THE STORY OF MY LIFE

Volume 1
(1928 – 1956)

An Autobiography

by

Wulf T. Doerry

I dedicate this autobiography to
My wife Edith (Penner) Doerry
And to our children
Armin Doerry
Karen (Doerry) Demel
Hilda (Doerry) Biselx
Norbert Doerry
And to our 9 grandchildren

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PREFACE

I wrote *The Story of my Life* as a response to suggestions from my two sons who wanted to know more about my early life and the conditions that motivated me to come to the United States of America. The biography is partially based on what I still remember, but primarily on diaries and letters I wrote during this time. I actually started to write down experiences and impressions during the summer of 1949, while many events, dates, and names were still fresh in my mind. Unfortunately, the diaries and the letters were written in German and are not very useful to anybody not knowing this language. I also had saved a good number of important documents, which support my memories and served as a framework for this autobiography.

In order for the reader to gain a better understanding of the difficult times the German people lived through during the first half of the 20th century, I wrote about these as I experienced and remembered them. Although I tried to avoid being judgmental about these times by applying new knowledge acquired at a later time, my memory of the political events during my early childhood was definitely influenced and shaped by the public opinion prevailing at that time. Readers of this biography will have an opportunity to experience Germany during the 1930s and 1940s as I did it, the good and the bad.

Poland annexed the original East Germany in 1945. This formerly German territory had been my home until Russian troops occupied it in early 1945. The majority of the German population escaped from their homes before the Russian army arrived. The new Polish government of this territory first disowned and then expelled the remaining German population after WW II and replaced the German names of towns and rivers with Polish names. To avoid any confusion for readers not familiar with this area and its history, I matched the old German names of communities from pre-WW II times with the present Polish names.

In preparation for this biography, my wife Edith and I revisited in 1995 and 1997 locations we had lived at in Poland and Germany before, during, and after the War. Many things had changed, while others just showed 50+ years of additional age and/or neglect. Many places in Poland and in the present East Germany were different from what I remembered them to be. Others were easy to recognize, because little had been done to maintain them. Apparently, communist governments with centralized economic controls, as was common for countries east of the former *Iron Curtain*, had used value systems different from those expected from western governments. The economic systems of "western countries" are usually based on "free enterprise" and transfer to the individual owners the responsibility for maintaining privately owned property. These formerly communist countries had offered to the public little or no incentive to invest in the maintenance of property owned by everybody. However, with the gradual transfer of property to private ownership since the early 1990s, one already can notice significant improvements.

This autobiography covers my life until after my graduation from the American Institute of Baking (AIB) in June 1956. Another biography, written in a different style, covers the next 40 years. This second biography covers my professional life as well as the growing up of our family. Although of much interest to some people, this second part of my biography is primarily

family history and contains some value judgements not everybody may agree with. The completion of this second part, however, must wait until I have finished the translation into English of the biographies of my parents. This will be a major project! But I hope to get this done during the next 3-5 years.

I hope that the readers of my autobiography will gain a better understanding of my life before, during, and after WW II. I am not saying that my life was more difficult or more challenging than what our grandchildren face today. We all have similar opportunities and what we achieve in our lifetime will depend on how we exploit these opportunities. We must recognize them and make the best of what is available to us! My future in this country was secured by the Korean War G.I. Bill, which paid for some of my formal education and made it possible for me to study at the AIB and to earn a college degree in chemistry.

Before I close, I want to thank our sons Norbert and Armin not only for urging me to write this autobiography, but also for their assistance whenever I needed help to overcome the mysteries of my computer. They spent many hours explaining to me how to do things, while I tended to forget things almost as quickly as I learned them! I wish all of you readers a good time with *The Story of my Life.*

CHAPTER 1:
MARIENBURG
(1928-1935)

Marienburg: Origin of the castle and the town

The town of Marienburg is now known as Malbork and belongs to Poland. It is situated on the east bank of the Nogat River, which is the east fork of the Vistula River (German: Weichsel; Polish: Wista). The town took its name from the castle *Marienburg* built by the Teutonic Order and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ.

The Teutonic Order was formed in 1190 to help German crusaders in their attempt to regain and secure the Holy Land for Christianity. Although most members of this religious order were of German origin, the Order gradually attracted enough non-German people to make it an international organization. For the first 119 years, the Teutonic Order (Deutscher Ritterorden) was governed by a Grand Master (Hochmeister) and a *General Chapter* consisting of members of the main house (equivalent to a cabinet of ministers) and the various masters, who governed the individual provinces of the Order. After the Grand Master moved to Marienburg, he replaced the General Chapter with a *Council* appointed by him.

In 1226, King Konrad I Mazowiecki asked the prestigious order for help to control the pagan Prussians and endowed the Order with the district of Chelmno (Kulm). This is the area east of the Vistula River (Weichsel, Wista) and located between Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) in the southwest and Grudziadz (Graudenz) in the northeast of Chelmno. Emperor Frederick II approved of this and granted the Order title to all lands occupied by the Prussians. The Teutonic Order established its first stronghold in that region in 1234 in Torun (Thorn), east-southeast of Bydgoszcz. From here it soon established a dense network of fortified watchtowers to control and defend the region against the Prussians. *Komturia* administered the individual districts under the direction of *Commanders*, who governed their areas from fortified brick structures. Each of the komturia housed a monastery with a minimum of 12 knight-brothers and six clergy members. All knight-brothers had to provide proof that they were of nobility.

The komturia Zantyr was located at the fork of the Vistula and Nogat Rivers. During the years of 1274-1276, the commander of that region, Konrad von Thierberg, built a new fortified komturia near the hamlet of Alyem to replace the one at Zantyr. In 1280, he moved the convent from Zantyr to Alyem. This komturia was to be expanded into the castle of Marienburg.

The construction of the basic buildings for the new castle dedicated to the Virgin Mary was started at Alyem in 1278 and these buildings were essentially completed around 1300. At that time, the building complex consisted of the monastery with church and dormitories (later called the *High Castle*) and the forecastle, that later consisted of administrative buildings and the Palace for the Grand Master. Later, after a new forecastle was added north of the building complex, the original forecastle was called the *Middle Castle*.

Marienburg Castle in 1995

Facing to the east, the church in the High Castle has a tall recess on the outside, which used to contain an 8-meter high statue of the Virgin Mary with child. Throughout the following seven centuries, it was believed that this statue protected the castle. Also, as long as it remained in its place, the castle and the surrounding territory would remain under German control. This statue was destroyed in March 1945 and the entire former Prussian region is since part of Poland.

Access to the heavily fortified castle was through the original forecastle. When the new forecastle was added with an assortment of supporting utility buildings, the original forecastle became the *Middle Castle* without direct access from the emerging town of Marienburg. Already naturally protected by the Nogat River in the west and north, and by marshy land in the east, the entire complex was heavily fortified with triple walls, towers, and massive gates that withstood even the onslaught of the Russian army in March of 1945. This battle inflicted severe damage to the Marienburg castle as well as to the nearby parts of the town. Only after about 50% of the castle complex had been destroyed, the German defenders finally withdrew.

In 1309, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Siegfried von Feuchtwangen, moved his administration from Venice in Italy to the newly erected Marienburg in Prussia. The castle, claimed to be the largest ever built, remained the seat of the Grand Masters until 1457. At that time, the Marienburg was surrendered to 600 Polish horsemen and the Grand Master escaped to the komturia in Kaliningrad (Königsberg), where in 1525 the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order dissolved the Order and its territory became a secular principality under the Polish Crown.

After an expansionary period in the 14th century, the Order suffered its first major defeat in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) in 1410. A shortage of money and excesses by the knights and their hired mercenaries caused the Order to lose respect and support from the local population. This contributed to the Order's second major military defeat in 1462. After the second Peace of Torun (Thorn) in 1466, Marienburg and many other major towns in Prussia were annexed by Poland. The Polish modernized the defenses of Marienburg. The 17th century brought the Swedes to this area and further modifications to the castle. The last major changes in Marienburg's defenses were made during the Napoleonic campaign in the first decade of the 19th century.

After the Teutonic Order abandoned the castle Marienburg, the buildings served many different purposes: as barracks for troops, a field hospital, storage facility, workshops for weavers, and finally, again, as a fortress at the end of World War II. Over the course of time, the castle endured many changes, not only in its use, but also in its appearance. Centuries of severe neglect finally culminated in an extensive restoration of the castle. It started in 1817 with the removal of debris and the emergency repair of roofs. This restoration was completed in 1838. A second period of restoration lasted 40 years from 1882 to 1922. However, the destruction suffered at the end of WW II was most severe and restoration work may extend far into the 21st century. Despite a major fire in September 1959, the first phase of this latest reconstruction of the castle complex was completed in the early 1970s. The "new" Marienburg is esthetically not as pleasing as I remember the castle from my very early childhood and from pictures and paintings. But I must give the Polish government of the post WW II years and the Polish people much deserved credit for putting so much effort into the restoration of this beautiful castle. It is really a monument for the German culture, and not the Polish culture, in that region.

Germany in difficult times: After World War I.

The *Treaty of Versailles* in 1919 was not what Germany had hoped for. Germany expected a peace treaty based on proposals made by President Woodrow Wilson. Instead, France and England insisted on punishing Germany according to long established tradition. The German people continued to suffer hardship and felt exploited when their coal and other valuable raw materials were hauled to France by the train loads, even though these commodities were in very short supply in Germany. Germany also lost much territory to France, Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, and the reestablished Poland. Poland laid claim to much territory in the provinces of West Prussia, Poznan (Posen), and to the coal-rich industrial area in Upper Silesia. While most of the territory was awarded to Poland as a "corridor to the open sea" (the Baltic Sea) with the port of Gdingia, some of the West Prussian districts were subjected to a referendum supervised by French troops. Although the Polish minority was favored, several of these districts voted for remaining with Germany and became part of the German province of East Prussia. Thus, the district town of Marienburg/Westprussia became part of East Prussia. The newly established Polish Corridor separated East Prussia from the remainder of Germany. Except for some industry in Elbing (now: Eblag), East Prussia was primarily an agricultural region and not a place where most German people wanted to live.

The economic situation in post-WW I Germany was not encouraging. The "roaring twenties" bypassed Germany and the "inflation of 1923" created widespread poverty. It was a time when people were paid every day and immediately spent their money on essentials before the money lost its value. I heard stories of people who needed a larger basket for carrying the money to the store than for carrying the groceries home. Unemployment increased and it seemed that the rest of the world did not care, because "Germany deserved it." The political scene in Germany became more and more unstable with over 30 parties and special interest groups vying for representation in the German Reichstag (the legislative assembly). One of these parties was founded in 1919 and was led by an Austrian, who during the war had served in the German Army. He was Adolf Hitler and the official name of his party was *National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (NSDAP). Hitler's main agenda was to gain support from the German people to correct the "injustice done to the German people by the Treaty of Versailles." This

included reunifying with Germany all German territory annexed by neighboring countries ("Heim ins Reich" was the slogan). Because a lot of German people agreed with Hitler on this point, they gradually gave him their support when the economic and political scenes did not show any signs of improvement. However, there were probably just as many Germans who did not trust the demagoguery of this Austrian veteran. Hitler attempted to overthrow the government by peaceful means on November 9, 1923, like Mussolini had done earlier in Italy. But this coup failed and Hitler spent the next years writing his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) behind bars in a prison for political detainees. His book became the manifesto for his party.

On the other extreme was the communist party (KPD), who promised everybody a fair share of all the wealth. After Hitler's release from prison, he resumed his leadership in the NSDAP (then known as the "Nazi party") and built it into a very powerful organization. The paramilitary wing of his party was the SA (Sturmabteilung: also known as "Brownshirts" and "Stormtroopers"). The SA was primarily responsible for disrupting rallies of other parties, especially those of the KPD, the "Kommies." The SS (Saal Schutz: also known as "Blackshirts") was created as a defensive force to protect the rallies organized by the NSDAP, the "Nazies." Street battles between the Nazies and Kommies were quite common before 1933 and I can still remember one I witnessed in Christburg in the summer of 1932.

It was in this time period when my father, Albrecht Hermann Heinrich Doerry (March 17, 1897 - July 12, 1980) was searching for a job as a high-school teacher. He had been severely wounded in the thigh while serving with an artillery unit in Russia on February 27, 1915. Because of nerve damage, he was no longer able to serve at the front lines. He requested and received his discharge and started his university studies in the fall of 1916. He received his Ph.D. in philology from the university in Halle, Germany, on May 24, 1919 at the age of 22, even before taking his final comprehensive state exams. He passed the last of the three oral exams almost two years later, on February 25, 1921. This certified him to teach German, history, and religion to the upper grades in high schools.

My Parents:

In 1922, my father applied for a position at the agricultural high school in Marienburg. After the war had ended in November 1918 and the soldiers had returned home, Germany had too many teachers available and it was difficult to get a good position in the main part of Germany. East Prussia, however, was underserved with teachers, especially in agricultural schools. My father was accepted by the school in Marienburg and moved there. Because of his youth, he soon became a popular teacher. During the 1960s we heard of several West Prussian Mennonites in Enkenbach, Germany, who still remembered my father as a good teacher. Through one of his students, my Uncle Heinz Penner, my father met my mother Erna Penner (September 16, 1902 - January 12, 1946) on her 21st birthday in 1923. They were formally engaged on December 23, 1923 and married on April 22, 1924. This marriage produced four children during the first five years and two more during the next six years:

April 11, 1925	Jürgen Gerhard Heinrich Doerry
June 19, 1926	Reingard Maria Elise Doerry (Schmidt)
September 7, 1927	Gundula Erna Luise Doerry (Eggeling)
December 29, 1928	Wulf-Thedel Albrecht Doerry

July 18, 1934 Uwe Rainer Doerry
November 2, 1935 Astrid Jutta Doerry

Despite hardships suffered during and after World War II, all of us children survived our parents and did quite well professionally. We all remained in contact with each other and met periodically to celebrate and commemorate special days and events related to our family, including special birthdays and anniversaries of our stepmother Wilma, whom we also called Mamuschka or Mutter.

My father accepted the position of Studienassessor at the agricultural high school in Marienburg. However, by exerting some pressure on the authorities, he was soon promoted to Studienrat on July 1, 1923. According to my father's biography, he was then the youngest *Studienrat* in Germany.

The title *Studienrat* indicates a ranking (similar to the G-scale for civil servants in the US), as well as the area of employment. The word "Studien" is related to "studies". In a civil service career, this title implied that its holder was involved with teaching in high schools and gymnasiums (high schools for those intending to study at a university). The rankings in these positions are, as I can remember, about as follows: Studienassessor (this title implies that the person has met all the requirements for a career in this field and has passed a comprehensive exam administered by government authorities), Studienrat, Oberstudienrat, Studiendirektor (most school principals have this ranking), and Oberstudiendirektor. After 1933, promotions very much depended on one's relationship with the local and regional party (Nazi Party) officials. Our father served his entire teaching career as a Studienrat.

My early childhood:

The winter of 1928/1929 was remembered in West Prussia for its severity. The temperature often dropped to -25°F. My parents had just moved into a new and larger apartment on the second floor of an old house located at a street corner not far from the castle Marienburg and only a half block from the school where my father taught. The address was Deutschordenstrasse 1. The street was renamed in 1934 and became Adolf Hitler Strasse.

Over the years, the ground floor of the house was home to many different businesses. In 1928 it was a corner grocery store. When we moved away in 1935, we had a bank below our apartment. When we walked past it in 1995, signs indicated the presence of a pharmacy.

The house was already considered "old" when my parents moved in. But housing was scarce and controlled by city authorities and the rapidly growing family desperately needed more space. The coal-fired tile ovens were inefficient and on cold winter days were not able to heat the apartment to a comfortable temperature, especially since the grocery made no great effort to heat its facility on the ground floor. The apartment had originally no kitchen or bathroom. These facilities were provided in a house adjacent to ours and could be reached through a steel fire door and via a few steps. A dark, cool, and damp basement served for storage of coal and food and always evoked fear in us when we had to get something from there.

Live-in housemaids were common before WW II. The girls usually came from the rural areas and from poverty-stricken families. They were single and had little or no expectation of finding a suitor capable of supporting a family. Most of them were Catholic, i.e. they descended from the original native people in the Kaschubei (Kaszubskie) in the west and Masuren (Mazurskie) in the east of Marienburg. Many of them were fluent in Polish and claimed Polish citizenship after World War II. These maids generally remained with the same family for many years, even though they only received room and board, presents for Christmas, and a modest monthly allowance. They worked 6½ days every week and were given a day off "when needed." In most cases, they were treated like a member of the family. These women were taking care of the household with little direction from the adult members of the family. We children had to listen to our maid just like we had to listen to our parents, in many cases even better! There were times in my early life when I thought that I had more responsibilities for the welfare of the family than the maid had, i.e. I had more chores to do.

It was customary in the 1920s that children were delivered at home by a midwife. Midwives were quite proficient in normal child deliveries. Complications, however, could be fatal for the mother. My own grandmother died of a severe hemorrhage after my father was born. Infections were common and antibiotics were not yet available. Consequently, many young mothers never saw their children grow up. My two younger siblings, however, were born in a hospital, as is common today.

The young Doerry family was well prepared for my expected arrival around Christmas. The baby basket was ready with blankets to keep me warm in the cold apartment and the midwife was alerted. My arrival was slightly later than expected and did not take place until December 29, 1928 at about 5 PM local time. According to my father, my mother had been in labor pains for many hours. This may have contributed to her developing a fever on the following day. The diagnosis was an infection of the ovaries. My mother was very ill and it took over three weeks before her condition started to gradually improve.

My father also reported that as the midwife prepared to leave after my birth, she checked on me one more time and found me in the baby basket covered with bedbugs. The bedbugs evidently had invaded the bedding in the basket while it was stored in an attic closet. Employees of the grocery store had at one time used this closet as a bedroom and the bedbugs had been waiting for some time for a good meal. They found it in me, but not for long. An exterminator soon took care of them.

My mother came from a West-Prussian Mennonite family, but converted to the evangelical (Lutheran) faith when she married my father. While the Mennonites were baptized as adolescents, children of evangelical faith were traditionally baptized soon after birth. The parents usually invited two of their friends or relatives to be "godparents" for the child, i.e., to take the responsibility for raising the child in case something happened to the parents. My godparents (*Paten)* were a pastor Geig and my Uncle Hans (Johannes) Wiehler, the father of my favorite cousin Horst. But unlike my brother Jürgen's godparents, who showered him with gifts on birthdays and for Christmas, my godparents never indicated any interest in my growing up. In fact, I have no memories of the pastor Geig.

My early childhood in Marienburg left me with some very vivid memories. My earliest memory is of sitting in a stroller (I was probably 2½-3 years old) and stopping in at the Marienburg castle on the way to shopping in Kalthof (Kamionka). This hamlet is located west of the Nogat River in what used to be the Free City State of Danzig (Gdansk). The prices for produce, dairy products, eggs, poultry, and some other groceries were much lower in Kalthof than in Marienburg. Mutti, as we affectionately called our mother, went shopping in Kalthof at least once every week. The open-air market was located a very short distance from the pontoon bridge (Kleine Schiffsbrücke) crossing the Nogat River north of the castle. Inspections by the custom authorities were almost non-existing before Hitler came to power in 1933. As time went on, restrictions on the amount of food a shopper was allowed to "import" from Danzig tightened up and after 1934, it was no longer permitted to shop in Kalthof.

My father, or Papa as we called him, reported that I, like my three older siblings, was very adventurous as a toddler. When Mutti was busy one day, I walked past the old City Hall to the business center where two girls recognized me under the *Hohen Lauben* (this section of the town was totally destroyed in 1945 and was replaced with apartment buildings) and took me back home. My mother never exerted much control over us and never seemed to worry much about us, either. This was in stark contrast to our father, who liked to control us to the extreme, even as grownups!

I always liked to spend part of the summer in Christburg, where my grandfather Heinrich Penner lived. This town was also the home of my cousin Horst Wiehler, whose parents managed, albeit poorly, the local hotel and restaurant *Berliner Hof*. Horst was only 22 days older than I was and we were well matched as playmates. We roamed through the hotel's facilities, which included a single-lane bowling alley (Kegelbahn), a beer cellar cooled with blocks of ice harvested during the winter, a horse barn for the guests' teams and a large garden bordering on a creek named *Die Sorge*. We built rafts to float on the creek, baked potatoes in the ashes of fires, and often went to visit our grandfather (Opapa) Heinrich Penner, who had remarried a few years after the death of my grandmother. His new wife, we called her *Tante Klara*, did everything she could to spoil us. Opapa, born in 1869, lived in semi-retirement and kept busy taking care of his garden, about 300 laying hens, and a number of beehives.

My last visit to Christburg was in 1939, when we celebrated Opapa's 70th birthday on May 27th and when his son, Onkel Oskar, presented him with a motorcycle (99cc engine) for increased mobility. But Opapa looked at this contraption with mixed feelings and it took a long time of convincing and coaxing, before he finally sat on it, started it up, and rode on it for one short loop. I don't think that he ever tried this again.

I believe, it was in the summer of 1934, during one of the visits to my grandfather. I usually stayed at his home and in the care of "Tante Klara." Since there were not many distractions for small children in those days, I often followed Opapa when he tended to his chicken, bees, or his large garden. One day I followed him into the attic above the chicken house, where he stored empty beehives and other paraphernalia for his bees. He had told me to stay outside, but I did not listen. There was no light in the attic and as I groped in the semidarkness, I touched one of the frames still containing a honeycomb. I immediately realized my mistake when I was stung several times in my right hand. I did not cry, but I did not waste any time, either, to let Opapa

know about what had happened to me. Tante Klara immediately soaked my hand in buttermilk, but with no beneficial effect. My right hand puffed up from my fingertips to beyond my wrist. For over a week, I was not able to move the fingers on my right hand, which was treated with an ointment and was wrapped in bandages. This I regretted the most, since Horst and I had built a raft from wooden tabletops stored in the large picnic hall attached to the hotel. We floated this raft in the creek, but did not dare to go with it anywhere, anyway. We had no means for returning the "raft" once it floated downstream. It was too heavy for us to carry and we had no poles for pushing it upstream.

I also remember spending a few days in the summers on a large farm in Grünhagen. The farm belonged to the Wiebe family, who had hired a private teacher for their three sons. The name of this home-schooling teacher was Jacht and he was a friend of my father. Herr Jacht liked me and arranged for my visit to that farm for a few consecutive summers. I enjoyed playing with the boys and riding one of their horses. We abused the poor animal so much, that it finally refused to let us climb on it. It tried to bite and kick us. We also spent much time playing in the straw and waiting for the teams of horses to return from the fields. On warm days, we were allowed to sit on the workhorses as they cooled off in a pond. Cooling work horses in this manner was a common practice and all hamlets and large farms had such a "Suhle" in a pond or in a creek. I also remember that the owner raised pheasants in a large aviary outside the residence. But I do not remember whether these birds were eventually released for hunting or were butchered as needed.

During my next to last visit to this farm I managed to consume too many *Flinsen*, one of my favorite foods. I "pigged out" and got awfully sick for a day. Flinsen are unleavened pancakes, similar to flour tortillas. We usually ate them with applesauce, berry compote, sugar, or honey. It took me several years before I could dare to again look at another Flinse.

During the summer of 1932, while I visited Opapa in Christburg, I watched one of the street fights between the Nazy brownshirts and the Kommies. This was my introduction to the political scene of Germany at that time. Since my parents despised the Kommies, my early sympathies were for the Nazies. However, very few Germans ever imagined what the Nazies would do to Germany. They finally would cause us to lose our home. But the 30th of January in 1933 will always be in my memory. There was much excitement in the air and in the evening, after it had turned dark outside, we stood at the living room window and watched a long torchlight parade moving past our house. This parade was very impressive! Hitler had been appointed Chancellor (Reichskanzler: equivalent to the Prime Minister in the United Kingdom) of Germany by President Hindenburg!

This event was followed by others that I had a difficult time understanding. One day I saw a bonfire and people throwing books on this fire. I was told that these books had been written by Jews. There also were some stores in our neighborhood, which were owned by Jewish people. As time went on, the shop windows were painted over with Nazi slogans and uniformed men (brownshirts) picketed the stores. Soon, these stores changed ownership or closed up. The word "Jew" became a familiar term.

On August 2, 1934, President Hindenburg passed away. The German people were in mourning, because in their mind, Hindenburg was the hero who had stopped the Russian Army in the second Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914, at the beginning of World War I. Postage stamps with his likeness were printed with a black frame around his picture. This event was followed by two significant changes in Germany, which even I became aware of. The German black-white-red flag of the Weimar Republic was replaced with a flag that rearranged the colors with a black swastika in a round white field and a red background. This flag became the symbol of repression in Germany and even we children became very selective with respect to what we "noticed" and talked about. As time went on, we learned that it was safer "not to know" and we accepted the "system."

The other change was that Germany no longer had a president and Hitler called himself the *Führer* (leader) of the German people and abolished the elected offices of the president and chancellor. He did, however, put this before the German people as a referendum in early 1935. The results showed an overwhelming support by the German public for these changes. After the second Word War, however, we learned that the reported impressive results of this last German "election" were obtained by widespread fraud.

There were, of course, also other events foreboding the future of Germany, but I was still too young to notice their significance. The first one was the burning down of the *Reichstag,* the German equivalence to the House of Representatives, on February 27, 1933. This arson was blamed on the communists and served as a pretext for arresting the leaders of that opposition party. Another staged event was the "Röhm Revolte." Ernst Röhm had been in charge of the activities of the SA (Brownshirts) and with this private army, he had an enormous amount of power. This greatly concerned Adolf Hitler. To eliminate Röhm as a potential rival, Hitler accused him of plotting against his leadership and had Röhm and many of his friends shot in a raid on June 30, 1934. But overall, the economic situation in Germany started to show signs of improvement with the introduction of the *Four-Year Plan* by Hitler's government.

All shop windows of bookstores were filled with Hitler's new book "Give me four years." I have never read this book, nor did I read "Mein Kampf," but this book delineated Hitler's plan for the economic reconstruction of the German economy. This blueprint contained many of the elements President Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed in his *New Deal*. With all the changes, initiated or proposed, most German people regained hope for a better future and learned to ignore the gradual emergence of a totalitarian government. They cheered when German troops reoccupied the Saar district in 1935 and gave tacit approval to rearming Germany with the goal to “undo the injustice done by the Treaty of Versailles." This cheering increased in intensity as Germany occupied Austria on March 13, 1938 and later in that same year, the Sudetenland, which had become part of Czechoslovakia after WW I. This was part of the "*heim ins Reich*" pledge of the NSDAP party, because it reunited these regions inhabited by German speaking people with Germany proper.

These successes and the memory of the "Röhm Revolt" kept the German public content and quiet while the party gained power and started to eliminate two groups of "undesirable people": political dissidents and the Jewish minority.

After the Second World War had started, we occasionally heard of camps, where people were held without trial. But I am convinced, the majority of German people never heard any details about what really happened in these camps. Jewish families gradually disappeared from the scene, especially after the *Crystal Night* of November 9, 1938, when many Synagogues and much Jewish property were torched. Initially we heard that these families left Germany for France, England, and the United States of America. As time went on, we children hardly noticed the disappearance of the rest of the Jewish families. We were too preoccupied with our own lives and the many other changes around us. The German people learned to accept these changes in the hope for a better future for themselves and their families.

As I mentioned earlier, the first change I noticed as a child, was the closing of the border with the Free City Danzig. My mother was no longer able to buy there the cheap food on market days. When I entered the first grade at Easter 1935 (until about 1942, the school years lasted from Easter to Easter of the following year), the teacher asked us children about the employment status of our parents. About one third of the children reported that their father was unemployed. Germany still suffered under a severe depression. However, only two years later, there were no longer classmates who reported their father as unemployed.

Our family was not wealthy; but we did not suffer any hardships either. Our father was employed by the state of Prussia and his civil service position as a high school teacher (Studienrat) was quite secure as long as he went along with what the *Party* (NSDAP) expected of him. He had no problem with it, since the changes brought about by the Party appeared to benefit a majority of the German people and these changes were a great improvement over what Germany's post WW I government had accomplished.

In 1930, my parents had the opportunity to take over a *Schrebergarten*. These were plots of land made available by an association for long-term lease. Most large towns and cities provided their citizens with an opportunity to rent one of these gardens. The original association was founded in 1864 and was named after Dr. Schreber, a physician by profession. These Schrebergärten provided an escape for city dwellers and an opportunity for some physical work in the form of gardening. These garden plots generally provided tenants with most of their vegetables needed throughout the year. Until about 1950, fresh and preserved vegetables were usually not readily available to consumers beyond their regular growing seasons. People depended on canning their own surplus vegetables and on vegetables that kept well in cool cellars, such as carrots, cabbage, and beets. Fences with gates surrounded the individual garden plots and many contained a shelter, usually with a table and some chairs. The shelters (Lauben) usually were enclosed and protected people in times of bad weather.

Our family spent quite a bit time at "our Schrebergarten" during the summers. Papa had mounted a wooden box on the carriage of a baby buggy and had painted it green. I still remember how our middle-aged maid Anna was always charged with the job of hauling us smaller children and whatever else needed to be moved to and from the garden in this green box on wheels. We loved these rides and Anna did not seem to mind. Later, during the war, when many larger cities and towns were gradually reduced to rubble, the enclosed shelters in these Schrebergärten often became the permanent home for bombed-out families.

Except for smallpox, there were no vaccines available against other contagious childhood diseases. Thus, it was expected that sooner or later we all would come down with the measles, whooping cough, chicken pox, etc. When a child got ill with one of these contagious diseases, the standard procedure for a family with several children was usually that all children were immediately brought in contact with their sick sibling, so that the time of the family's quarantine was kept to a minimum. I still remember some pretty lively pillow fights during our convalescence. The only contagious diseases we all really feared were polio, scarlet fever, and diphtheria. These illnesses generally required hospitalization and could be fatal.

Except for constantly chafed knees and elbows and an occasional runny nose, I was plagued only by severe earaches, which later gave way to very bad headaches. Antibiotics were still unknown to us, and our mother did not believe in any kind of medication, including aspirin. Thus, our treatment was generally limited to bed rest, especially when we had a fever.

Our mother liked to swim. Whenever the weather was nice and warm, she took us to the swimming pool. The town pool in Marienburg was only a closed-in area of the Nogat River. It was an area where the river made a turn and was wider than normal. The pool was at the inside of this turn and where there was very little current. But the current was still strong enough to constantly renew the water and to keep it clean. It was the only pool I know of that had separate areas for men and women, as well as a non-segregated area in between. Each segregated area had a small sandy beach and shallow water next to the beach for children to wade and play in. Mutti generally deposited us on this beach with some toys and proceeded to swim in the deeper portion of the river. One day she noticed a lot of "activity" near the diving tower. When she investigated the cause for this, it was her daughter Gundula. Gundula had seen how girls and women jumped off the diving board and decided to try this too. She jumped off the lowest board, came to the surface of the water, "dog-paddled" (at that age she did not know how to swim, yet) to keep her head above water, and called for help. Somebody pulled her out of the water and deposited her on dry land. Gundula went straight back to the diving board and repeated her routine a few more times, until Mutti finally claimed her.

The Nogat River was always solidly frozen during the winter. It was an ideal place for ice-skating. Our ice skates were clamped onto our boots and we learned to skate as soon as we knew how to walk. The Nogat River was also large enough for ice sailing. Here, the skater held a sail and a good wind could propel him at speeds of 30-40 miles per hour. This was a rather dangerous sport and every year it claimed a few casualties. Most of these were collisions. There were, however, also one or two young men every year, who raced into open water or onto thin ice. These were usually roped off areas where ice was harvested for the local breweries and icehouses.

Another dangerous activity was "floe-hopping" when the ice broke up in late winter or early spring. There were always some teenagers who spent more time on an ice floe than they had anticipated. Some had to be rescued, while others had a long walk home. But there were also some, who missed the next floe and fell into the icy water, either to drown or to get a very bad chill.

Our family always celebrated a traditional Christmas. It started with the first *Advent*, the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day. Mutti bought a wreath made from fir branches and decorated it with 4 thick red candles and some decorations. The wreath was suspended with wide red ribbons from a support stand placed in the center of our dining room table. On the First Advent we would light only one candle. On the Second Advent we lit two candles and so on. On the fourth advent, the Sunday before Christmas, all four candles were lit and Christmas was less than a week away.

The Advent season was a festive season. We children learned to recite a poem, our mother baked cookies and other sweets, and we all submitted our wish lists for the Weihnachtsmann (Santa Claus). Sankt Nikolaus visited us on December 6th and left sweets and trinkets in our carefully polished shoes. As more and more candles were lit on Sundays, our excitement grew. Our Christmas tree, a firtree of almost perfect shape, was generally purchased just a few days before it was decorated. These trees had to be absolutely fresh from the forest. On Christmas Eve (Heiligabend), we children helped our father with mounting the tree in a stand (no water pan!) and decorating it. We had 24 candleholders for candles made from tallow stearine. These holders were hooked over the branches and a small weight in the shape of a fir cone kept the holder vertical at all times. Papa made sure that the candle flame could not reach a twig, even when there was a draft in the room. The tree was usually about 8 feet tall and was topped with a homemade gold-colored star. After the tree was decorated with the candles and tinsel, we children were banned from the room. Our father then finished decorating the tree by hanging up the glass ornaments.

Presents were exchanged on Christmas Eve, after supper. The gifts we received from our parents were laid out on the extended dining room table and each place was marked with a plate filled with sweets (bunten Teller) consisting of cookies, figs, dates, nuts in the shell, chocolate, apples, etc. Toys and pieces of clothing were placed around the *bunten Teller* and all 24 white candles on the Christmas tree were lighted. As we all entered the room, which had been heated for the occasion with a warm fire in the tile oven, we children tried to locate our presents and see what the *Weihnachtsmann* had brought us. We also carried the small presents we had made for our parents and siblings. But it was not time, yet, to take a closer look. We children lined up in front of the tree and Papa played some Christmas songs on the piano and we were supposed to sing along. As we grew older, this tradition became more and more a nuisance for us and we became less and less cooperative, especially since we all had inherited Mutti's inability to carry a tune.

After this part of the ceremony was behind us, it was our turn to recite a poem learned especially for this occasion. All this delay just built up the excitement and we constantly tried to identify our presents. Quite often, we were so distracted that we could not remember the lines of our poem and required extensive prompting. When this was finally behind us, we were allowed to claim our presents and eat some of the sweets. We also exchanged the presents we had made and brought along. The total number of presents and their value was relatively small as compared with what most children in the U.S.A. expect to receive for Christmas today. None of the presents were wrapped! But like most young children, we really counted only toys as presents, while clothing items were considered a necessity. We did not fully appreciate clothing as presents until after the war had started in 1939.

Another part of the Christmas Eve ritual was the opening of a package sent by Tante Milchen (Emilie Beckmann), who was the sister of our father's mother and who had helped to take care of him as a child. Tante Milchen had never married and went through a lot of hardships in her life. But she did everything she could to please all of us. Tante Milchen was the epitome of conservatism. She saved everything and wasted nothing! Her Christmas package was wrapped in brown paper secured with a lot of cotton string and tied with a multitude of knots. When she had too much string, she just made more knots until all the string was used up. She also wanted the string returned without knots or cutting, so that she could reuse the string for the next Christmas package. Consequently, we usually spent 30-45 minutes every Christmas Eve untying her package, which contained mostly sweets. But since we ordinarily did not get any sweets at home, except for Christmas and Easter, we did not mind this "ritual" too much.

The candles on the tree were all allowed to burn out by themselves. We could not turn on an electric light while the candles were still burning. The lights had to wait until the last candle started to flicker. On Christmas Day, our father put a second set of white candles into the holders. But on Christmas Day, the candles were allowed to burn only about halfway down before they were extinguished and saved for New Year's Day, when they were allowed to burn out. The Christmas tree was generally removed before we all had to return to school. Glass decorations, tinsel, and candle holders were all removed and stored in a box for the next Christmas, much like we still do today.

As mentioned earlier, my birthday is only four days after Christmas. For this occasion I could always count on a refill for my "bunten Teller." But otherwise, I often felt that my parents simply withheld some of my Christmas presents until my birthday. I can still remember my 5th birthday. I was anxiously looking forward to receiving some presents. But nothing happened. When I asked why I did not get any birthday presents, I was told that I had to wait until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, because that was the time when I was born. Well, that made my birthday a very long day for me! One of the presents I received on that birthday was a box of chocolates (Katzenzungen: "cat tongues") and when I eagerly opened the box, I found it to be the home of a multitude of little white maggots. Obviously, sanitation standards in food manufacturing places were not as good in those days as they are today. Also, the product may have been in the store for quite some time. Despite my great disappointment, the spoiled product was never replaced.

On July 18, 1934, my father woke me up early in the morning to tell me that I had a new little brother. His name was Uwe Rainer. He was born at the hospital and I was allowed to visit Mutti and my little brother during visiting hours. My Uncle Oscar Penner and my Aunt Käthe Wiehler came from Christburg and brought my cousin Horst Wiehler along. While the adults went to visit Mutti at the hospital, Horst and I decided to do the same. We made it all the way to my mother's room, but also created a lot of excitement among the adults. We were told by our parents, and in no uncertain terms, that we were not allowed to come to the hospital on our own! But Horst and I could not think of anything wrong with this visit. We did, however, end up with some of the fresh fruit given to Mutti as a gift. Horst and I roamed freely in Christburg and we did not think that there was a difference between Marienburg and the smaller town Christburg, especially since crimes against children were very rare and we had not heard of any. We were 5½ years old and were convinced that we could take care of ourselves.

The routine in our home was that we ate an informal breakfast after we were dressed and ready to go to school. The main warm meal was eaten at about two o'clock in the afternoon when everybody had returned from school. Our father always sat at the head of the table and his place was marked with a glass full of homemade berry juice. For us children, it was considered to be impolite to "wash down" our food by drinking any liquids with the meal. The table was covered with a clean linen cloth and everybody had his own linen napkin. Since the napkins were used many times between laundering, they were identified with silver napkin rings engraved with the initials of their owners.

To bridge the long time between breakfast and the main meal, it was customary that everybody took a sandwich along to school, which we ate during the "long break" at 10 o'clock in the morning. After the noon dinner, it was quiet time. Our father took a nap in his room. As a small child I had to join him by taking a nap on the sofa. I considered this as a complete waste of valuable playing time and wanted to prove that I no longer needed this rest period. No matter how much I struggled to stay awake, I usually fell asleep soon after I heard my father's gentle snoring.

In the afternoon at 3:30 PM, our parents had their afternoon cup of coffee with a hard roll spread with honey, homemade jelly or marmalade. After I was about 5 years old, it became my responsibility to pick up every day two freshly baked hard rolls (Brötchen) at the neighborhood bakery about a couple city blocks away. To get there, I needed to go through one of the old town gates (Töpfertor) towards the old city hall. This gate is still standing, but the traffic is now detoured around it.

One afternoon in the summer of 1935 I returned from the bakery with my bag containing the two rolls and failed to notice a fresh banana peel on the sidewalk inside the town gate. As I slipped, I protected the precious rolls (I had paid five pennies for them!) by holding them up. When I hit the pavement with my right elbow, it hurt badly. I ran home crying that I had broken my arm. My parents did not want to believe it, but finally took me to the hospital for X-rays. After a long wait, the doctor verified that a bone in my right elbow was broken. After the arm was stabilized with a splint and lots of bandages, my father took me back home. My elbow finally healed and the splint was removed, but I was never again able to fully bend my right arm. From then on, I also lacked strength in my right arm.

In the afternoon we children usually ate a couple of slices of sour-leavened rye bread spread with marmalade or with lard, which was kettle-rendered and very tasty and flavorful. The evening meal was eaten at about 8 o'clock in the evening and consisted usually of a light meal, like milk soup, fried potatoes and leftovers, short grain rice cooked with milk and sprinkled with cinnamon sugar, marinated or smoked herring, etc. Bedtime was generally around 9 o'clock in the evening. Our leisure time was usually spent with playing, doing homework for school, or reading.

We started school in the first grade at the age of six. This was an abrupt change in the life style of most children. There was no preschool training. Most of us children could barely count to 10 or tell the time. As a reward for going to school and as an encouragement for behaving ourselves on the first day in school, we received a *Zuckertüte*. This was a cone-shaped container made from a thin cardboard and decorated with colorful designs. The cone was usually at least half as

tall as the child and it contained some sweets and trinkets. The children were also equipped with a rigid backpack that contained a framed slate with a small sponge tied to it, a granite stylus, and a small box of *Stäbchen* (thin wooden sticks of various lengths). The slate was used to practice writing letters and numbers, while the wooden sticks were used to form various shapes. There was virtually no paper used by the students during the first two school years. We also did not own any crayons for coloring, although some children had access to some small pieces of colored chalk. Paper did not enter into our lives until late in the second grade.

In addition to 2-week vacations for Easter, in the fall and for Christmas, we had a 6-week vacation in July/August. We went to school six days every week. In the lower grades we went for four hours in the morning, starting at 8 o'clock. Starting with the fifth grade, children entered one of three programs: An eight year program, a ten year middle school program, or the twelve year high school (gymnasium program). Each program offered its own distinct career opportunities. High school and middle school students had to pay tuition. Starting with the fifth grade, the school days usually were extended to 5 and 6 hours per day. As a teacher shortage developed during the war, there were no more afternoon classes (from 3-5 PM). Afternoon classes were generally limited to electives and team sports, including soccer and swimming at the outdoor city pool.

Once the student reached the fifth grade, the number of subjects taught increased gradually beyond the basic ones. It started with a foreign language (English or French) in fifth grade. Physics was added in sixth grade, Latin and chemistry in the seventh grade. Each subject was taught 2-6 hours every week for the entire 8 years of high school or until the student graduated. They were all required subjects. There were few electives and these were taught in addition to the basic subjects, not in place of them! The law required that physical education was part of every curriculum. Although religious education was the school's responsibility, religion as a school subject was discontinued during the war years.

Since the 16th century, whoever ruled a region in Germany could determine the religion of his subjects. This led to areas that were either predominantly catholic or protestant. There was, consequently, no separation of church and state. The state even collected a special surtax, a *church tax,* to support its churches, thus making ministers and priests quasi-civil servants. To facilitate religious instructions in schools, we had in the state of Prussia evangelical (protestant) and catholic elementary schools. This, however, did not promote social equality, when one religion was in majority. When we met a new child, our first question was always: "What school do you go to?" The answer determined whether we wanted to play with this child, or not.

Most larger communities also segregated their schools according to the sex of the students. We had towns with public grade schools only for boys or for girls. Smaller communities had classrooms for only boys or girls. We also had gymnasiums for boys and Lyceums for girls, even though both were high schools specializing in the teaching of languages. However, in small towns, these schools were all integrated.

During the summer of 1935, our father was offered a position at the Real-Gymnasium in Lauenburg (Lebork), Pomerania. He accepted, even though Mutti expected her sixth child and really did not want to move away from West-Prussia.

Not knowing anything about reproduction of human beings, I was just as much surprised by my sister's arrival as I was when my brother Uwe was born 15½ months earlier. In those times, children were not informed of anything, "because they are too young to understand." Papa started in his new position before the family was ready to move. We four oldest children were temporarily placed in care of friends, so that the movers could pack and load our belongings into a van and haul them to Lauenburg. Mutti stayed with Uwe and our nanny Bertha at the home of friends, i.e., with my godfather pastor Geig and his family. I spent these days with the Wiebe family in Grünhagen.

On Saturday, November 2, 1935, we were all to meet at the train station in Marienburg for the trip to Lauenburg in Pomerania. But when I was woken up in the morning, I was told of the arrival of a little sister. We four oldest children would make the train trip without any adult supervision. Bertha had become ill with a severe infection of her tonsils and the doctor advised against her traveling. Our regular maid did not want to make this move and had quit her job. Since we were to travel through the Polish Corridor, the doors of the railcars were locked, so that nobody could enter or leave the train. Only the last two cars in the train had open doors for passengers with a destination in the Corridor or who wanted to travel from there to Germany. Thus, there was no problem with our trip and our oldest brother Jürgen, 10½ years old, watched that we did exactly what we were supposed to do. We all arrived safely in Lauenburg, where Papa met us at the station and took us to our new home. It was right adjacent to the school where our father taught the upper grades. Our new address was Bismarckstrasse 33 in Lauenburg, Pomerania. Our apartment was on the second floor. An elderly Jewish couple, Mr. and Mrs. Baer, occupied the apartment on the first floor. They were very nice people and never complained about us children. The couple moved away in early 1939, when the school needed more space and converted this apartment into classrooms. The same was to happen to the apartment we lived in. But we moved to Gollnow in August of that year and the outbreak of WW II kept this from happening.

The furniture had already arrived before us and had been moved into the proper rooms. On the following Monday, we oldest four children went to school. After I came home, my father asked me about how I liked the teacher and the new school. My answer was that I liked everything, but "the children here talk funny." At that time I did not realize, that it was really I who spoke a different dialect. The West-Prussian dialect was more slow and "drawn out" than the Pomeranian dialect. But it did not take us long, and we all adapted to the new dialect until there was no more difference in our speech pattern.

Our nanny Bertha arrived a few days later with our brother Uwe, and two weeks later our father brought back our "Mutti" with Astrid. Slowly, we all settled down and I soon found new friends to explore the new environment with.

CHAPTER 2:
LAUENBURG, POMMERN
(1935-1939)

Like Marienburg, Lauenburg became Polish in 1945. Its present name is Lebork. While we lived in Lauenburg, it had a population of approximately 18,000. I was not aware that this area had ever been part of Poland or that we had a Polish minority living among us. During the Middle Ages, Lauenburg had been a member of the *Hanse*, an association of up to 90 coastal and interior towns that traded with each other (13th-17th century). With a few exceptions in the Baltic countries, the inhabitants of these towns were German speaking. Like practically all towns elsewhere, Lauenburg was located on a river, the Leba River, which drained into the Baltic Sea, about 20 miles to the north. Since there were two towns in Germany with the name Lauenburg, our town was called *Lauenburg, Pommern* (Pomerania) and the other was identified as *Lauenburg an der Elbe* (on the Elbe River).

I soon made new friends. The one I still remember best was Helmut Fröhbel. Helmut was a year older than I was and came from a very poor, but devoutly Catholic family. The walls in his family's small cottage were "whitewashed" with a tinted slaked lime solution that rubbed off when touched. Unframed religious pictures from magazines and other sources were pinned to the walls. Helmut and I were good friends and together we roamed the entire area around our town. Often we were gone for many hours and did not return until long after my family had eaten the main meal. Papa tried to cure me of this bad habit by ordering that I should get nothing to eat after I missed a meal at the table. But the maid usually gave me something to eat anyway. In those days I was a very slow eater and I loved to eat all the leftover potatoes and vegetables.

Rims of old bicycle wheels were our best toys. The rims that still had spokes and the front axle were especially valued. Helmut and I skillfully rolled these rims by holding a stick to the axle and gently pushing it. We did this while we were running through the neighborhood, in the City Park, through the surrounding pine forests, and along the dirt roads in the country. We also loved to play with marbles. Since we did not have the money to buy marbles, we made our own marbles from heavy moist clay. We allowed the marbles to dry until they were hard. If we somehow acquired a glass marble, we did not risk losing it in a match. In the fall we also collected chestnuts, which we sold to an old lady. We used the money to buy some badly needed household items for the Fröhbels. We were never bored!

Even though we did not have many toys to play with, we knew how to have fun! Television, radio, movies, music, bicycles and similar "tools of child entertainment" did not exist for us in these years. When I was eight years old, I was very fortunate to own a leather soccer ball. I had saved all my money from allowances and gifts to buy this ball.

The house we lived in was not only adjacent to the yard and garden of the Gymnasium (high school) where our father taught, but our yard and garden were also right outside of and next to the old city wall with a tower at the corner of the wall. The tower was called the *Efeuturm* (Ivy Tower), because a good part of the tower was overgrown with ivy. The tower was still in good shape and the entrance door was generally locked with a padlock. This tower and the school

building still existed when we visited Lauenburg in 1995, but the house we used to live in was replaced with a soccer field.

The old town wall showed severe signs of aging when we lived there. It was a very thick and high wall built around the 13th or 14th century to protect the town from marauding hordes and invading armies. The base of the wall was about 4-5 feet thick and consisted of rocks held together with a cement-like mortar. The rocks were faced with bricks. The top of the wall consisted of only bricks. The wall tapered towards the top where it was only about 2½ feet thick. The wall may have been about 10 feet high when it was originally built. But many sections of it had crumbled over the centuries and in some places it no longer existed. The section in the back of our yard was in bad shape, but still had its original height. The crumbling city wall was really dangerous to climb on, but we children enjoyed the challenge and we pretended to climb mountains when we tackled the wall.

Our yard was on the outside of the wall and we had a shed that was attached to the old city wall. One half of this shed served as a barn for rabbits, chicken, and geese. Our rabbits were of a special breed. Their pelts were to be used for a fur coat for our mother. Since nobody was very fond of rabbit meat, whoever slaughtered and skinned the rabbits, could keep the meat. The pelts were then professionally tanned and preserved. Shortly after the war started, our mother finally got her coat. It was a real nice one! The chicken provided us, i.e. our father, with an adequate supply of eggs. Since we fed the animals primarily table scraps and mill feed, our chicken were never good producers of eggs. Even the geese had a hard time getting fat.

Our yard sloped down from the wall and near the wall grew a large hazelnut bush that provided our family with an adequate supply of filberts. It must have been in the fall of 1936 or 1937 when a new crop of filberts ripened and our Tante Milchen came to visit us. She noticed a good amount of the nuts on the ground and offered me 5 pennies for every measure full (one liter, a little more than a quart) of hazelnuts. Well, I tried to be smart and filled the bottom of the measure with chestnuts and topped it off with a couple hands full of filberts. Tante Milchen was no dummy and when she emptied the measure into a bowl, my face turned red and I had to listen to a long sermon about how I had disappointed her. I was quite ashamed of my prank and never again tried to pull such a stunt on anybody.

I had always been a sickly child. It started with awful earaches that seemed to totally disable me for several days at a time. There were no antibiotics and only complete rest and time could take care of this problem. Our mother did not believe in any medication, not even aspirin. As I got older, the earaches turned into tormenting headaches that caused me to miss many days in school. All these problems kept me from gaining weight and in summer 1936 I was sent to a convalescent home for children in Dievenow (now Dziwnowek), a small resort village at the Baltic Sea, east of the island of Wollin (now Wolin).

These convalescent homes for children were operated by the N.S.V., the welfare branch of the Party. I do not remember very much about the weeks I spent in Dievenow. This time left me with no good memories. One of the reasons why I did not like this place was the policy of the nurses that we were not allowed to use the toilets during our bed rest after the noon meal and during the nights. We were punished when we were caught going to the toilet. Those among us

who rather wet the bed were not allowed to drink anything with the evening meal and were shamed by the nurses. Neither option was appealing to us. Today, this policy would be deemed "abusive."

During the summer of 1936 I also had my first surgery. I had polyps obstructing my nasal passages and the physician wanted to remove these in his office. According to the customs of that time, children were not informed of anything unless they were to be actively involved. Being operated on was a passive participation and I had no idea why I had to see the doctor. Apparently, nobody wanted to frighten a little boy with something he didn't need to know. After I was called into the office, I was seated in a large armchair. Next thing I knew was that the doctor and my mother pinned my arms to the armrests of the chair and the doctor's assistant put a mask over my face. Well, this really scared me and I tried to regain control over my arms. I believe I put up a pretty good struggle for a 7 year-old boy. When the assistant dripped some awfully smelling liquid onto the mask, something I had previously smelled only in the hospital, I was convinced that there was a conspiracy to kill me. It took all the strength of the adults to keep me subdued until the chloroform took effect. As far as I was concerned at that time, my struggle lasted for a "lifetime." Well, I survived the ordeal, even though it took at least three days to purge the chloroform from my lungs. I do not remember any soreness after this "surgery," but for years afterwards I was nauseated whenever I smelled anything like chloroform.

The first years in Lauenburg were the best in my life. I was totally carefree. My motto was: "Rules made by my father were to be ignored." During the summers, we children usually spent a couple of weeks with Mutti in the fishing village Leba (the name of this village was not changed in 1945) at the Baltic Sea. We stayed with a family named Schooth. Mr. Schooth owned a powered fishing boat, which he sometimes used to fish in Polish waters in the Bay of Gdansk. He could tell us a lot of stories about his encounters with the Polish patrol vessels. The Schooths also owned a smokehouse for fish and we ate all three major meals with the family while we were in Leba. Fish in one form or another was part of every meal in that home. But we never got tired of fish in Leba, because we not only consumed a large variety of fresh water and salt water fish (e.g., herring, flat fish, eel, etc), but the fish was also served in many different ways, as smoked, salted, grilled, fried, and cooked in soups. Mrs. Schooth knew how to make every meal a new experience for us!

The wide, sandy beach of the Baltic Sea was only a short walk from the street where the fishermen, including the Schooth family, lived. Except when we were eating or sleeping, we spent most of our time at the beach, where Mutti had rented a *Strandkorb* (a small movable shelter constructed from wicker. It has a seating capacity for two with a small locker under the seat and an adjustable sunshade above). When we were not in the water, we built sandcastles and other structures, hunted for shells, or hiked over the dunes adjacent to the beach. We always had a great time and we all enjoyed our vacation at the Baltic.

Like in Marienburg, we had a nice large swimming pool in Lauenburg. It was excavated next to the Leba River, which constantly supplied fresh and clean water. The bottom and the walls of the pool were made from concrete. One end of the pool was reserved for non-swimmers and the pool's depth gradually increased from about two feet of water to four feet, where a rope marked

the beginning of the deep water reserved for swimmers. The diving tower was on the deepest end with boards one, three, and five meters above the water.

After I started in the "Sexta" of the Real-Gymnasium, our physical education teacher promised us a good grade if we met the requirements for a swimming certificate before the summer vacation started in late June. We could get this certificate by swimming for 15 minutes, i.e., by moving in deep water without crying for help. This did not give us non-swimmers much time! As soon as the pool opened, I visited it as often as possible. I learned to float on my back and to move my arms and legs while I had my head under water. Finally, I was ready. Our teacher checked a couple of my classmates and me for our proficiency in swimming and gave us our certificate. I never became a very good swimmer, but I managed to swim ten lengths in the 100-meter pool in Gollnow in early September of the same year.

In winter we had a large pond in the town for skating. But because the skating area was smaller, it was more crowded and we did not like to skate as much here as we did in Marienburg. But we did have much better facilities for sledding in the City Park. Practically every child owned a sled. There were easy, smooth, and wide sledding lanes for the not-so-adventurous as well as curved lanes between trees for the adventurous. For the more daring, we had lanes where the sled had to jump over embankments. While exciting and fun, sledding often produced broken bones and, sometimes, fatal injuries. While our “bravery” usually increased with age, there were some lanes, only few dared to use. These lanes were well marked with signs warning of the danger faced by racing sleds down these hills. Although we all understood the dangers of this sport, we often ignored them. Fortunately, my siblings and I never had a serious accident while sledding. But I do remember the cold we had to face in wintertime. By today's standards, our clothing was not suitable for outdoor activities during the cold season. Boys wore shorts and girls wore skirts. Our legs were protected only by long woolen stockings, which we all hated. We wore woolen stocking caps and on very cold days our faces were covered with a scarf. Long ski pants were introduced in the late 1930s as part of the winter uniform we had to wear for our "Jungvolk" and Hitler Youth meetings. We liked these pants and the hats and started to wear them every day.

Like the county and state fairs in North America, practically every town in Germany hosted an annual festival that attracted carousels, vendors of trinkets and gadgets, shows, and frequently a small circus that often exhibited such "exotic" animals as lions, tigers, and elephants. Zoos were only to be found in the very large cities, like Berlin, Hamburg, München, etc. Thus, a circus was definitely not only entertaining, but also educational.

In different parts of Germany people used different reasons to justify such a fair. In the Catholic regions it was most often the dedication, or the commemoration of the dedication, of a new church (known as a *Kirmes* or *Kirchweihe*). München (Munich) is well known for its *Octoberfest*. In Pomerania, we celebrated the *Schützenfest*. If none of these reasons fit the occasion, it was simply called the *Jahrmarkt* (annual market).

The Schützenfest has a long tradition. The word "Schütze" means a marksman, i.e., a person who operates a firearm. When a town built a defensive wall with towers and gates around its buildings, churches, and shops, all male citizens of good repute were required to help guard and

defend the town in times of war and danger. As an incentive for good marksmanship, the town held a contest every year to determine its best marksman. Whoever had the best score in the shooting match was crowned the *Schützenkönig* (king of the marksmen) and the event was celebrated with a *Schützenfest*. However, in more recent times, when the towns no longer depended on their own citizens for protection, the guilds for marksmen became social clubs for the well-to-do businessmen. To be "crowned" as a "Schützenkönig" required that he pays for all the drinks consumed by the guildsmen during the celebration. Thus, only those who could afford these social obligations joined the guild and competed for the title.

Whenever we had the Schützenfest in town, our excitement grew to the extreme. We soon found out that we had to make some very difficult choices. Our father gave everybody 50 pennies and he left it up to us how we wanted to spend this money. One ride on the carousel usually cost 5 pennies. If we wanted to see the circus show, then we had very little or no money left to spend on other things.

Since the financial status of our family was not the best before 1938, when things seemed to improve somewhat, our mother stretched her food budget by serving us a lot of fish. On the average, our mother served us fish 5 times every week. But our Mother was not nearly as good a cook as Mrs. Schooth and we soon got tired of eating so much fish.

Wednesdays and Saturdays were market days when local fishermen offered their catches to the housewives shopping for food. All towns in Germany had an open-air market in those days and much of the fresh food was purchased directly from farmers and fishermen displaying their wares on tables. Fish were usually kept covered with crushed ice. One was even able to buy fresh meat (primarily poultry), live geese, chicken and rabbits, dairy products, and bakery foods on the open-air market. Freshly cut flowers were also available and many women would not walk home from shopping without a bouquet of fresh flowers.

Groceries were generally carried home in wicker baskets or *nets* (a large-meshed bag). Packaging material was not only scarce, but often also difficult to dispose of. There was hardly any prepackaged food available. The milkman came every morning with his horse-drawn wagon and alerted potential shoppers to his presence by pealing a bell. Every family owned a graduated milk can. The milkman measured the desired amount of milk and poured it into this can or into a pitcher. The only types of milk available were whole milk and buttermilk. The milk was neither pasteurized, nor homogenized and all cows were milked by hand. The only treatment the milk received was filtering through a cloth and paper. Dairy cows were, however, checked for tuberculosis. Leftover milk was allowed to sour and to become "thick." It tasted like yogurt and we either ate it with some sugar, or it was used as a dressing for lettuce. I loved to eat the thickened milk with sugar.

I attended the 2nd Public Elementary School (Gemeindeschule) until Easter 1938. My male teacher's name was Gehrke. There were not very many female teachers until shortly before the war when Germany had reached the state of "full employment." During the period of high unemployment (until 1937), male employees always enjoyed preferential treatment; female employees were discriminated against in Germany. They were not considered to be

breadwinners for the family. However, this changed during the war, when most young men were fighting and women had to share the burden of producing war materials.

All students in our school received religious instructions according to the evangelical (protestant) church. Across the street was the 4th Public Elementary School, where the children received their religious instructions from a Catholic priest. There was very little contact and practically no interaction between students of these two schools. Boys and girls were also segregated in our schools.

I was generally a good student and brought home good report cards. The grading system in German schools was opposite of that used in American schools. A "1" was *very good*, a "3" was *satisfactory* (the average grade), and a grade of "5" or "6" signified that the student had failed the subject. Two or more of these latter grades in the final report card required the student to repeat the entire year of instructions. A student was allowed to do this once in middle school or high school (Gymnasium). If it happened a second time, the student was declared "unfit" and was expelled from the school. There were no exceptions and a grade of "1" was given to only few exceptionally good students and very infrequently!

Students who wanted to switch from the elementary school to high school had to pass an entrance exam. This was generally done at the end of the fourth school year. Upon passing, the student was admitted for the 8-year high school program. High schools and middle schools required payment of tuition. However, this tuition could be waived for students coming from very poor families and who received a very high score on their entrance exam.

Since I was a good student, my parents wanted me to take the entrance exam together with my friend Helmut Fröhbel in the spring of 1938. While Helmut had completed four years of school, I found myself totally unprepared for the test with only three years of formal instructions. There also had been no attempt to instruct me in anything that children normally learned in the fourth grade. The result was that Helmut was accepted and I failed badly. My teacher, Mr. Gehrke, was undeservedly blamed for not preparing me better for the exam and preparations were made for me to transfer to another school. Arrangements were made for me to attend the middle school in Christburg for one year. I was to live with my Uncle Oskar (the oldest brother of my mother) and his wife Monika, who had just given birth to a little girl, Regina. The new school year started after Easter vacation in April.

Tante Monika took care of me quite well and I had no problem with keeping up in school. But I was extremely homesick. In June 1938 I returned to my parents and siblings in Lauenburg, where I enrolled in the fourth grade at the Cronau Schule. Here I met a new friend, Winfried Holle. Helmut and I no longer had much in common and we lost contact with each other.

Winfried lived practically across the street from the Cronau School, while I had quite a walk through the town center. Winfried also owned a large assortment of nice toys. Soon I made it a habit to visit him after school to play with him and his toys and totally forgot about going home for dinner. On other days I went window shopping on the way home, especially when I passed the toy store near the market-square. While my mother showed little concern about my "bad

habit," my father was quite irritated by my behavior. But all his disciplinary actions had very little lasting effect on me.

As I grew older, my interest in activities changed from roaming with Helmut to playing soccer at a nearby playground. Since I owned the soccer ball, I had enough leverage for being included in teams. Of course, we never had enough players for a full team and we generally played only with three or four boys defending the goal and a similar "team" being in the offense. I generally played in a defensive position and finally ended up as a pretty good goalkeeper. I became so good at it that I even substituted when the high school team practiced in the afternoons and lacked a goalkeeper.

Playing soccer also led to my second mishap with my right elbow. A "fence" consisting of two horizontal wooden poles between posts three meters apart surrounded our playground. Since there were few openings in this fence, we usually ducked between these poles whenever we entered or left the playground. The playground had been leveled and in places it was lower than the street next to it. One day, after I had retrieved the soccer ball from the street, I stumbled as I was crawling through the fence and tried to catch myself with my stretched out right arm. Well, I ended up with a cracked bone in my right elbow. Again, my elbow was stabilized with a splint and a few weeks later I was again playing soccer. But this accident added to the general weakness of my right arm. I was never able to make pull-ups, nor could I climb ropes or poles.

In 1935 it became law that all children had to join one of the youth organizations established by the Nazies for the purpose of indoctrinating the youth with the ideals and political goals of the Party. At the age of 10, boys joined the *Jungvolk* (members were called "Pimpfe") and girls joined the *Jungmädel*. At the age of 14, the boys were transferred to the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ) and the girls to the *Bund Deutscher Mädchen* (BDM). At the time when this became law, all other youth organizations were abolished. This included the *Pathfinders* (Boy Scouts), YMCA, YWCA, and all youth organizations affiliated with other parties, especially with the KPD (communists).

I had briefly joined the Jungvolk while I was in Christburg in 1938, because all my classmates were old enough for it. I liked some of the activities, but did not care for the bossy behavior of the older boys who were supposed to be our "leaders." I did not transfer to the Jungvolk in Lauenburg when I returned there in June 1938; but in the spring of 1939, I had no other choice but to join the local group in Lauenburg.

It was compulsory to attend the meetings in the afternoon of every Wednesday and Saturday. There was also one meeting per month on Sunday morning, mostly for some kind of parade. Most meetings lasted for about 2 hours, from 3 to 5 PM during the week and from 9 to 11 AM on Sundays. Since this interfered with the homework assigned at school, teachers were ordered not to assign any homework on days when we had a meeting, unless there were no classes for that subject on the following day. Thus, our class schedules were usually so arranged, that we did not have the same school subject on Thursday as we had on Wednesday, and on Monday as we had on Saturday.

As the years went on, more and more exceptions were made in favor of the *Party* and all its associated organizations. We all learned to accept this and did not dare to question the "authority of the Party". This also meant that we children had to obey anybody with a higher ranking in the youth organizations, no matter how abusive these "leaders" were. Interference by parents could lead to severe consequences. During the war, children were encouraged to inform authorities when a parent did or said anything contrary to the Party's official position. We heard of parents who had been arrested because their child had informed on them. These cases were presented to us as an example of what was expected of us children! This is difficult for anybody to understand who has never lived under a totalitarian government. But it was not uncommon in Germany and, after the war, also in countries behind the Iron Curtain. This kind of condition also contributed to the extreme effectiveness of the Party's control over what the public should or should not know about individual events and institutions. I myself believe that the average American knew more about the existence of German concentration camps than even people who lived near these camps, because nobody dared to talk about anything that "tarnished the respectability of the Party" or could cause dissent among the German people. When neighbors quietly disappeared, especially Jewish neighbors, it was to one's advantage not to notice and talk about it.

In 1938 we finally had enough money to buy a nice radio. At that time, radios were built like a piece of furniture. They were relatively large and used vacuum tubes. Most radios were able to receive broadcasts over a wide range of frequencies. But during the war, it was against the law to listen to any station not sanctioned by the Party. Violations were treated as treason. The radio waves were a means for Hitler and his propaganda minister Joseph Göbbels to communicate with the German public. Most of their speeches lasted over two hours and we were all expected to listen to them. These speeches contained a lot of promises for the followers and threats for those who opposed Hitler and his Party.

During summer vacation in 1938, my sister Reingard and I were invited to visit relatives. We took the train to Berlin where our father's sister Jutta picked us up at the station. She was still single at that time and we had a good time with her. It was our first visit to a "big city" and we enjoyed the day at the zoo. I had never before seen so many exotic animals, of which "Gorilla Bobby" was the most famous one at that time. Here we tasted tuna fish for the first time, a fish variety I had never heard of before.

From Berlin we took the train to Forst in the Niederlausitz, a region between Brandenburg and Silesia. Forst was a textile town on the Neisse River, which now forms the border between Germany and Poland. It also was the home of our Tante Milchen, who had moved here with her mother and sisters shortly before WW I. Tante Milchen had her inheritance invested in "Hungarian Goldpapers" which became worthless at the end of WW I. She then found employment in one of the textile mills, where she was still working in 1938 in what we call today the "Quality Control Department." Since her life style was very "conservative" (an understatement!), she had, again, accumulated a nice "nest egg" for her old age.

Tante Milchen was well prepared for our visit. There were restrictions for how much one could buy of certain foods on a given day. But there were no ration cards, yet. Butter and coffee belonged to the restricted items. This forced, for example, my mother to shop for freshly roasted

coffee beans almost every day, because she was able to buy only 62.5 grams (1/8 German pound) at a time. Tante Milchen showed my sister Reingard and me the butter she had “squirreled away” (*gehamstert*) in anticipation of our visit. Well, we could never eat that much butter during such a short visit. She also showed us a number of tin cans filled with surplus meat from the First World War.

After Germany had a very poor harvest in 1917 during WW I, the only hope the government had to feed the public was to severely limit the livestock on farms and use for food whatever feed became available. The government ordered farmers to deliver their hogs for slaughter and everybody in Germany received a one-time ration of pork. After that, there would be no more rations of pork. Tante Milchen preserved her ration of pork by canning the meat and saving it for some "rainy day." Over 20 years later, during our visit in 1938, I asked her what she intended to do with the cans of meat. Her answer was: "Nothing!" She was afraid to open the cans, because she did not want to waste the meat if it was still edible. If it was already spoiled, she did not want to smell up her apartment. As I was told later, she did finally open the cans during the starvation years after WW II and found the meat to be in good and edible condition and she consumed every trace of it.

Although there was no age limit in Germany for the consumption of beer, children and most women generally consumed only dark beer with minimal alcohol content (Malzbier). When I was once offered some "light beer" (regular beer, consumed mostly by men) at the age of seven or eight, one swallow was enough to convince me that children did not like this type of beer and that it was for grownups only. But I did like to drink the dark malted beer. During our visit in Forst, Tante Milchen bought Reingard and me "beer" from the beer wagon, just like we bought milk at home. Since this beer did not produce any foam and was bought in open containers, it was really more like an English ale. Besides milk, this was our main beverage during our visit in Forst.

In the spring of 1939 I retook the entrance exam for the Real-Gymnasium and passed it with the best score of the entire group. After Easter I started in the Sexta (fifth grade) of the high school. The descriptive term *Real-Gymnasium* implied that this high school combined the curricula of a Gymnasium, which promotes the study of languages, and of a Realschule, which emphasizes the teaching of sciences. In other words, it represented a hybrid of the two traditional teaching philosophies for high schools. Real-Gymnasiums later were simply called *Oberschule* (high school).

According to the old tradition, the Latin designations for the eight grades in gymnasiums were in reversed order. The sequence started with the *Sexta* for the fifth grade, followed by the *Quinta*, *Quarta*, *Tertia*, *Untersecunda*, *Obersecunda*, *Unterprima*, and *Oberprima* (12th grade). The studies concluded with the *Abitur*, a set of comprehensive written and oral exams. A student who had passed the Abitur was usually qualified to enroll for studies at any university.

As a new "Pimpf" in the Jungvolk I applied for summer camp during July 1939. The camp (Zeltlager) was near the Baltic Sea and not too far from the Polish Corridor. There were already tensions between Poland and Germany and talk about war was all around us. I expected to have a lot of fun at the camp-out. We took the narrow gauge train to the nearest station and had to

carry our field pack for about 4½ miles on a warm day. The road was sandy and difficult to walk on. It was not an easy task for a 10-year old boy. We slept on straw in round squad tents and were kept very busy with very little time for play. But we did go to a secluded beach every day, where we all had to strip down for swimming. This was the custom for German soldiers at that time and we were already being trained in such traditions. We also spent a lot of time with keeping the campground clean, i.e., we constantly picked up pieces of straw. In the evenings we learned marching songs, which we always sang when we marched in formation. This, too, was a custom adopted from the German Army. But most of us were glad when the 10 days were over and we could return home.

When I returned home from the camp, I found our yard, which now was part of the school yard, crowded with men in the gray Army (Wehrmacht) uniform. Germany was mobilizing for war! All adult males had to register for service in either the Wehrmacht or in the Defense Force (Landwehr), which was activated as a reserve force. I mingled with these soldiers and absorbed some of their optimistic excitement.

Lauenburg was only about 11 miles from the Polish Corridor. We heard a lot of news about the mistreatment of German people in the formerly German territory. Little did we then know that much of this news was merely propaganda or instigated by German infiltrators, just like in the Sudetenland a year earlier. Although war seemed to be imminent, our family would not experience it in Lauenburg. Our father had accepted a new position at the Barnim Oberschule in Gollnow (since 1945 Goleniow), about 20 miles northeast of Stettin (Szczecin) in the district of Naugard (Nowogard).

CHAPTER 3:
GOLLNOW
(1939-1945)

Our father never avoided controversy. He considered changing one's mind as a "weakness of character" and taking an overt position demonstrated "strength of character." This, of course, soon led to friction with the emerging party cadre. He also taught tolerance to and acceptance of other religious philosophies in his classes on religion. This, of course, has never been acceptable to any "religious leader". Instead of facing a public reprimand from officials in the evangelical church, our father chose to quit teaching religion in high school and cancelled his membership in the evangelical church. The rest of the family also left the evangelical church as time went on.

When a suitable teaching position opened up in Gollnow (now Goleniow, Poland), our father asked for and received a transfer to the local Barnim-Oberschule. The town of Gollnow had a population of about 14,000 in 1939 and is located approximately 20 miles northeast of Stettin (now Szczecin), the former capital of Pomerania. Gollnow belonged to the district of Naugard (now Nowogard) and had railroad connections to Stettin, Kammin (north: now Kamien), and Kolberg (northeast: now Kolobrzeg).

Germanic people settled in Gollnow during the middle of the 13th century. Duke Barnim I signed the charter for the settlement on July 1, 1268. The original German name of the town was Vredeheide. The name Gollnow is derived from the Slavic word *Golinog.* It means a large and inaccessible forest. The original people living in this region were West Slavs and their neighbors called them *Wenden*. The town was situated next to the river Ihna. To protect it from marauding hordes and unfriendly neighbors, a town wall complete with watchtowers and gates to guard the access to the town soon surrounded it. The gate controlling the road to the town of Wollin (now Wolin), one corner tower and sections of the old town wall were still in existence in 1997 and showed evidence of restoration by the Polish authorities.

Like in most German towns, the St. Katharinen Church was near the center of the original town. The city hall and the market-square were in front of the church. But neither exists today. Apparently, the town suffered much damage during the hostilities on March 5-6, 1945, when the Russian troops took possession of Gollnow. The church now has a new tower and many of the old buildings of the inner town are gone, including the Barnim-Oberschule, which I attended during WW II. However, the house we lived in and the grade school attended by my younger siblings show little change other than some neglect. The railroad station has been replaced, just like some other buildings along the street leading from the station to the church (former Bahnhofstrasse).

Our father started in his new position at the Barnim-Oberschule on May 1, 1939. His assignment was limited to teaching German and history, since he was no longer a member of the evangelical church and thus was ineligible to teach religion. He was happy to have left behind his old adversaries in Lauenburg. As time went on, he became friendly with the local *Ortsgruppenleiter* (party chief) and accepted some assignments. One of these was the distribution of firewood to all the households in Gollnow. He received no remuneration for this and did this volunteer work

strictly as a service to the community. However, after the Ortsgruppenleiter had volunteered for military service, our father's relationship with the new party boss deteriorated rapidly and finally ended in his transfer to other schools in 1942. This was his punishment for accusing a long-term party member of adultery. This also precluded his promotion to *Oberstudienrat* and it caused not only physical stress for him, but also hardships for our family.

We followed our father to Gollnow after summer vacation in 1939. We were to move into our new home upon completion of renovations. Fortunately, this work had started on August 19th and was completed shortly after Germany invaded Poland. If the construction had commenced only one day later, the remodeling work would have been automatically cancelled when WW II began on September 1, 1939.

The house on Massower Strasse 11 provided our family with ample living space. The bedrooms were upstairs. My brother Jürgen and I shared a relatively large room facing to the back yard. As it was very common in Germany, we had our own lavatory in our room. The sink however, only had cold water. The toilet was next door in the bathroom. We did have a small gas water heater in the kitchen that heated the water as it flowed through the heater. There was also a wood-fired water heater for the bathtub. To take a bath in warm water required a lot of preparation and hard work hauling firewood. As firewood and coal grew scarcer with time, so also were the times when we could afford a warm bath. We children usually all used the same bath water. But most of our personal hygiene consisted of washing ourselves with cold water.

Front and rear view of Gollnow residence in 1997

Central heat in homes was not very common before WW II. Most rooms in our house had a tile oven that was heated with wood and briquettes (compressed brown coal). Every morning during the wintertime, we helped our father build fires in ovens of rooms he wanted to heat. But as the war dragged on, less and less coal and wood became available for heating homes. After 1941 we were no longer able to heat our bedrooms in wintertime more often than once on weekends to evaporate the snow that had formed inside of the outer walls during the week. On very cold days we developed a ritual of warming up our feather beds on a warm tile oven before we covered ourselves with it in our cold beds. This preserved our body heat and helped us fall asleep. I also learned that washing with cold water before going to bed made it easier for me to stay warm during the night. This routine also helped me a lot while I served in the US Army.

We four oldest children arrived in Gollnow in the middle of August. Since we were unable to move into our new home at this time, our father found a *Pension* (boarding house) at the edge of town. We lived there for a few weeks. The owners of the house, Mr. and Mrs. Bartelt, also had another boarder. According to the rumors we heard, this gentleman harbored a deep resentment against the Nazi party, because his brother had been a victim of the Röhm revolt five years earlier.

Our mother stayed with our younger siblings, Uwe and Astrid, at the Baltic resort town Misdroy (now Miedzyzdroje) where she enjoyed the nice late-summer weather. But when we visited her one weekend in early September, we found the town deserted by visitors.

Although in Lauenburg we had been in the midst of mobilization for war, Gollnow showed very little of this activity. On Friday morning, September 1, 1939, we heard the news that German troops had invaded Poland. They encountered only localized heavy resistance. Stukas (Junker 87 dive bombers) inflicted much damage to Polish defenses and the Messerschmitt 109 fighter planes were wiping the small Polish air force from the sky. France and England protested and issued ultimatums for immediate withdrawal of German troops from Polish territory. These statements were simply ignored by Germany and a mutual defense treaty between France and Poland caused France to declare war on Germany on September 3rd. This triggered a treaty between France and England and one day later, England, too, declared war on Germany. WW II had begun!

Germany imposed an immediate blackout. We were forbidden to show any light during darkness that could assist enemy planes with finding their targets. The streets were very dark and we all wore fluorescent buttons to prevent collisions between pedestrians during dark nights. Cars and trucks used blackout lights, which served only to make the vehicles visible, rather than to illuminate the road.

During the first days of the war, we were not allowed to go anywhere but to school. Many of our male teachers had to report for military service and were gradually replaced with female teachers or teachers who had returned from retirement. Some of them were not qualified for the subjects they were teaching. Nonessential classes, such as religion, sport, music, and others were simply dropped from the curriculum.

Rationing of some food items started immediately, while other food items, tobacco products, clothing, firewood and coal followed as soon as the infrastructure for rationing and distributing these items was set up. Every day we read in our local newspaper of people who were arrested for hoarding and black-marketing of scarce items. Punishment for these violations was swift and severe, including confinement to emerging concentration camps which we had never heard of before. The concentration camps were used to confine "undesirable persons" without a trial. But we had no idea that these same camps were also used to confine minorities, such as Jews and gypsies, and political dissidents. Their final use for providing slave labor and for "exterminating" these minorities (*the final solution*) and dissidents evolved during the war after severe shortages had developed and Germany was struggling to keep the war effort alive.

About two weeks after the war had started we were able to move into our new home and our mother with Uwe and Astrid were able to join us.

The Massower Strasse was paved with cobblestones and was located near the railroad station. The ramps for unloading coal were located on the other side of the tracks and not far from where we lived. The horse drawn freight wagons with steel rimmed wheels were usually loaded to the top with coal and passed our house on the way to the coal yard and the local dairy plant near the railroad station. The cobble stone pavement caused the wagons to lose pieces of coal and my "standing order" was to go out and pick up from the street all spilled coal before anybody else did it. I also had to scavenge any coal left at the loading ramp. Although this extra coal helped to keep the house warm during the winter, I hated to scavenge from the street. However, as time went on, the wagons lost less and less coal, as they were no longer loaded as fully.

Our father was always a heavy smoker. As the rationing of cigarettes approached, he was trying to accumulate a good supply of them by befriending owners of tobacco stores. Since he did not like to do this by himself, he sent us children to the stores with bouquets of chrysanthemums in the hope that we would return with some packs of cigarettes. I hated this!

My own life style changed completely with time. The opportunity to play soccer vanished with our move to Gollnow. I utilized the nice weather during the late summer days to swim every day and managed to swim full 1000 meters before the pool closed for the winter. But from then on, my time was used up by other activities, such as helping at home and studying for school. Since my brother Jürgen claimed to be busier for school than I was and Uwe was only 5 years old, I gradually assumed all the chores that needed to be done at home. This included weeding the garden and feeding our "livestock" consisting of rabbits, chicken and ducks. During the summer we fed to the rabbits freshly cut dandelions, which we cut wherever we found them. The city had rented all patches of grass within walking distance, including ditches along roads, to persons who used the grass for making hay or to feed a goat or some other animal. There really was no legal place for me to cut dandelions or to remove a blade of grass. The only thing I hated more than this job was to pick up potato peels at homes of people I hardly knew. We cooked and fed the peels to our chicken and ducks. Since we had no protein to feed to the chicken with the table scraps, the yield in eggs was rather low.

We had a nice large garden and planted it with fruit trees, raspberries, strawberries, and all kinds of vegetables. I was assigned to keep the weeds from taking over and also had to "assist" our father whenever he worked in the garden. This consisted mostly of watching him and being a "handy person" who picked up things for him or brought him whatever he needed. I did not care very much for these assignments and much rather did everything by myself.

When we moved into the house, we found four trees full of ripe prune plums. We had so many of them that our mother decided to process them into marmalade. Because of the large volume of fruit, she used the kettle in the laundry kitchen in the basement, which was also used to boil the bed sheets and white laundry, as it was customary in Germany. What she did not know was that the fruit acids would react with the metal of the zinc kettle and produce a toxic salt. Well, we soon found out and had to dispose of all marmalade. It was a costly lesson in chemistry!

Unfortunately, none of the four trees survived the following winter. This winter was unusually severe and it brought much snow.

We brought with us from Lauenburg one pet chicken and three rabbits. We also bought four more Wyandotte laying hens. Our father paid 5 marks for each hen. But taking care of rabbits, chicken, ducks (later on), and also the garden were not the only chores for me. My brother Jürgen and I also had to share the daily jobs of peeling a large pot of potatoes and shining the shoes for the entire family. This always took quite a bit time out of our day. Regular maids were not easy to get during the war. But my mother qualified for some assistance and we had a local girl who had to serve her *Pflichtjahr*. At that time, we had a law in Germany that required all girls graduating from an elementary (8 years) or middle school (10 years) to work for one compulsory year in some kind of household before they were allowed to start in an apprenticeship program. With all the chores I had to do and the time I had to spend for school and Jungvolk, I had less time for myself than the girl. I no longer had time for any sport activity and very little time for reading or to cultivate a friendship.

Once we had settled down in Gollnow, I had to report to the local Jungvolk to be assigned to a group. Boxing was one of the favorite sports in this group, although nobody received anything that could be called "training" in this sport. Thus, the matches were really nothing more than a spectacle of physical abuse. During one of the first meetings I attended, I became one of the victims. Since I had no experience in boxing, I did not know how to defend myself against my opponent. After the group leader was convinced that I could do him no harm, he took the gloves and worked me over. Since he was bigger and three years older than I was, he was able to do with me, whatever he pleased. I still have a picture taken a few days later for my identification card, which shows the black eye I received during this "match." As time went on, however, I learned the real "secret" of boxing: always look into the opponent's eye and never at his gloves! The eyes tell you when and where the opponent is going to punch you.

As mentioned earlier, the Jungvolk (translation: young people) units met every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon for various activities. These included marching and close-order drill, military games, learning of marching songs, and whatever Boy Scouts learn in this country. But we also learned about the origin of the Nazi Party and its goal to undo the "injustice of Versailles." Although we could have had a lot of fun, the older boys who held any kind of leading position tended to abuse their power (imagined and real!) and tyrannized the rest of the group. Since membership was compulsory and there was no adult supervision, there was no way for anybody to complain about being abused. Since I never attained a leading position in the Jungvolk or Hitler Youth, I must not have been considered to be a "qualified leader" for such a group of boys. At least once every month we also met on a Sunday morning for a parade of all youth organization units, boys and girls. The staging of all the different groups usually took considerably more time than the "passing in review", i.e. marching past a party official.

The major hostilities in Poland lasted about 18 days and many local citizens soon returned to their civilian jobs. Gollnow had suffered some casualties during a poorly prepared attack under the command of a captain Driest. Before Germany was able to occupy eastern Poland, Russia occupied these areas and never returned them to Poland. Instead, following World War II, Poland was offered the eastern German provinces as compensation for it's lost territory. This

displaced about 10 million German citizens in 1945-1947. Today, we would call this *ethnic cleansing.*

The winter of 1939 was relatively quiet with respect to military activity. Our prediction that Germany and France would blow up each other's heavily fortified defense fortifications (Westwall and Maginot Line) soon after the war started, had not come true. There were no major engagements during the winter. Then, on April 10, 1940, German troops invaded Denmark and Norway and on May 10th they invaded France, The Netherlands, and Belgium. We were amazed how quickly German troops were able to advance in France. They even breached the Maginot Line, which nobody had ever expected! The number of casualties in all these campaigns was relatively low and nowhere near the losses suffered in WW I.

My report card at Easter 1940 was quite good and I was promoted to the *Quinta* (6th grade). During the summer I participated in my second campout with the Jungvolk. This time we rode our bicycles for about 40 miles to Jakobshagen in the District of Saatzig. I enjoyed this campout as little as I did the first one a year earlier near Wittenberg at the Baltic Sea and only a couple miles from the former Polish Corridor. We were, again, kept so busy that there was little time left for fun and play.

The winter of 1940/41 was, again, cold and long. There were no major military engagements. But on Sunday, June 22, 1941, German troops invaded Russia. It came as a surprise for us and when my mother heard of the news, her only comment was: "Now Germany has lost the war." As true as her statement was, it seemed to be unreal in light of the progress made by German troops in their effort to reach Moscow, the Russian capital. Hitler did not heed the advice of his generals and did not allow the German troops to dig in for the winter. The troops were ill prepared for the extreme winter conditions they faced during one of the earliest and coldest winters of this century. They suffered heavy casualties not only from the severe cold, but also from fresh Russian troops specially trained and equipped for cold weather fighting and rushed to battle from eastern Siberia.

The situation of the German troops in Russia was desperate and the German government called for sacrifices from everybody in Germany, citizens and prisoners alike. Everybody was urged to donate winter clothing, fur coats, blankets, woolen socks, etc. The prisoners in the penitentiary in Gollnow were stripped of extra blankets and clothing. All these items were quickly loaded into trains and shipped to the eastern front, where much of it fell into the hands of advancing Russian troops who had overrun the poorly prepared and manned German defense lines.

In August 1941, shortly after summer vacation, I suffered an attack of appendicitis while I was returning from picking mushrooms on a Saturday afternoon. The doctor sent me immediately to the hospital where the appendix was removed on the following Monday. An appendectomy was a major surgical procedure and in 1941 required a 2-week stay in the hospital. I was anesthetized with ether, which I found to be much more "tolerable" than chloroform. The incision was horizontal and was closed with only three large stitches. I was not allowed to move for three days. After one week of strict bed rest, I was allowed to stand up and make a few steps. But to some extent I had enjoyed my confinement, since I had plenty time to read books written by Karl May about his adventures with the Apache chief Winnetou in the "wild American West."

I shared the room in the hospital ward with Mr. Lüdtke, a farmer from the little village of Retztow, and with Mr. Wolters, the owner of a small restaurant. I still remember visiting Mr. Lüdtke several times during the next three years. From every visit I returned with a "home-baked" loaf of rye bread and some other food that supplemented the scarce food we received as rations. During one of these visits I watched the process of communal bread baking. All farmers in the hamlet baked their bread on the same day in the same village oven.

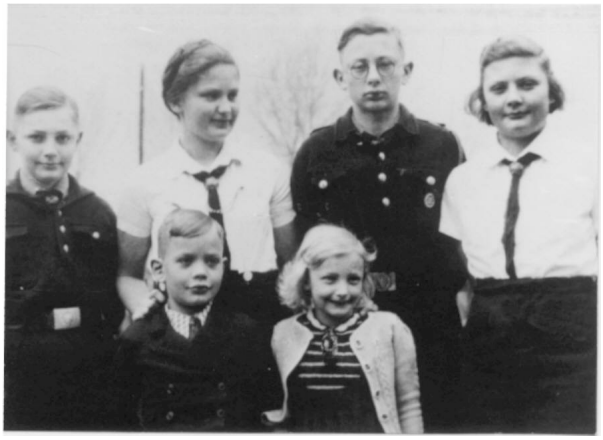
The large communal oven was built of bricks in the center of the hamlet. It consisted of a dome-shaped ceiling over a flat hearth. Every two or three weeks, the oven was fired up by the “oven man”, usually an elderly man. He built a fire with dry brush and wood inside the oven chamber and heated it until the normally sooty black bricks of the dome turned white. This usually took several hours and until about early afternoon. The ashes and remaining charcoal were then swept from the hearth. Then wet rags were tied to a stick and were flung against the hot walls of the oven chamber to generate a good amount of steam. At that time, the women in the village came with their sourdough leavened rye bread loaves, which had already proofed (raised) for several hours to the proper size and the "oven man" loaded these loaves into the oven with a long-handled wooden peel. After a few minutes, most of the steam was allowed to escape through an opening in the ceiling and the heavy bread loaves baked for about one hour. When they were fully baked, the "oven man" removed the loaves with the oven peel and the women took them home. Each woman had marked her loaves for identification and all loaves were of similar size and shape. There was generally only one oven load of bread per baking day. If a second load had to be baked that day, then the oven needed to be reheated. But the oven was still warm enough for baking cakes prepared from sweet dough and topped with streusel and/or fruit slices. The dough for these cakes was usually leavened with yeast. Rural women rarely used chemical leavening for their cakes.

Preparing the doughs for bread and yeast-raised cakes followed a strict ritual that allowed for very little flexibility. It started on the day before the bake when the sourdough starter was activated. The active sourdough starter was then added to the pre-dough made from about half of the rye flour and water and kneaded by hand. This pre-dough was allowed to ferment and sour overnight. On the following morning, a small portion of the preferment was saved as a starter for the next bake day and the rest was combined with the remaining flour, water, and salt and kneaded until the dough looked fairly smooth. After a couple of hours in a warm place, the dough was divided and shaped into loaves, which were allowed to rise (proof) to their desired size. This required keeping a good schedule, because the quality of the bread was affected by the amount of proof given to the loaves.

In the fall of 1941, I was diagnosed with a case of glandular tuberculosis. This type of tuberculosis was quite common in children. My treatment consisted of extra rations of milk and butter and on very cold days I was allowed to stay home from school. I also developed abdominal pains and was in constant treatment by our doctor Mrs. Schmidt-Rüte. As was discovered in 1944 by a specialist in Stettin, my pains were caused by gas putting pressure on the poorly healed internal scar that had resulted from the appendectomy. All the rest prescribed for me as treatment for the tuberculosis had only added to my health problem.

Germany suffered a severe shortage of trained medical personnel. Practically all male doctors younger than about 50 years were in uniform. Only women and old male doctors were left to serve the civilian population. Dr. Schmidt-Rüte worked very long hours and had only one assistant to help her with the paper work and with treating her patients. There were no appointments. Except for emergencies, patients were treated "first come, first served." The large waiting room often was "standing room only." A waiting time of 4-5 hours after I arrived there after school was not unusual. Infections were common and antibiotics were not yet available. A lot of our illnesses were caused by malnutrition, primarily vitamin deficiencies. During the last years of the war and for three years afterwards, I often suffered from painful boils on my neck and on my thighs.

During the summer of 1942, I was sent to a home for recuperating children to recover from my tuberculosis. I spent 11 weeks in Frankenhausen, Thuringia, in the southern region of the Harz Mountain. I had a pretty good time, but was homesick when the first group of children departed for home after five weeks. I was glad when I, too, could go home on September 23rd.



Doerry Children in 1942
Front: Uwe and Astrid
Back: Wulf, Reingard, Jürgen, and Gundula

When I arrived back in Gollnow, I was given some surprising news. My sister Gundula and her classmates had been sent to the hamlet of Hermelsdorf to help out with the potato harvest. Since automated potato harvesting machines did not yet exist in Germany and this harvest was very labor intensive, students 14 years or older were ordered to help out.

The even more surprising news was the transfer of our father to the high school in Greifenberg (now Gryfino) south of Stettin. He still lived at home in Gollnow and he commuted every day to Greifenberg by train. This transfer was punishment for an allegation our father made regarding adultery committed by a female colleague with a local medical doctor. Gundula had heard the remark and had spread the news to her classmates. But, unfortunately, the female colleague happened to be the owner of a golden party membership awarded to those party members who had joined the Nazi Party prior to January 30, 1933, when Hitler came to power. Since she denied our father's allegations, the Party wanted to try him before its own court for insult and libel. But somehow, the issue was resolved with our father's transfer. However, as future events proved, our father's allegations were correct and the lady teacher had committed perjury. But

this still leaves me wondering whether our father ever had the right to get mixed up in this affair. His actions definitely did not help the welfare of our family and could easily have had tragic consequences for him and the entire family. The Party continued to gain power and its members took more and more of the law into their own arbitrary hands!

Doerry Family in spring 1943

In the spring of 1943, my brother took all the exams for his *Abitur* and graduated from high school. Most of his male classmates had already been drafted and Jürgen had to report for training at a Reichsarbeitsdienst (R.A.D.) camp in Gartz at the Oder River on May 18, 1943. He remained there until late in August, when he was drafted for service in a German air force communication unit in Augsburg, South Germany.

The R.A.D. was formed shortly after Hitler came to power to reduce unemployment among young people. Its objectives were similar to those of the Civil Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) here in the U.S. Initially, the R.A.D. was heavily involved in the construction of the Autobahn (4-lane divided highways) and other major construction projects.

Although officers and noncommissioned officers had ranks different from the military branches, the units were very much organized like the German army. Every young person, male or female, had to serve for one year in the R.A.D. But as the war progressed, the obligation was gradually shortened and the activity changed from work training to military training. Beginning in 1943, some units were employed in air defense. Male units operated 88-mm Flak (Fliegerabwehrkanonen) anti-aircraft cannons and female units operated searchlights near major cities.

My sister Gundula, too, left school at Easter 1943 and served her *Pflichtjahr* at home. Reingard started her training at the Frauenschule (women's school) in Stettin. After her state exam in the winter of 1944/45, she became a certified Kindergarten teacher. I didn't mind when she left home, since we constantly argued with each other. Ironically, we grew very close in later years and we always had an excellent sister-brother relationship after the war.

There used to be a saying in Germany: "It is better to have Italy as an enemy than as a friend." This proved to be especially true during WW II, when Hitler's friend Benito Mussolini and his Fascist Party ruled in Italy. Mussolini always liked to show off his military power. Just like Russia in Poland in 1939, Italian troops invaded southern France after the French Army was ready to surrender in June 1940. Italy's next adventure was in the Balkan when her Army attacked Albania and Greece. The Italian army was almost defeated by these two small countries, when Hitler sent his troops for its rescue. Italy also attacked the British forces in North Africa. Again, Hitler had to send in General Rommel to save Mussolini's troops. All these campaigns spread the German troops quite thin and it took a lot of troops and logistics to occupy the territory Germany had no real interest in.

After having suffered heavy casualties and the loss of much of its military equipment during the winter of 1941/42, Germany mustered all its reserves for a major offensive during the early summer of 1942. This time, the objective was to conquer the southern parts of the Soviet Union. The Ukraine not only promised to supply Germany with grain, but also its population was not very supportive of the communist system. In fact, the Ukrainian people welcomed the German troops until the military government moved in and used oppressive measures. The German Military Government even confiscated the Ukrainian people's food supplies. Since Germany suffered a severe labor shortage, young Ukrainian men and women were sent to Germany to work on farms. Often, these young people were simply kidnapped on the streets. This, of course, caused a lot of resentment and prompted the remaining population to support guerilla warfare against the German occupation.

Germany used elite troops to spearhead the 1942 offensive. This included divisions of the *Waffen SS*, i.e. military units of the former *Saalschutz* organization that was founded to protect political rallies before 1933. To prevent Russian troops from surrendering to the German army, as they did by the millions in 1941, the political commissars in the Russian Army ordered the execution of some German prisoners of war and to leave the corpses behind to be found by advancing German troops. The German soldiers would then retaliate and shoot some Russian prisoners. This discouraged the Russian soldiers from surrendering to the German army. This method had worked in 1920/21 when the Red Russian Army was almost defeated by the White Russian Army and it also worked for the Japanese defending the islands in the Pacific Ocean against American forces. In every case, such retaliatory measures led to vicious fighting and to escalated casualties.

Since the SS divisions were some of the best motivated troops Germany had at that time, their members could no longer expect to survive capture. The SS units started to become brutal with their prisoners of war and their initially good reputation deteriorated rapidly. The youngest brother of my mother, Reinhard Penner, was a member of one of these elite divisions and his

commanding officer reported him wounded and captured by Russian troops on July 18, 1942. We never heard from him again.

Initially, the German offensive was very successful and German divisions reached Stalingrad in the fall, where they met strong resistance. Stalingrad was the ultimate turning point in the war. German troops were never able to take the entire city. When a Russian counter-offensive threatened to isolate the 6th German Army in Stalingrad, Generalfeldmarschall Paulus requested to retreat from this city. Hitler denied him this request. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring had assured Hitler that the German Luftwaffe (air force) would be able to keep the German 6th army fully supplied. This, however, turned out to be an impossible task and Stalingrad became "the beginning of the end." The last German soldiers surrendered with their general on January 30, 1943. From then on, there were no more significant German military victories. Attacks on German cities by British and American bombers increased in frequency, until they became a daily occurrence in 1944. While the English continued to attack during the nights, the American bombers came by the hundreds in broad daylight.

The first air attack on Stettin was in the night of April 20, 1943. Also attacked during this night was the nearby Hydria Plant in Pölitz, where coal was converted to gasoline by a hydrogenation process. During the attack, we went outside to watch some of the spectacle. The sky was filled with light beams from search lights and tracers. We also heard the loud humming of hundreds of aircraft engines and the detonating shells of the flak (anti aircraft cannons). Then we noticed several pyramids of colored flares, which we called *Christmas trees*. These were markers put in place by the first reconnaissance planes, which outlined the targets for the attack. The bombers following them just dropped their loads of bombs in the marked area. This was the beginning of *carpet bombing*, which finally systematically destroyed entire German cities, regardless of their military insignificance. This first attack was on Adolf Hitler's 54th birthday and did little damage to the Hydria Plant, which was vital for the German war effort. The second and long awaited attack on Stettin and Pölitz did not come until January 6, 1944.

On March 28, 1943, I was transferred from the Jungvolk to the Hitler Youth (H.J.) and became a member of its communication section (Nachrichten H.J.). We learned Morse code and how to install and operate field telephones. Our meetings were now in the evenings and we had a lot more fun than in the Jungvolk. We actually learned something new! When there was a need for some of us to operate the communication equipment in the H.J. leadership training camp in Lubmin, West Pomerania, I volunteered for two weeks to operate the switchboard for three microphones, 2 loudspeakers, and one record player. I totally forgot my previous bad experiences in such camps. Again, the camp administration made sure that we had no time for play and fun. We were kept busy with all kinds of extra duties and were glad to return home when our time was up.

While at the Lubmin camp, we had many opportunities to watch the launching of experimental V-2s from the Peenemünde rocket facility, about 10 miles east of our camp. At that time, we did not know anything about this weapon that became operational a year later as *Vergeltungswaffe 2* (weapon of retaliation), shortly after the invasion of Allied troops in northern France.

When I was 14 years old in the spring of 1943, I was given the choice to be confirmed as a member of the Evangelical Church, or to give up my membership in the church and adopt the emerging philosophy of simply believing in God. This is the philosophy I still adhere to. During the ceremony for our transfer to the H.J., those of us who had given up their affiliation with any official church, were recognized and received a certificate that we had participated in a *Weihe* (dedication to God).

Jesus Christ is for me a great philosopher who attempted to change long established attitudes and prejudices by teaching tolerance and respect for others, especially for the less fortunate among us. I respect Jesus for this and for what he, as a real human being, has done for humanity. I am also a firm believer in his teachings and try to live by these! Unfortunately, there have been only relatively few true Christians, like Mother Theresa, who lived by Christ's philosophy and really deserve to be called a *Christian*. As evidenced recently in Ireland and Bosnia and formerly in the "Bible belt," most so called "Christians" who frequently recite the Lord's Prayer either ignore Christ's teachings or have never taken the time to really think about these teachings and the real meaning of the Lord's Prayer. I often noticed during my lifetime that those who pretend to be most religious also show the least tolerance and respect for others – they make very little effort to emulate Jesus Christ. I never wanted to be part of this hypocrisy! Of course, there are also exceptions, but not enough!

For me, all religions are basically similar. They are philosophies that teach us how to adapt to and make rules for societal living. This includes the Ten Commandments introduced by Moses. Religions provide ethical rules. Many of these rules became incorporated into laws. But, unfortunately, these "religious rules" and their applications often exclude and do not protect segments of the society (primarily minorities) that are not totally integrated in the dominating part of the society, which is not always the majority. Therefore, the societal rules of religious groups teaching acceptance and tolerance are often applied to only "their own kind." This attitude accounts for the bloody rivalries between the two "Christian" factions in Ireland, the Protestants and the Catholics. Both kill each other in the name of Jesus Christ by totally ignoring his teachings. This attitude, however, is not limited to only Christian groups, i.e. denominations, but is also found in other major religions, especially in Judaism and Islam. The terms *brother, sister*, and *neighbor* apply only to those who attend the same house of worship and engage in the same religious rituals. Those, who do not worship in the same Church are not considered to be *brothers* and *sisters*.

After immigrating to the U.S. in December 1951, I attended services of various denominations and felt extremely uncomfortable when the minister was preaching doctrines and hardly touched on Christ's true teachings. It was a rare occasion when I felt intellectually stimulated to be a true follower of Jesus Christ. I soon stopped going to churches where my social standing was based solely on church attendance and on how much I was able to "financially sacrifice" to the church's coffers. I was especially offended by a representative of the Southern Baptist Church who lectured me on one Sunday morning in my own house in Sauk Village, Illinois, that my only guaranty for going to Heaven was by joining his congregation. No other church would do! Is this tolerance to others' beliefs? This church's attitude also explains slavery. Slaves were never regarded as "brothers" and "sisters." These terms were strictly reserved for those who paid their tax to the church, even though slaves were allowed to sit in the back of the church.

Both my younger siblings started attending school in Gollnow. While Uwe did not like to go to school and rather stayed at home to play, Astrid was always eager to learn. She even took piano lessons when she was 5 years old. However, she soon started to dislike practicing on the piano and after 1½ years she was allowed to quit taking lessons. Astrid was always a good student and she was smart enough to skip the second grade. It did not take her very long to catch up with her new classmates.

Our father had been transferred several times since the summer of 1942. He even spent a few months teaching in Luxembourg, where he developed stomach problems from all the stress caused by living separated from his family. He finally ended up back in Greifenberg and, at last, in Stettin-Pölitz. He rented a room in Stettin and came home only for the weekends. His room, as well as the school where he taught, became victims of bombings in 1944. Fortunately, this happened when he was at home in Gollnow.

Although I did not mind to take care of all the chores that needed to be done at home, I did resent my father when he tried to control me by constantly telling me when and how I should do everything. This caused a lot of friction between us and he often threatened to send me to a "reform-school." I did not appreciate these threats and the frequent slaps in the face, but I also made no real effort to improve our relationship. I generally tried to stay out of his way when he was at home. With time, I became extremely stubborn and derived much satisfaction from infuriating our father. I had very little respect for him!

In the fall of 1943, it was my turn to help out in the potato harvest. My classmates and I were sent for three weeks to Hermelsdorf. We slept in an old structure that had once been used to shelter French prisoners of war who had worked on farms in this hamlet. The windows still had steel bars. Picking up potatoes was not an easy job. We had to hurry to keep up with the team of horses that plowed up the rows of potatoes and we had to lift and move the heavy wicker or wire baskets filled with 30-40 pounds potatoes.

During the last days of our deployment we worked for a different farmer. On our last Saturday morning on this small farm, two of my classmates and I were supposed to pick up the potatoes that had come to the surface after the dry potato foliage had been raked into rows with a harrow. We soon noticed that there were a lot of field mice under the piles of foliage and we had fun catching these mice by hand and putting them into a wicker basket. The mice had a very difficult time escaping from these baskets and soon we had a collection of over 20 mice, ranging from small to very fat. As the mice finally escaped, one at a time, we stood ready with clods of dirt to throw at the mice. Only few of the mice escaped alive. We had fun! Somehow, there is some brutality in every child! But mice, rats, sparrows, crows, flies, mosquitoes, and roaches were always free game for us and were usually killed on sight – if we could get them!

In November 1943 I learned a good lesson in psychology. On a Monday morning, our school principal Oberstudienrat Herrmann came into our classroom to announce that our classmate Henner Krupke had been caught on the previous day watching the first German movie in color, *Münchhausen*. The movie was named after the "lying baron" von Münchhausen who had told all kinds of unrealistic adventure and travel stories to his drinking companions. It was a delightful

movie seen by many students after the war was over. However, movies were the only type of entertainment left for adults and watching them was generally limited to adults and soldiers in uniform. Students were barred from going to the Movie Theater, unless there was a showing of a propaganda film on Sunday afternoon. Now, one of my classmates was caught violating this edict! Oberstudienrat Herrmann, who was also our Latin teacher, chided my classmate, as he was obligated to do. He told us that Krupke's punishment was now in the hands of the juvenile justice system. I had mixed feelings about all this.

Until this Monday morning I had never even thought about seeing a movie that we were not allowed to see legally. But now it became a challenge for me to do better than Krupke had done. I wanted to see whether I was able to watch the movie "Münchhausen" without being caught! After supper I told my mother of my plan and dressed in an ill-fitting suit and coat and my father's hat. I had no problem purchasing a ticket and thoroughly enjoyed watching the entire movie. But on the way out of the theater, I was stopped and asked for my identification. Well, it did not take very long before all the paper work was done and I was allowed to go home. I told my mother about it and also told her that I was glad that I was able to watch the entire movie. I had no regrets! On the following morning, Oberstudienrat Herrmann expressed his disappointment to the class that I, one of his best students, had committed the criminal act of watching a restricted movie right after he had admonished my classmate Krupke on the previous day. My punishment was that I had to report for solitary confinement on the weekend before Christmas from Saturday 5:00 PM to Monday 5:00 AM. It was the most boring and longest weekend I ever spent! But I still had no regrets!

Doerry family in 1944 without Reingard
Front: Astrid, Erna, Albrecht, and Uwe
Back: Wulf, Gundula, and Jürgen

After his basic training, my brother Jürgen was assigned to a communication unit of the German air force in France and in February 1944 he came home for two weeks of furlough. After that he had to report for officer's training in Berlin-Kladow. He came home one more time for a few days at Whitsuntide (7 weeks after Easter) before he had to report at the eastern front in Minsk, Belarus. We soon heard from him in Brest-Litowsk, from Lithuania, and finally from Warsaw, where he helped to put down the bloody uprising in September 1944. During these deployments he earned the *iron cross 2nd class*. Later in the fall he was transferred, on his request, to the

paratroopers and reported to his new unit in Halberstadt. He saw combat in Belgium and was taken prisoner of war by British troops on February 25, 1945.

On July 20, 1944, assassins attempted to kill Hitler. Although there had been other attempts before, this came as a surprise to us. Hitler was badly injured, but survived and soon we heard his voice over the radio to dispel any possible rumors that he was no longer able to lead the German war effort. Although people started to express their doubts with respect to the success of the German war effort, it was very unusual when someone dared to say anything negative about "our Führer" and the Party. We all had learned to accept whatever happened around us. Any open opposition to Hitler and the Party was usually quickly suppressed and the guilty persons disappeared, probably into concentration camps, of which we had very little, if any, knowledge. Even to just confess to this knowledge could have fatal consequences.

Soon after this assassination attempt at Hitler's headquarter in East Prussia, the German public learned of the arrest of many prominent German officers and civil leaders who allegedly had been involved in this plot. Within a few days, German courts found them "guilty of conspiracy" and condemned them to death. Practically all of them were executed before the war ended in May 1945. One officer caught up in this affair without being a participant was the very popular and respected Feldmarschall Rommel. He was forced to commit suicide, because the group of officers that had planned the assassination wanted to use Rommel as an emissary for contacting the English and American governments for a peace proposal.

In February 1944, I noticed that I had vision problems and the ophthalmologist in Stettin prescribed a pair of glasses for me to correct my near-sightedness. At school, I was a good student, but I did not work any harder than to be the second best student in my class. I was very comfortable in this position. It allowed me to be quite lazy. But somehow I always managed to get good grades – better grades than I really deserved. My last report card, dated July 13, 1944, still exists and it shows that my greatest weaknesses were my English language skills (I disliked my English teacher, Ms. Spann, very much) and my handwriting. Although I had missed 85 lecture hours because of illness related to my bouts with tuberculosis, boils and abdominal pain from a poorly healed appendectomy scar (and plain lack of interest and boredom!), I was promoted to the 6th grade of the high school (10th grade).

In late July 1944, we had to make room for a German sergeant, his young wife and baby. The sergeant was recuperating at a local military hospital and his wife had been evacuated from the Memel district between East Prussia and Lithuania. Russian Troops had already occupied parts of this district and had entered East Prussian soil. This was the first German territory that had been lost in combat.

In August 1944, my sister Gundula was inducted into the R.A.D. and her unit was soon equipped with searchlights and stationed near a major German city. Her unit finally ended up in Czechoslovakia and was disbanded in early April 1945.

As the frequency of air attacks increased, high school students were trained to operate anti-aircraft guns (88 mm Flak). All my classmates born in 1928 or earlier were serving in one of these units. I was exempted from this service because of my bout with tuberculosis two years

earlier. But my time came on August 11, 1944. We had been notified on the day before to report in the morning with a spade or shovel to construct a defense line. The duration of our deployment was estimated to be 2 weeks.

We took the train to Schönau, district Schlochau (now Czluchow) and found shelter in the granary of the *Gut* (farm estate) Schönwalde, a little over a mile from the train station and near the *Ostwall* (East Wall), Germany's eastern defense line at its former border with the Polish Corridor. Everybody of age 14 or older, boys and girls, was drafted to help fortify the defense line with trenches, pillboxes, bunkers, and anti-tank trenches. Our group consisted of about 500 boys from Gollnow and the surrounding villages and hamlets. We slept on straw in the large, but crowded building that was originally built to provide a lot of fresh air for grain storage. We had only a few weak light bulbs in the building to help us find our gear in the evenings and in the morning.

I was part of a group that worked under the guidance of a professional forester. Our job was to clear the "field of fire" for the concrete bunkers and trenches. We also cut down trees where the trenches were to be dug and provided logs and brush to fortify the trench walls and pillboxes to keep them from caving in. The forester showed us how to properly use our tools, such as axes and large crosscut saws that needed two persons to operate. The most dangerous part of the job was to bring those trees down which were hung up on other trees. Since the forest we were working in had been planted and cultivated, the large trees were relatively close together and difficult to fell. Many times we had to climb up on the trunk of the cut off tree and rock it loose from the other trees. We had to quickly jump off when we heard branches breaking off. I am still surprised that we suffered no major accidents doing this work.

All the fortification work was done by hand, although teams of horses were used to move logs and brush when necessary. Initially, we walked only 2½-3 miles to our jobs. This distance, however, increased as time went on. We finally were allowed to ride on wagons to keep us from being too tired when we arrived at our workstations.

It was still quite warm during the first weeks and most of us suffered from diarrhea and similar illnesses. We lacked sanitary facilities and the food was not only poor, but also inadequate and nutritionally unbalanced. When we returned from work in the late afternoon, we received one warm meal and the "cold" rations for the next morning and for lunch. The warm meal usually rotated from cabbage with potatoes to cabbage with water and water with cabbage. Only on Sundays did we receive a small piece of meat. The cold rations consisted of a piece of bread and some fruit-flavored artificial jelly for breakfast and some sausage for lunch. It was never enough! The appearance and spicy taste of the sausage made us believe that it was made from mostly horsemeat. We also shared our quarters and cold rations with an army of mice. As soon as we fell asleep, these mice raided our scarce food supplies. We had no good means to protect our bread from them. The mice were everywhere and it happened quite often that we grabbed a mouse that ran over our faces when we were almost asleep. Food was so short in supply that some of us wrote home for bread, even though our families had no longer enough to eat, either.

There was no indication that we could go home after two weeks. Except for every other Sunday, we worked every day from mornings to evenings. On the few days that we did not have to work,

we could do very little in our camp. There were no recreational facilities. We did not even have a ball or a deck of cards to play with. Thus we did all kinds of dumb things, some of which could have had tragic consequences. For instance, there was a large stack of bundled straw where we climbed on and slid down into loose straw accumulating at the base of the stack. This was fine until some of us, including myself, tried to do this headfirst. Well, I tried it once and almost killed myself doing so. Instead of ending up in the loose straw, I slid all the way down to the ground between the stack and the loose straw. I not only ended up under about 5 feet of straw, but I also found out that an upside-down spine and arms are not very good shock absorbers. I almost broke my back and I was glad when I had emerged from all the loose straw. Well, I never again tried this kind of stunt!

As the days became shorter, we started to leave our camp in darkness and had little daylight left after we had eaten our evening meal. Gradually, the food improved a little in variety, quality, and quantity. But we were poorly prepared for the approaching cold weather.

We soon became aware of another problem. On September 16, 1944, we noticed a lot of unusual activities, actually a lack of activity on the farm. All Polish farm workers had been rounded up for questioning. According to rumors, there had been plans for an uprising of Polish workers to open up a corridor for advancing Russian troops. This uprising had been planned and organized by a former Polish army captain who lived quietly in the nearby German town of Rummelsburg. It was to be on September 15th, but was delayed for one day. A German farmer discovered this plot when he went to check on his Polish worker. He noticed that this worker was hiding something. When he checked this out later, he found a German uniform and a firearm. Many more weapons and all types of German uniforms were then found in the possession of other Polish workers. The rumors also claimed that there had been plans to attack our camps by setting fire to the straw in the buildings we were sleeping in and by shooting at us when we tried to escape the fire. We were happy, that this plot had been discovered in time!

These rumors explained the tracers and flares shot above our camps whenever British planes passed over us. They were to identify a potential target for the bomber pilots. On at least one occasion, our camp leader with a few other fellows investigated the source of these signals. They saw four individuals jump out of an overgrown old gravel pit and run away.

After September 16th we were required to walk guard at the perimeter of the camp. This included the park of the estate, landscaped with a lot of shrubs and trees, as well as the many utility buildings of the farm. We had only sticks to defend ourselves, although we had good reasons to believe that any Polish partisan trying to harm us carried a firearm or even hand-grenades. Naturally, we were very scared and we did nothing to endanger ourselves. But every animal or bird moving and making noise in the dark of night sent shivers down our backs.

Finally, in October we received a one-week furlough to go home and to pick up warm clothing for the winter. I had developed a very painful infection at the tips of seven of my fingers and thumbs. The infection produced large fluid-filled blisters around the fingernails and caused severe pain when I touched anything. I had my affected fingers heavily bandaged by the camp nurse, but still had a difficult time carrying my belongings on the way back to Gollnow. My father took me immediately to an old doctor who locally anesthetized my fingers by freezing the

skin with a rapidly evaporating liquid. He then cut off all the light-colored skin above the blisters, cleaned the fingertips with alcohol and put new bandages on my hands. By the time I had to report for the return trip to Schönau a few days later, my fingertips had healed and I had no more problems with them.

After our return to the farm estate, we were given quarters in a storage building that offered us better protection from the cold weather. We immediately built compartments with walls made from bundles of straw. Each of these compartments was lit with an electric bulb and held 4-6 men tightly packed together. These straw compartments kept us warm during the nights. However, I benefitted from this for less than a week.

We had just settled down in our new quarters when everybody born in 1928 had to report for pre-military training. This training was organized by the Hitler Youth organization and was to increase our "fitness for defense duties." The camps where members of the H.J. were trained were called *Wehrertüchtigungslager*. We had heard all kinds of stories about the discipline in these camps and were not very happy about this new "assignment." This training was to take about 6 weeks. On the following morning we reported in uniform and took the train to Deutsch-Krone.

Our training was strictly pre-military and we were drilled like recruits. But life in the camp was not nearly as bad as the rumors had made us believe. We were trained in the use of rifles, machine guns, and recoilless rifles, such as the Panzerfaust (throwaway type) and the Panzerschreck (bazooka type that could be reloaded). We also learned to read maps and to use the compass. At the end, we were tested for our proficiency in everything we were trained in.

The days were filled with training and we had little time for ourselves. We had only one set of uniforms, one pair shoes and no rain gear. We were constantly outside and had a difficult time to dry everything overnight for the next day. But the weeks went by quickly. On November 11th, we all were sworn in as members of the *Volkssturm*. The Volkssturm was a militia to which every male between the ages of 15 and 60 was required to belong to. The Volkssturm was to man the defense line we had been fortifying since August. This militia was finally used as a "throw-away army" to slow down the Russian troops long enough for regular German army divisions to move into new defensive positions. But just like the East Wall we worked on, the Volkssturm had no significant effect on the advancing Russian army.

On November 21, 1944, we returned to the camp in Schönwalde, where we found our remaining group packing their belongings to return home. The fortification work was done! The East Wall was ready as a new defense line whenever it was needed during the next Russian offensive. The concrete bunkers were connected with trenches and pillboxes, and anti-tank trenches were waiting to stop approaching tanks. The only remaining gaps in the trenches were at major roads where German tanks and vehicles could still retreat to new positions behind the new defense line. But as I was later told, when the Russian offensive started in January 1945, the only troops the German army was able to muster for manning the trenches and bunkers were the Volkssturm units we were sworn in with 3 months earlier. These units were not only poorly equipped and lacked ammunition, but they also could post only one man per 100 meters. Since this was a hopeless situation, many of the Volkssturm units refused to fight and just awaited the arrival of

the Russian troops. There was no effort made to close the last gaps in the trenches and other fortifications. There were rumors that the acting principal in our high school, Oberstudienrat Herrmann, commanded one of these units. He handed out all available alcoholic beverages to his men and simply waited for the arrival of the enemy. I have no idea, whether he survived the war. Survival rate of German prisoners of war in Russia was less than 40%.

We were back in Gollnow on November 23rd. Some of my comrades, who were with me in the Deutsch-Krone training camp, already had their induction orders into a R.A.D. unit. I was lucky. I was able to spend the rest of the year at home in Gollnow. In fact, I was even able to start my tenth school year on December 1st. On December 18th, the schools closed for an extended Christmas vacation until January 18th. The vacation had been extended because of a coal shortage. The schools were unable to heat the classrooms.

Being away in camps for almost four months and not hearing the news over the radio or seeing them in the local newspaper, I was dismayed when I found out how the German war effort had fared during this time. The countries in the Balkan had all turned against Germany. An entire army was lost in Romania. Finland had given German troops 30 days to leave the country. Most of them retreated to the north, through the tundra within the Arctic Circle, and on to Norway. This ultimatum saved Finland from another devastating war with Russia. Allied bombers had systematically destroyed many large German cities along with factories and railway facilities. Attacks by hundreds of bombers coming in endless waves were a daily occurrence. When a bomber was shot down by German Flak, another plane just moved into its position. In the west, Allied troops had invaded German territory near the city of Aachen. The Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 was Germany's last futile effort to turn the tide of the war.

I myself felt that my days as a student were numbered. I became acutely aware of my educational shortcomings and spent every available minute during the entire month of my vacation studying history, geography, and other subjects I wanted to know more about. I hated everything that distracted me from my effort to increase my knowledge. When my father handed me a large pile of tobacco leaves to have it cut into very fine shreds, I resented it. I had always hated to cut tobacco and considered this job an imposition. However, I had little choice and went to work. But instead of shredding the tobacco into very fine threads suitable for cigarettes, I shredded it very coarsely so that it could only be smoked in a pipe. Well, this ended in a very unhappy relationship between my father and me. It also was the last time that he asked me to cut his precious homegrown tobacco leaves.

We returned to school on January 18th. Two days later we were notified during a class in school to be ready for doing more fortification work. On Sunday, January 21st, I heard from classmates I met at the movies, that the school was closed indefinitely.

On January 22, 1945, my father woke me up at 5:00 AM and gave me the news that I had received orders to report immediately for more fortification work. My mother had already prepared my clothing and at 7:30 AM I was at the railway station where we assembled for this new assignment. But nobody was really sure of our destination. We took the train to Altdamm, near Stettin. Here we left the train and walked into the town, where we awaited further orders.

Finally, about noon, we were told to take the train back to Gollnow and to return on the following morning.

Later that day, just after we had eaten our evening meal, we heard that there was a need for volunteers to help unload refugees from a train. We hurried to the train station and waited for directions from whoever was in charge. When some of us finally asked when the refugee train would arrive, someone pointed at a string of box cars sitting on a siding and said: "The refugees are in those cars." There was no sign of life around these cars. We finally walked over to the boxcars and found in them entire families with whatever they had been able to save. Their belongings included horse harnesses and pieces of furniture. We soon learned more details about these refugees, the first ones to arrive in Gollnow.

The refugees came from the area around Allenstein (now Olsztyn) in East Prussia. They were from small farms and had formed a *Treck* (wagon train) when they were given permission to leave their homes before the advancing Russian troops. They were some of the lucky ones! As the Russian army was gaining on them, they found an empty freight train standing near the road with the engine under steam. Within a few minutes, the families transferred their belongings, including some food and straw for bedding, to the railcars and turned loose the horses. The engineer started the train with the first Russian soldiers in sight. These refugees were the fortunate ones! Within three days, the train had reached our town.

Many Trecks were overtaken by Russian troops and endured the ultimate of suffering. Others got caught in the open or on frozen lakes and suffered heavy casualties from strafing fighter planes. Some made it all the way to ships. Some of these were later torpedoed in the Baltic Sea. The mid-winter evacuation of East and West Prussia was the ultimate of chaos and suffering!

We helped to unload the train. Many of the elderly had a difficult time getting back on their feet. The families had to make quick decisions on what they wanted to keep and what they wanted to leave behind. This was not easy, because it was very dark and required consolidating of necessities in containers they were able to carry. It was already after midnight when the last family was transferred to their temporary quarters in some public building. But this was only the beginning!

I did not report for fortification work in the morning. Instead, I went to the train station to help taking care of more and more refugees arriving from East and West Prussia. As if somebody had opened a floodgate, one train came now after another one. Most of them were passenger trains loaded with women, children, and the elderly. These trains came from towns and cities that were evacuated in a great hurry. Often times, people were given only a few minutes time to gather what they needed. Especially the young mothers and the elderly were confused and often left without adequate food and the basic necessities. For many trains, Gollnow was the first stop. There was no schedule or destination for these trains. There were also no logistics for feeding and tending to the needs of these refugees. Some trains also had box cars filled with severely wounded soldiers attached to them. Most of these cars had no attendant and the wounded soldiers were without food and water and needed immediate medical attention.

Witnessing all this, I was soon involved in organizing help for the most needy on these trains. Whenever I found unattended wounded soldiers, I contacted the local military hospital and had its staff take care of their needs, including routing of the cars to another military hospital west of the Oder River. I also managed to get the local Red Cross people and women volunteers to prepare sandwiches, which I distributed to women and children only. But I never had enough food for everybody and soon was threatened by some of the few men who, too, were hungry. Although I tried to help everybody, it never was enough! I also witnessed many tragic events. There was very little warning given before a train left our station. Almost every departing train left a mother, a child, or an elderly person behind, who had tried to purchase some food in a nearby store and did not hear the train's signal. In these cases, I usually tried to find out anything I could about the immediate destination of the train.

I had taken on a lot of responsibility and felt good about helping others. But after a few days, the *Frauenschaft* (women organized by the Party) in our town took over my work. One day, after working for 36 hours straight in the cold and wet weather, I came down with a fever and had to stay in bed for several days. I had just gotten up when on February 3, 1945 the top H.J. leader of our district (Hauptstammführer) showed up at our home to find out why I had not reported for fortification work. Although my mother and I explained to him and his assistant, a "Gefolgschaftsführer," that I had been busy with helping refugees and that I was just recovering from a fever, the Hauptstammführer threatened me with severe punishment, unless I reported immediately for fortification work. Then he made me an alternate offer. I also could volunteer for service in a *Panzerjagdkommando* (a commando to "hunt" enemy tanks). I immediately chose this alternate assignment. It sounded to me more interesting!

On the following morning I reported to a commando unit stationed in Trechel, district Naugard. These commandos were organized by the H.J. as a "last ditch effort" to stop the Russian offensive. We were told of a handful of 12-14 year old boys, who had stopped the Russian tanks near Stargard (now Stargard Szczecinski) long enough to allow German divisions to dig in and to take over. These boys had been armed with only a few rifles and some of the Panzerfaust disposable bazookas. It was now our job to train for a similar assignment. Apparently, young boys were expected to have a different perception of danger! This was also the first time I heard that the front lines were only about 30 miles south of us.

I arrived in Trechel with three other 15-16 year old fellows. The entire commando group consisted of about 40 young men at the age of 14-16. We were issued German air force uniforms and a new semiautomatic rifle, similar to the U.S. M-1 rifle. The leader of our group was a H.J. Gefolgschaftsführer (like a company commander).

Without further delay, we had to go to the rifle range to pass a test in marksmanship. Since I passed this test even though I never was a good rifleman, this test cannot have been very difficult. After that we were introduced to the other members of the commando.

As a group of 40 men (teenage boys!) we had 20 K43 semiautomatic rifles (two of them equipped with a scope), two machine pistols, one 98k carbine, and 20 disposable bazookas with a 60-meter range. We were divided in teams of four. Two in each team were equipped with rifles

and the other two carried bazookas (Panzerfaust). Ammunition was scarce and we were able to only watch the firing of one bazooka during the 19 days I spent with this group.

Our training consisted primarily of receiving basic information about our weapons and cleaning our rifle. I learned to reassemble its complex firing mechanism (it was much more complex than the bolt of the U.S. M1 rifle) in the complete darkness of a power outage. We also trained in the field. We were told that after completing our training, we were to be sent south to the front near Stargard. There we were to slip through the Russian lines to destroy tanks and various logistical targets. We were also known as werewolf commandos.

During one of these exercises in the field we faced a simulated attack by Russian tanks with squads of infantry soldiers riding on them, as was common during their rapid advances in WW II. They were to come on a dirt road emerging from a forest. We were positioned on an open range covered with a few shrubs and trees. These and a few depressions in the ground were to give us cover. But the range of our Panzerfäuste (disposable bazookas) was only 60 meters (less than 200 feet). In order to be effective, we had to be positioned much closer than this to the dirt road. While I was lying on the ground and studying the situation, I came to the conclusion that we would have only one try. The chance of success for us to stop a group of tanks and infantry with our few weapons was about equal to zero, while the probability of getting killed approached 100%. This definitely put a damper on my enthusiasm!

While I was with this group, we furnished the honor guards for two military funerals. The first was for two brothers from the village of Trechel who, as members of a Volkssturm unit, were killed by Polish partisans while standing guard. The other victim had been a member of another commando. He had been killed through the carelessness of one of his comrades while they cleaned their weapons.

Life with the commando was not bad. We slept in bunk beds and walked guard at night with a loaded weapon. The food was adequate in quality and quantity. At one time we received from the forester a deer that I helped to skin. The venison provided us with extra meat and we really had no cause for any complaints, even though our future was rather uncertain.

On Friday, February 23, 1945, I received a telegram from my father informing me of my induction into the R.A.D. I immediately turned in my gear and hitchhiked home. I found a space on a double-deck bus loaded with refugees from Danzig and rode all the way from our district town Naugard to Gollnow, slightly less than 20 miles. The highway was already crowded with refugee Trecks and all types of vehicles. Progress was very slow. As we passed through some of the villages and hamlets along the way, we saw wagons being readied to join the continuous stream of families and individuals trying to escape the approaching Russian army. I had no idea, how close this army already was.

My induction order stated that I had to report to the Schillersdorf R.A.D. camp no later than Monday, February 26, 1945 at 6:00 PM. The camp was located about 300 meters south of the Autobahn bridge across the Oder River and behind the bluffs on the westside of the river. It was within walking distance from the railroad station Kolbitzow (now Kolbaskowo) south of Stettin.

There was no need for me to pack too many things and I spent most of my time with catching up on the news. The conference of the Allied leaders in Yalta on the Crimean Peninsular had just been concluded and our newspaper published a summary of their agreements, including a map showing how Germany was to be divided between Russia, Poland, France, England and the United States. Our area was to become part of Poland. This was a frightening prospect for us!

Although there was no panic in our home, my mother started to use up some of her precious food stores. On Sunday evening she prepared for me my favorite dish, cottage cheese dumplings with a fruit sauce made from homegrown berries. I stuffed myself as if this was my last meal. I had forgotten that my stomach was no longer capable to process this amount of food and during the night I woke up nauseated and very sick. I was unable to eat anything for breakfast, but managed to catch the train to Stettin, where I had to change trains to get to Kolbitzow. Little did I know then, that it would be 52½ years later before I could revisit Gollnow.

CHAPTER 4:
IN TRANSITION: FROM WAR TO PEACE
(1945)

After a long delay in Stettin, I finally found a train that took me to Kolbitzow, a village 8 miles south of Stettin. The R.A.D. camp Schillersdorf was less than 2 miles from the station and I reported there just 15 minutes before the time stated on my induction orders. It had taken me over 10 hours to travel approximately 25 miles by train from Gollnow.

The R.A.D. unit garrisoned in Schillersdorf was Abteilung 4/50. The camp was located in a low spot behind the bluffs overlooking the Oder River to the east. The river bottoms were swampy and the river itself was only about 150 meters (about 500 feet) away. About twice this distance to the north was the Autobahn with a bridge across the river. Our barracks were shielded from the river by the bluffs and mature pine trees surrounding the camp provided the buildings with some protection from air attacks. Previous occupants of this camp had dug a tunnel into one of the near-by hills to serve as an air raid shelter.

On the first full day in the camp we were assigned to smaller groups according to our size. The tallest of us were in the first squad (Trupp 1 or troop 1) of the first platoon (1st Zug). I belonged to the 2nd squad (Trupp 2) of the 1st platoon (Zug 1). We also received our uniforms and had to turn in our civilian clothes. Everything we received was second hand and had been used by others who had gone through this camp before us. We received one woolen dress uniform (class A) to be worn during our training, one set of fatigues (Drillich for dirty work assignments), two sets of underwear, two pairs socks, and a pair of "Knobelbecher" boots (calf-high boots). One pair socks was in good shape, but the other pair had holes big enough to put our fists through. During one of our first training exercises, we received a card with darning yarn, a needle, and instructions on how to darn socks. I found much use for this training during the following 6 years!

Rules of war, still applied during WW II, prescribed that soldiers had to wear a recognizable and standard uniform. Our "standard" R.A.D. uniform was brown and similar in style to the regular army (Wehrmacht) and air force (Luftwaffe) uniforms. Anybody caught by enemy troops with a weapon and not wearing an official uniform could be considered as a partisan and was subject to immediate execution. Fatigues were not considered to be a standard uniform until the Korean War.

The new recruits of our unit came primarily from the district of Naugard (now Nowogard) which included my hometown Gollnow (now Goleniow). I knew only one of them. He was my classmate Karl-Heinz Köhler, the son of the owner of the movie theater in Gollnow. Most of my other classmates born in 1928 were serving as Luftwaffenhelfer in an 88-mm anti-aircraft battery. About 20% of my unit had been inmates of the juvenile prison in Naugard. Most of these claimed to have been imprisoned for only minor offenses, such as shoplifting. Others bragged about their sexual offenses. While some of the former prisoners integrated quickly into our unit, others I would not have liked to cross the street with in the darkness of night. These were truly criminals.

The first three days were relatively "normal." Troops 4 and 5 of the 2nd platoon were soon detailed to Schivelbein (now Swidwin) to evacuate the food stores located in an R.A.D. camp near this town and serving the entire R.A.D. region. The two troops of recruits barely avoided being captured by the approaching Russian troops and returned to Schillersdorf just in time to leave for Ummanz, a little island on the westside of the island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea. We all were issued bicycles for this trip.

While still in Schillersdorf, we observed endless columns of refugees moving west on the autobahn. Russian planes tried to destroy the bridge over the river. The single engine planes came mostly during the night. Their engines produced a very characteristic hum and we named the small planes "sewing machines." We heard them coming, turn off the engine, release their bombs, and start up the engine to fly back home. These planes came about once per hour and never hit the bridge while we were there. But every time they came, we had to seek shelter in the tunnel and thus got very little sleep.

After one of these sleepless nights, the main body of our unit (Abteilung 4/50) left for Ummanz by bicycle. Twenty men of the first platoon stayed behind under the command of Oberfeldmeister (equivalent to first lieutenant) Colzhorn. Colzhorn was one of the finest officers I ever served under. He had lost one arm during the campaign in France in May/June 1940 and had transferred from the army (Wehrmacht) to the R.A.D., where his disability was less critical and inhibiting. Our group of men was charged with loading all the clothing stored for the R.A.D. region at this camp and shipping it to Ummanz per rail car. We were to receive our rations of food from another R.A.D. unit stationed north of the autobahn with a battery of 88-mm anti-aircraft guns (Flak). Our mess sergeant also provided us with some extra food he was unable to move to Ummanz and left it in the pantry of the mess hall. There also was an additional group of 20 men who were charged with moving all the files and documents of our unit.

As soon as our unit had vacated the camp, a Latvian SS unit moved in and took over all available barracks, including the mess hall with pantry and the food supply left behind by our cooks. The SS unit had also brought along a herd of cows that milled around between the barracks and the guns and vehicles of the SS. As it turned very dark, we went out as groups of three men to milk some of these cows. One of us held the cow by its horns, while a second man held the mess kit (the German mess kits were designed to hold a little more than a quart of food and could be used for cooking food). The third man was then trying to strip some milk from the cow's udder. Our experience equaled our success, but we did manage to get some small amounts of milk from the starved cows until we heard someone yell: "It's a bull!" This ended our attempt to milk cows.

On the following day we had a different plan. We wanted to butcher a cow! We had someone in our group who claimed to have some experience with butchering animals. There was also a fellow who assured the rest of us that he knew how to prepare parts of a butchered cow for a meal. I myself was not involved in this adventure, but shared in the "fruits of their labor." For some reason unknown to me, the group only salvaged the liver of the cow. By the time it was "cooked," the liver was as tough as the soles of our boots. We could hardly chew the meat!

Since the rail car had not yet arrived, we had time to "explore the neighborhood." We watched the fighting between German and Russian tanks on the other side of the Oder River. The German troops were still trying to maintain a bridge head (an area that controls access to a bridge) at the eastside of the autobahn bridge to allow as many refugees as possible to escape across the river. This was one of only two bridges across the Oder River near the city of Stettin.

During several assignments to a detail that picked up our rations from the R.A.D. Flak unit stationed north of the autobahn, I was able to see some of the misery the refugee Trecks had to endure. The two eastbound lanes of the divided expressway were used by the refugees, while the westbound lanes were reserved for vehicles of the German Army. The lanes used by the refugee Trecks were covered with mud. Everywhere were dead horses (once I counted 13 cadavers on a 500 meter stretch of the highway) and broken wagons. Personal belongings were scattered nearby and made me wonder what had been the cause for this and what had happened to the former owners of this property. We heard that a Treck from the Gollnow area had been hit by strafing Russian planes and that there had been eleven fatalities. On our way we also passed a cemetery, where we saw several corpses lying on the ground, probably victims of an air attack. There was simply no time for families or former neighbors to linger and to take care of their dead. These dead were the victims of a brutal war! In order for the rest to survive, they had to keep moving west!

While we saw endless columns of vehicles, mostly horse-drawn farm wagons, move west on the muddy highway when we crossed it the first time, nothing moved there on the following day. The Russian troops had cut off the escape route for countless refugees from East Pomerania. But we were still able to watch fighting near the autobahn bridge.

After it was dark in the evenings, we saw fires burning east of the river. It seemed like every farm and hamlet, every village and town, as far as we could see, was in flames. We also heard that Gollnow was occupied by Russian troops. Almost all of us in our R.A.D. unit were now homeless and most of us had no idea where to find our families. Fortunately, before I left Gollnow, my father had given me and my older sisters the address of a distant relative, Dr. Carl Doerry, who lived in Rosche, district Uelzen, in Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen). All I could hope for now was that my parents had been able to safely escape from Gollnow for West Germany.

The railroad box cars finally arrived on the third day. Since we had to move all the clothing supply for the entire R.A.D. region to the station about 1½-2 miles away, we were given an old army truck and trailer. The truck, however, had a dead battery and we had to start it by pushing it. We worked through the night and finished the job by the next morning, about 10:00 AM. I have no idea, whether the rail cars ever made it to their intended destination. But handling all the uniforms and clothing gave us the opportunity to exchange some of our issued clothing for better items. We also helped ourselves to extra uniform pieces, especially hats. Some even helped themselves to new ski boots. However, most of these "extras" we had to turn in, again, after we arrived in Ummanz.

Oberfeldmeister Colzhorn was very satisfied with our performance and sent me and my comrade Hain from the town of Pyritz (now Pyrzyce) with a letter to the regional headquarters of the

R.A.D. in Stettin to get some rum or any other alcoholic beverage as a reward for our effort. We had to wait for quite a while and spent a couple of hours in an air raid shelter, but we were finally sent on our way with two bottles of apple wine. While we were gone, the rest of our detail had talked the SS unit out of some tea and rum, so that we had a nice evening together. We were all ready to leave Schillersdorf on the following morning.

The Oberfeldmeister led our group on bicycles. We rode through the western suburbs of Stettin and headed for our first stop at the R.A.D. camp in Pasewalk. We pedaled 36 miles on our single-speed bikes against a strong westerly wind. I was in the first group of seven men that arrived at the destination. The Oberfeldmeister kept pace with us for most of the trip, but pedaling with one arm finally took its toll and he fell behind, too. We admired him for his endurance. One by one, the rest of our detail arrived. Some had been too tired to keep up with us and others were delayed by mechanical problems with their bicycles. The last two of our group joined us on the following morning. Colzhorn, again, took care of us. Somehow, he was able to obtain a few bottles of red wine and a few boxes of rye crisps for a nice social evening. While in Pasewalk, a couple of our fellows "exchanged" their bikes for some unattended ones, which were in better shape than their own issued bicycles.

On the following morning, we headed north for the town of Anklam. But this time we were fortunate. The Oberfeldmeister found a truck willing to take us with our bicycles to our next scheduled stop in Anklam. There we found another truck that took us all the way to Greifswald, where we found shelter in the Adolf Hitler barracks of the local garrison. By hitching these rides, we were ahead by one full day of our travel schedule and Colzhorn declared it a day of rest. He had a very good reason for this. His wife lived in Greifswald and this gave him an opportunity to spend a full day with her.

I was lucky, too. My sister Reingard worked in a home for children in Greifswald and I received a pass to spend a full afternoon with her. Since we had not had any fruit or vegetables to eat for a while and my teeth started to hurt when I was eating, I asked Reingard for a few carrots. After I ate those, I had no more problems with my teeth. Reingard had also just received a letter from our mother stating that she had found a room in the little village of Emmendorf, 4½ miles north of the district town Uelzen in Lower Saxony. Our father had not yet joined her.

During the afternoon, Reingard showed me some of the sights in the town. Greifswald was crowded with military personnel and I was constantly forced to salute. After a while, this turned into a nuisance for me. As a recruit, I was required to salute every commissioned and non-commissioned officer and there were plenty of them in this garrison town!

Back at the barracks, my comrades worked on their bicycles to prepare them for the last leg of our trip to Ummanz. Some of the bicycles were not in a very good shape and spare parts were not available. In desperation, a couple fellows of our group stole the bicycle of the sergeant major of the barracks and salvaged from it everything useful but the frame, which they threw over the wall surrounding the compound. Fortunately, my own bike was in very good shape and I did not need to worry for the rest of the trip.

On the following day, we rode our bikes through Stralsund and crossed on the narrow dam and bridge to the island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea. At Samtens, we turned north and at Gingst we turned west and crossed the bridge to the little island of Ummanz. There were two R.A.D. camps on this island. Their original occupants were probably kept busy with draining swamps and building levees along the shoreline to keep the island from flooding during strong winds from the west.

The first and third platoons were assigned to sleep in the day room of one of the two camps. The 2nd platoon and the cadre slept in vacant squad rooms. We were sleeping on straw covered with our triangular shelter sections buttoned together to form a long sheet. We were very crowded and could claim only as much space, as our field packs were wide. This was, at best, the width of our shoulders. There was no room to roll over during the night.

Although the Reichsarbeitsdienst (R.A.D.) started out as government employment for young people, it gradually developed into a paramilitary force during the war. Another function of the R.A.D. was to provide basic military training. The regular German armed forces no longer engaged in basic training, even though specialized advanced training was still offered. Most training after 1943 was done "on the job," i.e., after the young recruit had arrived as a replacement for casualties at his assigned unit. It became the recruit's own obligation to learn as quickly as possible to "survive" in a hostile environment. The more experienced members of a combat unit usually tried to teach the new arrivals the basic rules of warfare and survival.

We spent long hours learning the rules of warfare and also trained in the field. Our main meals now provided us with more fresh vegetables, such as cabbage, carrots, and beets, than we had received in Schillersdorf. Meat still was scarce and we never had enough food to eat; but we were used to this and there was nothing to be gained by complaining. By this time, almost everybody in Germany was starving! We did, however, receive sufficient rest during the nights. We did not even have to walk guard!

The German armed forces believed in "guilt through neglect." We had been assigned lockers after our arrival in Schillersdorf. In "normal" times, we were to keep all our belongings in these lockers and had to secure them with padlocks. We no longer were able to get padlocks and in Ummanz we did not even have lockers, either. But under the "old" rules, if one lost "unsecured items," then the loser was considered as guilty as the thief and was subject to the same disciplinary action. Another rule was that nobody was allowed to file a complaint about someone else, especially a superior, until the following day. This was to allow the plaintiff enough time "to sleep over it."

The conditions in our camp in Ummanz invited theft and there was nothing done about this. The "most endangered items" in our possession were blankets, uniform hats, and collar liners for our uniforms. Even food stored in the mess pantry disappeared during nights. Nobody was ever caught and held responsible for these thefts. We soon learned to take our blanket along when we had to use the latrine during the night. There was always somebody waiting to steal an unguarded blanket. We also wrapped ourselves in our blanket, because almost every night we heard a quick shuffle followed by a loud curse of someone who had his blanket pulled from him. But as time went on, there was less cursing. The victim simply waited for an opportunity to pull

a blanket from another victim. This type of activity during nights increased significantly after an inspection of our issued clothing was announced near the end of our training period. There were to be severe penalties for not being able to produce all issued items.

As explained earlier, we were required to wear our Class A dress uniform whenever we carried our rifle during training, which practically was all the time. One morning, we had to qualify at the rifle range. Since the first squad (Trupp 1) was first in line and was followed by the second squad, to which I belonged, we had some extra time after our qualification to "explore" a nearby farm. Somehow, while I was looking at some of the farm machinery, I got some black grease on my uniform. Of course, there was nothing available with which to wipe off the grease, nor could I leave my uniform the way it was. In desperation I took my pocketknife and literally shaved off the dirty surface from my uniform jacket. This way I got my uniform jacket clean enough that only a close inspection would reveal the remnants of the black grease.

In early April 1945, we started to lose our cadre. The Russian offensive was threatening Berlin, where the last headquarters of Adolf Hitler was located. By now, most German divisions were no longer ready for combat or only existed on paper and in Hitler's mind. American and British troops had crossed the Rhine River at Remagen earlier in March and had deeply penetrated into central Germany. All R.A.D. training units were now stripped of most of their cadre to form the 3rd R.A.D. division for the "last ditch defense" of Berlin. On April 4th I was ordered to immediately travel to Prenzlau, West Pomerania, to pick up identification papers (Wehrpässe) and other documents for those who had been transferred to the new division. I rode the bicycle to Stralsund and was able to catch the train to Pasewalk, just in time before it left via Greifswald and Anklam. In Pasewalk I changed trains. When I reported at the regional R.A.D. headquarters in Prenzlau, I was told that the documents would be ready on the following day and that I should then return. While in Prenzlau, I met a courier of our sister unit 4/54. We both found shelter for the night in the local R.A.D. camp and on the following afternoon we were handed the envelopes with the requested documents. We immediately left for Pasewalk, where we reported to the local shelter for transient military personnel. There we received rations and found a bunk for the night in a former movie theater. At 10 PM in the evening, we were shown a cartoon show for entertainment. This was the first film of this type I had ever seen. While at this shelter, I heard that the American troops had reached Erfurt in Thuringia, the center of prewar Germany. Despite the sobering news, there was a young lieutenant in the crowd who claimed that Germany still had a "wonder weapon" that would win the war for us. Nobody argued with him.

On the following morning, April 6, 1945, I took the first available train back to Stralsund. By coincidence, I met on this train a former classmate, who had served as a Luftwaffenhelfer (high school students serving in an auxiliary air defense unit attached to the German air force) in an 88-mm anti-aircraft battery. Even though he was ordered not to talk about it, he told me about what had happened to his battery. His and another battery manned by students had been ordered into ground positions to stop approaching Russian tanks near the East Pomeranian City of Schneidemühl. As the two batteries were going into position near the top of a hill, the Russian tanks came over the next hill. Before the 88-mm guns could fire one round, the tanks had overrun the two batteries. Some of the boys were trying to shoot at the advancing enemy with small arms, but to no avail! One of these was Krupke, the fellow who had "inspired" me to watch the forbidden movie Münchhausen. Only 7 men, two noncommissioned officers and 5

students, of the two batteries escaped death or capture. My classmate was one of them and I had no reason to doubt his story! In the afternoon I finally returned to my unit in Ummanz.

April 8th was Easter Sunday. We were given off on Sunday and Monday afternoons. But it was raining on both days and most of us preferred to stay inside the barracks to rest and for some "horse play." We had nothing to keep ourselves occupied with. We had no books or games. There was really not much reason for us to celebrate, since most of us had no idea of the whereabouts of their families. I was one of the few fortunate ones who had received a letter from his parents since Russian troops had occupied our homes in East Pomerania.

Our basic training was to be completed one week after Easter. On April 13th, we turned in our weapons and prepared for returning our other issued clothing and uniforms on the following day. We then received countermanding orders. We were reissued our weapons and in the morning of April 14th, a Saturday, our unit left by bicycle for Franzburg in West Pomerania and about 15 miles southwest of Stralsund. But we did not get very far! When we reached Samtens, we received orders to return to our camp in Ummanz. A Feldmeister (equivalent rank to a lieutenant) with two other men and me remained in Samtens to await further orders. These finally arrived at 9:30 PM. When we arrived back in Ummanz, we found chaotic conditions. The local officials of the Wehrmeldeamt (like the Selective Service Board in the U.S.) had arrived at the camp and issued for everybody induction orders to regular military units. Since I was unaware of the contents of the new orders we had received in Samtens, I reported right away to these officials and received my orders to report to an airborne unit. But then we were told that we all would leave together in the morning. Our destination was the camp of our sister unit 4/54 in Franzburg-Barth.

We arrived in Franzburg in the afternoon of April 15th and were merged with the 4/54 unit to form a combat strength company for the newly organized 4th R.A.D. division. We received two days of rest before we started our training. I got a new platoon leader and Oberfeldmeister Colzhorn was transferred to another unit. Besides our training in the field, we also made a long march with our field packs and weapons. Our rifles were primarily of French origin and with a caliber different from the German rifles. This meant that we would have a difficult time finding suitable ammunition once our supply was depleted.

While at the Franzburg camp, we constantly heard about a move to another location. Our Tross (wagon train) was moved to a loading ramp at a railroad track a little over a mile away from the camp. On April 21st, our platoon furnished the first guard detail for our supplies on the wagons. When we relieved the guard detail on the following day, we found paper strewn all over the area. The first guard detail had pretty well plundered the "iron rations" (long shelf-life food items to be consumed only when regular rations have not been available for three or more days), sweets and tobacco products. Apparently, "the fox had guarded the hen house!"

Late in the evening, our guard detail was reinforced with a light machine gun. We also received live ammunition and formed an outpost with a 360-degree defense perimeter. We considered all this as part of our training. We did not know that this was for real! The Russian troops had broken through the German defenses near Stettin, crossed the Oder River, and were rapidly advancing towards Berlin. Nobody bothered to inform us about this!

On the following morning, April 23rd, we were ordered to remain at our guard post. We got some straw from a nearby farm and put it into our tents as bedding. We prepared for an extended stay at this position. But at about 10 AM, a train appeared comprised of flat cars and boxcars. We loaded the wagons and horses on the train and the straw into the boxcars and rode the train back to the camp, located right next to the tracks. Here we heard that the guard detail before us would be held responsible for the theft of the iron rations and that we may be punished, too. Apparently, some of us had helped themselves to some of the supplies, too.

After we had received our ration of warm food, we were loaded into the boxcars. Our platoon of 40 men, the tallest in the unit, ended up in the smallest boxcar. However, we gained a little room when the 7 men of the first guard detail were ordered to guard the supply wagons on the flat cars at the end of the train.

The Train took us back to Stralsund, where we waited for another transport to join us. We did not feel too good about sitting in a large rail yard without any protection from air attacks. Fortunately, we had only one air raid alarm and no attack. We were glad when the other transport arrived! While we had the air raid alarm, one of our men deserted. We had considered him to be a coward and felt no great loss. We were just wondering how he found the courage to take this step. There were rumors that he had somehow found his parents nearby and just joined them at the first opportunity. Considering later events, it is difficult to tell whether he was smart or plain dumb. The military police was constantly looking for deserters hiding as refugees in Trecks. Punishment was always swift and very severe. War is brutal! It has no mercy for those on the losing side!

In Stralsund, the second guard detail involved in plundering our supplies had to relieve the first detail. Since we had to stand guard as pairs, we stood guard for 4 hours with two hours off in between. Finally, our combined transport left in the evening and our guard detail was posted on the open cars at the end of the train. There was no shelter or protection from the wind. It was a long and cold night! Our train moved us through Demmin and Neubrandenburg to Neustrelitz, where my guard detail was relieved from guard duty. It was April 25, 1945.

We unloaded at the first station northwest of Neustrelitz in the direction towards Rostock. From there we marched on a sandy road to the little hamlet of Babke, where my platoon found quarters in a farmer's granary. Babke is located about 7 miles straight west of Neustrelits in what is now the Müritz National Park. The area is full of lakes and large pine forests. It is the area where the glaciers of the last ice age stopped and upon melting left behind moraines, i.e., hills filled with stones and boulders. This was the staging area for the newly formed 4th R.A.D. division, a "fighting unit" without heavy weaponry. We had a few light machine guns, but no hand grenades or anti-tank weapons, such as bazookas. As said earlier, our bolt-action rifles predated the war and it was difficult to find suitable ammunition for them.

The next days were filled with training in the field and every other night, we pulled guard duty. My platoon was posted at the western exit of the hamlet on the road leading to Rechlin. There was the last active German airfield. I was on duty in the evening of April 28th and it was already dark when we stopped a local woman, who returned home to the hamlet. As we talked to her, I

noticed a dark red disk in the sky southeast of us. At first, I thought it to be the moon; but the disk grew larger and suddenly it exploded into a giant firework. It was the ammunition plant Fürstenberg, 15 miles south of Neustrelitz. This plant had manufactured ammunition for recoilless guns (Do-Werfer, similar to the Russian Stalin Organ). We had no idea why the plant blew up. We also did not know that the Russian troops were not far away from us and that our pulling guard duty was not mere training, but a real wartime necessity!

The next day was Sunday, April 29, 1945. Our platoon leader bought a small pig from the farmer and our cooks prepared a big meal for us. There was a new law in Germany that lifted all restrictions from butchering livestock in areas subject to occupation by the enemy within the next 24 hours. Our Feldmeister knew about this and took advantage of this, especially since we were out of our regular food supply, anyway.

We had the day off to prepare for a major inspection. Only the cooks and some volunteers were busy getting the pig butchered and cooked. The platoon also bought plenty of potatoes and cabbage from the farmer and we were looking forward to a real "fill-up" meal. While we waited, the Russian air force provided us with entertainment. A group of 6 bombers flew above us towards the military airfield in Rechlin, where the last German fighter planes in north Germany were stationed. As German fighters attacked the bombers, Russian fighter planes appeared and engaged them in dogfights. Three fighter planes came tumbling down and crashed. We were unable to identify the crashed planes as German or Russian. But the bombers seemed to ignore all this and never deviated from their course. We heard the detonating bombs and soon we saw them returning from their mission.

We still had no idea that the war was rapidly approaching us! Our officers kept us ignorant of the real situation, probably to discourage would-be deserters. There was also no indication that we were to move closer to Berlin to provide some military relief for that city. I am now sure, that our officers recognized the futility of any effort from us. Perhaps, they wanted to keep us from becoming actively involved in combat without telling us so. Any statement to that effect could have endangered them. Until the very end, there were German military police units actively looking for deserters and "cowards" – soldiers who recognized the futility of continued resistance and the destruction of private property. Many brave and decorated soldiers were hung from girders of bridges across the Oder River or from trees with a sign on their chest stating "I am a coward," just because they had dared to cross the bridge without official marching orders.

We enjoyed the pork roast and literally stuffed ourselves with food. I was just recovering from a cold and regained my appetite while I was eating the fatty meat. I suffered for this. A few hours later I developed a fever with severe shivering. Since we were off-duty, I just laid down to rest without reporting sick.

Just a little before midnight, our platoon leader informed us that everybody not on guard duty in the first two squads (Trupp 1 and Trupp 2) had to be ready with bicycles to "requisition" horses in a neighbor village. What this really amounted to was stealing horses from farmers in exchange for a worthless piece of paper, a receipt to be redeemed at a later time. The guards were called back and a troop was sent to the main highway to collect weapons discarded by

retreating German soldiers. Now we finally started to understand that the war had caught up with us! Our unit was to move out at 5 AM.

Our platoon leader woke us up at 1:45 AM. Our field packs were quickly packed and we were ready to move. I felt exhausted and very sick. When my squad picked up bicycles to leave for the assignment, I could find neither my bicycle, nor any other bicycle. Actually, I was glad that I was unable to join my comrades. Instead, I went looking for the medic to report sick. The medic was not very happy to be woken up early. When I told him that I was ill, he only asked me what I had been doing before I was drafted. After I told him that I had been a high school student, he shouted at me that I was a typical high school student who tried to dodge his duties. He definitely exposed the antagonism that existed between high school students and those who entered the work force as an apprentice after completing the 8th grade. After much verbal abuse, I finally convinced the medic that I was unable to carry my field pack. He gave me the written permission to have my field pack transported by our Tross (supply wagons), if I could convince its leader of the necessity. Well, it took quite a bit "convincing" before I was able to place my pack on one of the horse-drawn wagons.

The unit was ready to move out at 5 AM on Monday, April 30, 1945. We used the sandy road north to the town of Waren in Mecklenburg. The wagons were overloaded and the horses had a difficult time pulling them on the sandy road. The horses required frequent rest-breaks. This was very fortunate for me. I was nauseated and suffered from diarrhea. I needed as much rest as the horses! After a couple of hours, it became evident that the horses were unable to pull the heavy wagons for much longer and the order was given to lighten the load. Ammunition was distributed to the men and everybody could take as much canned food as he wanted to eat or carry. The rest of the unloaded and unwanted items was left behind. From now on, the wagon train moved faster and with only infrequent rest stops. I no longer was able to keep up walking at the side of the road. This is when I grabbed the sideboard of a wagon and let the horses pull me.

As our column moved slowly through the pine forest, we were passed by small groups of soldiers on bicycles. Suddenly, we heard a couple shots ahead of us. We immediately thought that Russian soldiers were blocking our escape route. Our Feldmeister sent a couple of our men ahead to investigate and we soon followed. As we came around a bend in the road, we saw what happened. The last group of soldiers that had passed us had their rifles tied to their bicycle frames. One of the soldiers had forgotten to switch on the safety lever of his semi-automatic rifle and something had somehow triggered the shots. One bullet had passed through the thigh of the man ahead of him and also grazed the arm of another comrade. They were already applying first aid bandages. We did not stop, but I often thought about the wounded men and what may have happened to them during the following days. It was a shame to become a casualty through a freak accident just before the end of the war!

As we kept moving along the road and past the agricultural estate (Gut) Speck, I had one positive experience: I saw 8 European buffaloes (Wisents, relatives of the American bison) roaming free in a fenced-in area. I had always been interested in these animals and knew this herd to be one of two outside of European zoos. I only hoped that this herd would survive the chaos of warfare.

Wisents were truly an endangered species with less than one hundred of these magnificent animals left at that time. (I did see some of them, again, when I drove on the same road in 1997.)

As time went on and the road improved slightly (it became less sandy), the wagon train moved faster, making it very difficult for me to continue hanging on to these wagons. I was not only very weak, but my chest started hurting from forcing air into my lungs. I started to consider "falling by the wayside" of the wagon train.

Not too far from the town of Waren, I reported to the leader in charge of the Tross and simply told him that I was unable to continue walking. I needed to ride on a wagon or I would remain behind. Again, I was asked what I had been doing before I was inducted into the R.A.D. When he found out that I had been a high school student I, again, had to listen to a tirade of insults. But I finally received his permission to ride on one of his wagons.

We entered the town of Waren from the east. It was obvious to us that the town's population was preparing for the arrival of the enemy. They were cleaning out all the depots and supply stores in town. We saw residents pulling 100-kg (220 lbs) bags of refined sugar on their little coaster wagons. Some of these utility wagons did not make it very far before they broke down or simply collapsed. Our unit, too, loaded two sugar bags onto our wagons. Everywhere we saw chaos and misery.

Our unit just kept moving until we reached a stand of trees or a park on the westside of town. Here we set up our tents for bivouac. We also received a ration of food. I was too ill to eat and just rested in the tent I shared with three others. We had put some leaves into our tent as bedding and prepared for a good night of rest. But then we received orders to prepare to leave within 30 minutes. The Russian troops were entering Waren from the east! Within a few minutes, we were ready to move again. Practically nobody had gotten any rest.

I was allowed to leave my pack on a wagon, but not to ride on any of them. We now moved on a highway and it soon was very dark. Our second and third platoons were ahead of us on bicycles when we crossed an intersection. A few minutes later, a messenger brought us orders to turn around and to take the side road leading to the west from the intersection. A couple hundred yards from the intersection and next to the side road was a small railroad station with a loading ramp. As we reached the station, we were told to take cover. A few seconds later some soldiers blew up the tracks. We were lucky. Although small pieces of track and gravel came down all around us, nobody was hurt. As we moved on, we heard tanks moving along the highway. When finally some members of the other two platoons caught up with us, we learned that those had been Russian tanks. Thanks to the darkness, our two platoons had suffered only a few casualties when the tanks surprised and passed them. Initially, our fellows had believed them to be German tanks, but the men changed their mind quickly after the first rounds had been fired. However, many of the surviving men never found their way back to us.

We moved all night in a westerly direction and I started to feel a little better. After daybreak on May 1st, we were allowed to rest at the side of the road. We barely hit the ground in the ditch when we were asleep. A couple of hours later we were ordered to move out again. The Russian troops were closing in on us! We were ordered to throw all unnecessary items, like personal

belongings, extra blankets and fatigues, away. About a half-hour later we were ordered to leave behind everything but our combat gear. We also were told to hurry up, since the enemy was close behind us. The pace of our retreat picked up! The wagon train was ordered to move in a trot and we had to double-time (slow run). As weak as I was, I kept up with the rest. I had no intention to become a Russian prisoner of war! Fear instills us with energy we never think we can muster under normal circumstances!

As we passed through a village, we noticed a battery of large caliber rocket launchers (Do-Werfer). As I mentioned to somebody in our group that this was the first unit we have seen that was not retreating, he pointed out to me that the soldiers were already preparing for it. Well, 20 minutes later, this battery was passing us. Some of our men had jumped onto the caissons for a free ride. I did the same. But as I jumped onto the launchers, I lost my steel helmet, which I later replaced with one I found at the side of the road. Everywhere we looked, we saw discarded property and combat gear. Everybody was anxious to get away from the Russian front. But where did we retreat to? At this point, it really did not matter, as long as it was away from the Russian Army. If we could help it, we did not want to surrender to Russian soldiers!

A few miles down the road at the entrance to a hamlet we saw one of our officers. He collected us and we soon resumed our retreat in a more orderly fashion. As the day came to an end, we found shelter on a large farm. The farm buildings were crowded with refugees and military personnel. For us, it was the first time that we had a rest break that lasted longer than just a couple of hours. We also finally had a chance to thoroughly wash ourselves. But we no longer had a change of underwear available. The horses needed this rest, too.

The following morning, May 2, 1945, it was chaos everywhere! Any horse not closely guarded during the night by its owner was either stolen or exchanged for another exhausted mare. There was much lament, especially among the Trecks of refugees. "Law and order" had disappeared and everybody was on his own!

As it turned light, we moved out. Instead of using the paved highways, we continued to use dirt roads and farm roads. The Russian tanks controlled all major roads in the area. A few hours after we had left the farm, we stopped and were told that we were surrounded by Russian troops. Our general mood was one of despair. I myself was too exhausted to respond much to the bad news. I just rested. After about 30 minutes, we started to move again. A reconnaissance detail had found an open road leading us out of this "kettle." We continued to use dirt roads to avoid encounters with Russian tanks, which really did not make much of an attempt to capture us. The Russians were all around us most of the time during this morning. The Russians probably assumed that it was only a matter of time before we would surrender to them. Also, nobody was anxious to have a hostile confrontation this close to the end of the war.

In the afternoon, I noticed that one of my comrades, Jürgen Riedel from Gollnow, was riding on one of the wagons. When I asked him for the reason, he told me that he had come down with yellow jaundice, a liver ailment. He also showed me a tag that admitted him to the next available military hospital. As he looked at me, he noticed that my skin, too, had turned yellow. I, too, suffered from yellow jaundice! I went straight to our medic and told him that I had yellow jaundice. After he saw that my eyeballs had turned yellow, he made out my transfer tag to a

military hospital. I then showed this tag to the leader of the wagon train and told him that the medic had said that I was unable to walk and should ride on a wagon. He promptly gave his permission and I joined Jürgen Riedel on a wagon for the rest of our retreat.

As I was sitting on the wagon, I soon became bored and was looking for something to do. I still had no appetite, but found two packs of cigarettes in my coat pocket. I took one cigarette out. However, I had nothing to light it with and there was nobody near me who had a match. As I was contemplating what to do, I thought of my father, who was a heavy and addicted smoker. I remembered how I hated to shred his tobacco leaves and how he had smelled up the house with his homegrown tobacco, to which he usually added dried rose petals or other aromatic dried leaves. After I had thought about this for a while, I returned the cigarette to its pack. I still believe that if I had smoked this one cigarette, I would have become a tobacco smoker for life.

In the early afternoon, we finally must have "outrun" the Russian tanks and we returned to pavement and moved through small towns, like Sternberg. What annoyed us immensely were the white bed sheets hanging out of windows everywhere signifying surrender. We were not quite ready for this, yet!

Later in the afternoon it started to rain lightly. We finally stopped in a village and assembled in the local dance hall. We had lost a good part of our company for one reason or another. While we listened to the rain outside, our company commander finally briefed us on the situation: We were about 20 miles ahead of the Russian forces in the east. The British troops were about 20 miles to the west. Hitler had been killed while defending Berlin and Grossadmiral Dönitz had assumed the leadership of Germany. Dönitz was trying to negotiate an armistice with the western Allies. The armistice would stipulate that German forces could continue to fight against Russia with logistic support from the Allies. If we decide to surrender to the British, we should not destroy our weapons and supplies, because we may need them again! The British forces would set up a demarcation line the Russian troops would not be allowed to cross.

After we had heard all this, we were given the choice to either start fighting the Russian forces or to surrender to the British on the following morning. The location for the surrender of all German forces in this area was given as Hohen Viecheln, Mecklenburg. This hamlet is located 2 miles east of Bad Kleinen at the north end of Lake Schwerin. We were to be there by 10 AM on May 3, 1945. Our unit unanimously decided to surrender to the Allies. We also agreed to continue our fight against the Russian army once we had been re-supplied by the western Allies. Although I have heard the same story from other sources since this day in 1945, I have no idea who ever started the rumor that the western Allies were turning against the Soviet Union. Perhaps, it was only wishful thinking of a few individuals who anticipated the Soviet Union's real intent to dominate the whole world.

After a few hours of rest in this dry place, our unit assembled and moved out. As we approached Hohen Viecheln from the east, we noticed the first English artillery in position and facing east. This gave credence to the story that the Allies were checking any further advance of Russian troops past the demarcation line. It was about 8 AM in the morning of May 3rd when we reached the area of surrender. We found all kinds of vehicles and equipment lined up with no signs of destruction. We were given a rest break, which we used to replenish our supplies. I

found a field pack and filled it up with a blanket, any food items I found, and an assortment of other "useful" items. Our unit then moved on. But after less than a mile we stopped, again. The teamsters were ordered to line up the wagons, remove the harnesses, and to turn loose the horses. There were already a lot of other horses running around.

Our officers assembled us and distributed to us our Wehrpass (passport for military service) in which there was the notation that we had been discharged from the R.A.D. in Ummanz on April 15th. We had no paybook (Soldbuch) that listed the details of our service, including pay and decorations. A head count established that we had lost about half of our unit during the three days of our retreat.

As we waited for further orders, we watched English soldiers patrolling the area. Although we were not interested in giving them any problems, they were extremely cautious and distrustful. They carried a pistol in each hand and a sub-machinegun slung over their shoulder. But their main occupation seemed to be looking for German small arms and other souvenirs. There was also a light observation plane with U.S. markings circling above us. It was here that I saw Oberfeldmeister Colzhorn for the last time. He was riding a horse and still displayed his armband with the swastika. We had been ordered to remove these armbands, which were part of our uniform, at the beginning of our retreat. Russian soldiers were known to shoot anybody with such an armband in possession.

At about noon, we were moved to another area closer to the hamlet of Hohen Viecheln. Here we were searched for hidden weapons. Since I had too much to carry, I associated with Jürgen Riedel and shared with him some of the items I had picked up in the morning, including a raincoat and some food. We then waited in a fenced-in pasture for the rest of the afternoon.

In the early evening, it was about 6 or 7 PM, we formed a column of four and moved towards the hamlet. At the entrance to the community were German medics asking for bandages for the wounded. We never had any issued to us and could, therefore, not donate any bandages. But we did show to the medic our tags for immediate admission to a military hospital. The medic told us to report at the nearby village church, which was being used as a first aid station. In the church, we were told to settle down. We found ourselves an empty pew and sat down. As time went on, a few more sick and wounded soldiers walked in for treatment. At about 10 PM, the doctor in charge told us that Russian forces would occupy the village in the morning and we should try to walk to Bad Kleinen, which would remain under English control. The doctor would do his best to find transportation for those who were unable to walk; but he could not promise that he would be successful. Now we also realized that the Russians were the recipients of all the vehicles, horses, and matériel we had surrendered in the morning.

We settled down and found it to be quite difficult to sleep on the narrow bench without falling off. But we did manage to get some rest. At about midnight, some wounded soldiers and medical personnel awakened us. They had come from three trains parked a short distance north of us. We had seen them during the day. The cars in these trains were clearly marked with red crosses on a white background. Apparently, Russian soldiers had found the trains and started to shoot everybody not running away, doctors, nurses, and wounded soldiers alike.

In the morning of May 4, 1945, at about 9 AM we were told that the Russians would occupy Hohen Viecheln within the next two hours. Everybody able to walk should leave immediately! We, Jürgen Riedel and I, were lucky and found a ride on the hitching tongue of a trailer in a Treck of refugees. As the Treck entered the town, a couple of English soldiers punched us in our ribs and motioned us to follow them. They walked us to a street corner and made us open our packs, empty our pockets and put everything on the ground. There was already a big pile of knives and other assorted "potential weapons." The knives included everything from table knives to pocketknives of all sizes. My pocketknife became part of it, but I was able to recover a small knife taken from Jürgen Riedel, which I hid under a chunk of cheese in my pack. We were then subjected to a thorough body search. But as I learned later, these searches were primarily for watches and other valuables that were converted to war booty. Then we got into trouble! The two soldiers found a 6.35-mm Browning pistol in my comrade's raincoat. Fortunately, he had no ammunition clip with the weapon. But for a while it looked like we were going to get killed by the two English soldiers. Anyway, they scared the wits out of us. I was angry, because I had asked Jürgen to throw the pistol away when he had shown it to me on the day before. Despite this, I still trusted him and I even returned his knife to him in exchange for a smaller one he was able to save.

While we waited for about two hours at this street corner, more and more German soldiers joined us. Finally, a truck came and 40 of us were loaded onto it. The truck took us over worn-out roads and through a lot of potholes to the village of Goddin in Mecklenburg (about 7 miles northeast of Gadebusch). Here we stopped at a prisoner of war camp and were asked to turn in all our food so that it could be shared with those who had nothing to eat. I did not do this and never regretted it, either. Most other prisoners had the same opportunity to "scrounge" food and other supplies as I had in Hohen Viecheln. We new arrivals were mostly sick or wounded and had to report for registration at the camp's first aid station. I then went to look for my former comrades who had walked to this camp. I found them, but soon heard my name called and had to return to the aid station. We were told that we would be brought by horse-drawn wagon to the hospital in Gadebusch. While we waited for the wagon to arrive, one of the medical noncommissioned officers approached me and after a few questions told me that we were related. Unfortunately, he was called away and we did not meet, again, before I had to leave. I also did not remember his name.

The 7-mile trip on a wagon equipped with rubber tires to Gadebusch was quite pleasant and we arrived at the auxiliary hospital in the early evening. But we were told that there was no room for us and that we had to report to the large prisoner of war camp. When we arrived there, we were searched again and sent to the camp's first aid station. This station was in the granary of the city's farm estate (Stadtgut). Since it was raining outside and there were few tents, the granary was crowded with prisoners seeking shelter from the inclement weather. The medics had reserved for themselves an enclosed space normally used for chopping straw. I finally talked the medics into letting me and two others sleep under the straw chopper.

On the following morning, May 5, 1945, we heard that there were some open spaces in the auxiliary hospital. We immediately reported to the medics and received transfer papers to the hospital in Gadebusch. It was a grade school building with a latrine in the back yard. This school building still served its intended purpose in October 1997. We slept with about 20 men

crowded into a small classroom and two persons per mattress or straw bag. The mattresses were lying on the floor and were designed and constructed for only single occupancy. They did not support two men very well. I could hardly sleep during the first night, because my back bothered me so much. If there had been enough room on the floor, I would have preferred to sleep directly on the floor.

The doctor in charge was an American Jew, who quickly introduced us to the American way of doing things. On the following day, May 6th, we were ordered to sleep in an alternating position, with our heads next to the feet of our neighbors. The doctor ordered this to reduce the risk of pulmonary infections. It prevented a sick person from coughing into the face of his neighbor. We, of course, did not know this and took it merely as mean spiritedness of the doctor. The building had no sanitary facilities and there was no place for us to clean up and to wash our clothes. We thus were forced to keep our noses right next to our neighbor's sweaty feet.

After my first night in this hospital, I finally started to realize that the war was over and that I had survived! It was like someone had removed a very heavy burden from my shoulders and I felt like a new person. It was for me an indescribable feeling I never again experienced in my life. But I also learned about human nature. All of a sudden, we heard individuals claiming that they had always been communists and had always been against the Nazis. Judging them by their previous behavior, this was difficult for me to understand. I then realized that people change their political allegiance according to where they gain the greatest advantage. Only few people living under a dictatorial government are honest and sincere in their expressed beliefs. I then vowed that I would never become a member of a political party, nor would I financially support such a party! I never broke this vow! But I do take my responsibility as a citizen serious and vote at local, state, and federal elections.

Food in the hospital was short, but still more and better than we could expect to get in the main camp, where the prisoners were given no food rations for several more days. My appetite had returned and I started to recuperate. We received a sandwich in the morning and one in the evening. At noon we received a cup of warm soup. As I was one of the youngest patients, the nurses felt sorry for me and often brought me leftovers or gave me larger rations. This caused some jealousy among the others in the room, but it did not bother me too much. I started to feel better and may even have gained a little weight. We kept ourselves busy with sleeping, reading anything we could get our hands on, and soaking up some sunshine in the school garden, located behind the latrine and right next to a small lake. But as we watched civilians walking freely outside, our thoughts became preoccupied with freedom!

One event will always remain in my mind. As I was reading one day, I felt something on my neck. As I brushed it off with my hand, a louse fell on my booklet. I turned pale in my face and squashed the louse. I immediately got up and left for the latrine, where I occupied the last stall. This stall was reserved for patients with intestinal diseases and was rarely used. As I undressed, I found that I was loaded with body lice and nits. I immediately went to work and systematically hunted and killed a couple hundred lice. I also scraped the nits from the seams of my pants into the toilet. This took me about two hours to accomplish. After that I went to be deloused with DDT. When I returned to my room, I found much excitement. Some fellows in the room had found lice on another comrade and blamed him for the problem we apparently all had. In their

frustration, they beat him up. I certainly was glad that I had not been the unfortunate first one to be caught with lice and that I was gone when this happened.

This was one of several times that I became aware of how brutal people can get when they vent their penned-up frustrations. I was sure that everybody in our room was crawling with body lice, even though nobody admitted it. But now it was in the open and we could pick lice without worrying too much about being "caught" by others. The main reason for having lice was not so much that we had no sanitary facilities, but that we always tried to sleep on straw for warmth. In most places, it was the same straw many others had slept on. Lice are quite active and after feeding, they often fall into the straw and stay there until they get hungry and another "host" comes along. With this "tradition" of sleeping on straw, it did not take long for us to be infested with these parasites. With a life cycle of only 15 days, they multiply rapidly.

While we all were recuperating from our illnesses and wounds, we did not receive any special medical attention. We received our three "meals" per day and medical neglect was our medicine. We had about two or three different commanding officers during the almost two weeks I stayed at the auxiliary hospital. The American doctor was soon replaced with an English doctor. But whenever these doctors made their tour with some visiting persons, they invariably pointed to me as an example of a severe case of yellow jaundice.

As the days went by, I noticed that Jürgen Riedel helped himself to the food I had saved since Hohen Viecheln, even though I had shared with him everything I had. When he was released from the hospital, I still gave him almost half of what I had left. But what made me most angry was that he did not return to me two roadmaps of northwest Germany I had loaned to him. I thought that I would need them once I was released from the prisoner of war camp and had to hike to where my parents now lived. He no longer was my friend!

While at the hospital, I heard that the English were releasing all R.A.D. prisoners of war and everybody under the age of 17. I started to dream of being free, again, and asked for my release from the hospital. The German doctor explained to me that I was still very ill and a relapse of my hepatitis could be much worse than my original bout with this illness. But I finally convinced the doctor that I was well enough to be released from the hospital on Friday, May 18, 1945.

Back in camp, I found out that the English no longer released anybody. There may have been other reasons, but the main reason was that some of those released earlier were looking for their families in areas occupied by Russian troops. The Russians captured them and sent them to camps in Siberia. The English did not like this!

At the main prisoner of war camp at the city farm outside of Gadebusch, I became a member of the 2nd company in the 31st battalion. Here I met several acquaintances from the hospital, because all late arrivals ended up in this unit. We were all sleeping in large company size tents. My place in the tent was not very good and I was happy when an acquaintance from the hospital asked me to sleep in his area. Somebody had left in the morning and there was an opening for me. But before I was accepted by the other fellows, I was asked if I had lice. Well, this was the last thing one wanted to admit and I just replied: "No!" I got the nice spot in the tent. I soon

found out that these little creatures plagued almost everybody in the camp. Whenever the weather was nice, I went to a deserted area in the camp to pick off the lice that had hatched or were "walk-ins." I kept them pretty well under "control" and was happy, whenever I found less than ten of these creatures per day. All around me were others doing the same, but it was strictly a "private affair". Everybody pretended not to notice you and your activity. But you paid no attention to them, either.

The camp was located on high ground with barbed wire around it. On every corner was a mounted anti-aircraft gun with four barrels. Whenever the guards were bored or wanted to have some fun, they just fired a burst of rounds over the tents. But this did not stop anybody from leaving the camp during the night to barter with the local population for things to eat. But there were not many escapes and most prisoners were gone for only a few hours.

Behind the camp was some bottomland with a creek flowing through it. Here we got our water for drinking, cooking, washing, and bathing. We took the water for drinking upstream of the creek and washed ourselves downstream. By the time I got to this camp, there was nothing to cook anymore. Any edible weed was already consumed. I soon settled down and spent much of my time reading, exploring the camp, and trying to get rid of my "cohabitants," the lice.

I soon became aware that I was a "host" to not only body lice, but also head lice. My hair had not been cut since January and I had neither soap, nor a comb. I finally found someone who gave me a small comb for three cigarettes. I was also able to talk a fellow into shortening my hair with a hand clipper. A wound had crippled his hand and he was unable to give me a good hair cut. But I only wanted to get my hair back under my control and I badly needed it clipped. I sacrificed my last four cigarettes for this and immediately started to comb the lice out of my hair. I got rid of them within a week by simply combing my hair at every opportunity I had.

Every prisoner in the camp now received daily rations. These rations were adequate and consisted of 300 grams rye bread and 125 grams of canned beef per day. At noon, we received a warm meal cooked in a field kitchen on wheels. The warm meal was generally some kind of soup. When we were lucky, we found a spoon full of solids, beans or pearled barley, at the bottom of our mess kit. The rest was water. The cooks did not even have salt to give the soup some taste. Salt was very precious, for some of us even more precious than gold jewelry. I used some of the cigarettes still in my possession and traded them for a piece of rock salt normally used for cow licks.

Since I was always hungry, I talked the cook into letting me clean the kettle of the field kitchen. After all the soup had been removed by ladle, there was still some scorched residue baked to the kettle wall. I scraped off this residue and had a good meal of it. The scorched matter gave it some taste, which the soup itself did not have. It did not take long before I had company. Others wanted to do the same.

On the first Sunday in camp, it was Whitsunday (Pfingsten), May 20th, we had red beets and potatoes for our warm meal, a holiday exception. From home, I only remembered that I did not like to eat red beets, because our mother did not like them! I was not very happy about getting

this vegetable when we had so little to eat. But I decided to eat the beets anyway and I was amazed, how good they tasted! From then on, I no longer disliked eating red beets.

What surprised me at the camp was that there were battalions of prisoners claiming to be Polish, Romanian, or Hungarian. The Polish flew the Polish white-and-red flag over their tent and wore a patch of the same colors on their uniforms. By claiming a foreign nationality, these prisoners hoped for a quick release from the camp. We also had a company of Romanian forestry workers, who wore dark brown leather clothing that resembled some kind of uniform. At the closing days of the war, anybody who wore something that looked like a uniform, whether as a child or as a senior citizen, ended up in a camp for further processing. Later on, I met a couple of 14-year old boys in one of the transit camps, who had been caught wearing Hitler Youth uniforms. They were processed for release like I was.

Soon after my arrival at the camp, we were sorted according to the branches of the German armed forces we had served in. All members of SS units were transferred to a different camp. Members of the German air force and navy were segregated, but remained in our camp. We from the R.A.D. became part of the regular army.

While in the Gadebusch camp, I continued my effort to be released in any way possible. I was always told to come back a couple of days later. One day, I read a new notice on the camp bulletin board that stated that according to an agreement between the Allies (probably at Yalta), any German prisoner of war could be held for up to 20 years for reconstruction work in areas ravaged by the war. This notice definitely shocked me and all kinds of thoughts went through my mind.

On Thursday, May 31, 1945, we were called into formation. The English camp commander wanted to make an important announcement. He told us that on the following morning we all would be moved by rail to another area. The Russian troops would occupy Gadebusch sometime during the day. He also warned against escaping from the camp, since the Russians would most likely capture everybody without proper discharge papers and send him to their labor camps. There would be no attempt made to prevent anybody from running away! While the officer spoke, he lit one cigarette after another and after a few puffs, he discarded them by throwing them onto the ground. After we were dismissed, literally hundreds of prisoners rushed to the place where the officer had stood to retrieve one or more of the partially smoked cigarettes. I was disgusted by the lack of pride and self-respect exhibited by these prisoners. I often wondered whether the English officer had anticipated this degrading behavior of the once so proud German soldiers. This was another experience that kept me from becoming a smoker later in my life!

At 6 AM on the following morning we were ready to be moved. Our few things were packed and the tents were all taken down and packed in storage bags. Three hours later, we marched to the railroad station. We were loaded 60 men per boxcar. The train left immediately after we were aboard. There was not enough time to load all the tents. The train took us past Lübeck to Holstein. It stopped at Haffkrug near Neustadt, where we saw the *Cape Arcona* and the *Deutschland* capsized in the water. Local inhabitants told us the story of their sinking by the British Royal Air Force in the waning days of the war. At the time of their sinking, the ships

were loaded with prisoners evacuated from a concentration camp. Only very few of these prisoners survived the ordeal. Many were shot by German SS troops as they swam ashore or were hunted down during the following days.

At one time, our train stopped right next to a camp of Polish men, who trained to liberate their home country from Russian occupation. They asked us if we were the reinforcements the British had promised them. We just laughed! Every one of us was glad to have survived the war and had adjusted to not being in danger anymore. Perhaps, if we would have been asked to do this right after our surrender, some of us may have volunteered for this cause. But now it was too late, especially after we had seen that the Russians had collected all our equipment and supplies in Hohen Viecheln. We felt betrayed and learned not to believe anything the English said they would do for us.

The train finally stopped somewhere north of Neustadt where we were told to get out of the boxcar. Our group was one of the few still in the possession of its tent. But we had to leave it behind. We had to move to the back of the train and in doing so, we had to pass an English officer who tried to hit everybody with his riding whip. There was not much we could do about this, except to run quickly past him. Well, we were prisoners and prisoners have few, if any rights! But this event gave me something to think about. Why did he hit us, even though we had done nothing to hurt him? The answer definitely was that he hit us, because we were German and he had power over us! Then I remembered that the German people had treated, or mistreated, the Polish, Ukrainians, Russians and other foreign nationals in the same indiscriminate manner. It was for me a very valuable lesson and I started to think of people as individuals, rather than as members of an ethnic group or minority.

We prisoners formed a column and started to march along a road. Nobody seemed to know how long or how far we had to walk. According to rumors, the distance was somewhere between 2 and 28 miles. We were not in the best physical shape and moved quite slowly. It turned very dark and shortly before midnight, we stopped in a forest. Here we just gathered some leaves to keep us warm during the night. We did not dare to unpack anything. It was too dark for finding anything we dropped into the leaves. Shortly after 5 AM, we were back on the road.

At about noon, we received our rations for the day. It consisted of 13 tea biscuits (a flat lean vanilla flavored cookie about 2 by 3 inches large and approximately 3/16 inch thick), 13 grams fat, one tablespoon full of cereal coffee, and half of a can of a single English combat ration. There was no way for us to heat our can of mixed vegetables and meat or to boil water to make the Ersatzkaffee (coffee substitute). We just ate the roasted and ground cereal coffee and shared the can of C-ration with somebody. We ate everything as cold as it was. The English C-rations were tasty, but it was not enough food for us to last all day.

Our column of prisoners moved very slowly, not more than 2 miles per hour. This was tiring by itself. Since there were signs and German military police along the road to give us directions, a few others and I finally decided to leave the main body of our column behind and we walked at a more brisk pace. We arrived at our destination a couple of hours ahead of the others. Our new camp was, again, in a stand of trees with a creek nearby. There were no fences or other restraining devices for us prisoners. The entire region of Schleswig-Holstein was our prisoner of

war camp. The North Sea was in the west and the Baltic Sea was in the east. The border to Denmark in the north and access to the remainder of the British occupation zone in the south were patrolled by members of a German elite division evacuated during the last days of the war from Kurland (Latvia). These German soldiers were still carrying their rifles and made sure that no unauthorized person crossed over an invisible boundary. A few jeep loads of English soldiers supervised these German guards.

On the following morning, June 3rd, we moved on in the same manner as on the previous day. Since our small group walked faster than most, we had to wait for the others to arrive at the place where we received our rations. The person in charge for a fair distribution of the food was a young lieutenant, 18 or 19 years old. After he gave everybody his 13 biscuits, he had a couple extra cookies left. As he was trying to hide them for himself, an older fellow noticed it and exposed the "thief." Soon, others joined to severely beat the young lieutenant. It was another case of penned-up frustration vented as brutality against one of our own. I do not believe that the few crumbs we were deprived of by the young officer would have made any difference to us; but it was dishonest and stupid to try to "enrich" oneself at the expense of others.

We arrived at our "final" destination in the afternoon. It was a forest near a lake and not very far from Lütjenburg, Holstein. On the following day, we received tents. We were allowed to go to the lake (Grosser Binnensee), but not to the nearby Baltic Sea. There were no fences and markers outlining our camp area, but we were threatened with a delay in our release from our prisoner status, if we were caught more than 1000 meters from our tents. This threat kept us nicely together, just like a bunch of sheep.

We collected every edible weed in the area, primarily stinging nettles, and cooked these like spinach. One day, I saw a couple fellows frying something over a fire. When I asked them if they had found some mushrooms, they told me that these were snails. I had never eaten edible snails (escargot) before and asked them where they had found the snails and how they prepared them for eating. The two fellows explained everything to me and even gave me a good supply of the little creatures. I was hungry enough to try anything!

I immediately went to work. I boiled some water and threw the snails into it. This not only killed them, but also made them come out of their shells. I then separated the soft parts from the firm body of the snails. I washed the latter and fried the pieces in my last chunk of semi-rancid margarine, which I had saved since Hohen Viecheln. It was not much, but it was something to eat!

We had plenty of time to think about our future. I had given up on being released soon. As a refugee, I did not expect to be able to complete my high school education. I thought of learning a craft, such as cabinetmaker, carpenter, or brick layer. I also noticed that we prisoners were extremely sluggish in our thinking. We were hardly able to solve the simplest arithmetic problem. Then I remembered somebody telling me that German penitentiaries fed their prisoners food with very little salt. This made them more docile and easier to control. Since we did not receive much salt with our food either, perhaps, this explained our own mental laziness.

After one week, on Sunday, June 10th, notice was given that everybody under 17 years of age was eligible for discharge. However, those who lived outside of the area occupied by the British (British Zone) had to have a sponsor from a farm 21 years or older. There was a need for manpower to bring in the meager harvest of that year. Since I had a letter from my parents in the district of Uelzen in the British Zone, I did not need a sponsor. We, who met these requirements, packed our belongings and on the following morning reported to a transition company located in the granary of a large farm in the nearby village. Here we met others like us, but who had already waited to be processed for discharge for the past 2-3 weeks. This somewhat deflated our hopes; but there was some progress. We were regrouped according to districts. Since I was unaware of the exact location of the town Uelzen, I reported to the group from the district of Hannover instead of Lüneburg. We stayed at this camp for only a couple days. On June 13th, we were given orders to report to the transition camp at the brickyard near the hamlet of Gottesgabe (The Lord's Gift) and not far from the Selenter See (lake), less than 8 miles away.

One member of our group claimed to know the area and a shortcut, which would reduce the official distance to about 5 miles. Well, 13 miles later we had learned our lesson: never use a shortcut when you travel on unknown roads! A thunderstorm made things worse, because it caught us out in the open and soaked us thoroughly. But we finally made it to the brickyard being smarter by one more lesson!

Since we were considered to be in transit, we no longer received a warm meal. It remained this way until we were discharged two weeks later. Our daily ration had now changed to 4 ounces of tea biscuits, a half can of an English combat ration (mixed vegetables and meat), a half salted herring, and every three days a spoon of Ersatzkaffee (ground roasted barley), which we ate immediately. There were some among us, who did not like to eat the salty herring and gave their share away. I sometimes ended up with one or two extra portions of herring. But this stopped when we learned to leach out the salt with water. This made the herring more palatable to everybody.

We found shelter from the rain in the large manufacturing hall of the brickyard. But those who had passed through this “camp” before us had burned all the shutters and wooden drying racks. We had cold and miserable weather and the wind was blowing unobstructed through the building. I became seriously ill with dysentery. I was passing nothing but blood and a slimy matter. The latrine was outside and consisted of an open trench with a wooden plank to sit on. This contraption was "affectionately" known as the *Donnerbalken* (thunder log). There was usually a "guard" nearby to watch that nobody fell into the open trench and to throw more lime onto the excrements. This kept the flies from spreading disease.

As I was again and again rushing outside to relieve myself, I slid on the wet clay and every time this happened, I lost control over my bowels. I had a high fever and was afraid to report sick, because this could set me back in my processing for discharge. I was determined to get back to my parents, no matter what it took! I was very weak and struggled to get my food down. I only drank boiled coffee. I finally went to see the camp doctor and asked him for some help. But I also told him that I did not want to go to a hospital. He finally gave me some opium tablets. They produced pain in my chest and made my heart pound heavily. But the tablets helped me to recover in a hurry.

A couple days later, on June 16th, we were told to move to the next transit camp, 11 miles away. I saw the doctor and asked him what he thought of me walking 11 miles with my pack. Under normal circumstances I would have been committed to a hospital for two weeks. The doctor was against any attempt on my part to go anywhere. Well, when the morning of June 17th came, I was ready to move to the transit camp Krummsee (crooked lake), northeast of the town of Malente, Holstein. Our camp was right next to the lake and it gave me the opportunity to clean up from my ordeal in Gottesgabe. My underwear was so soiled that I simply discarded it by covering it with dirt. The sun had come out, again, and it was a nice day. I changed groups at this camp and now belonged to the one from the Lüneburg area.

From now on, things moved quickly. On the following day, June 18th, we moved through Malente and reported to the release camp "R 1" near the town Eutin. The next day we were registered for release and were grouped according to the military branch we had belonged to. Each group consisted of 10 men and in my group we all were from the R.A.D. We also adopted two 14-year old boys who had been in a Hitler Youth camp when they were captured in their uniform. Without adult supervision for a couple of months, these boys showed severe neglect. They lacked the necessary discipline to properly take care of themselves. A few days later, one of them was caught stealing some items from another man. He was severely beaten and his head was shaved. He finally ended up in the hospital.

On June 19th we were sent to the military barracks in the town of Eutin, about 4½ miles from our camp. Here we were registered, interrogated, and received a cursory physical examination. We also received 40 marks discharge pay and were "deloused." The procedure for delousing was simple. A man with a hand pump dispenser blew DDT dust down our neck, chest, into each sleeve and pantleg and also one charge down our lower back. A black cork stamp on the back of our right hand signified that we had been dusted with the pesticide. It seemed to us that after each treatment the lice just crawled more and faster. I rarely found a dead louse and despite all the treatments, I never got rid of these creatures until I was able to take off all my clothes and store them away from people. The lice seemed to disappear quickly once they lost their "host." After we were finished with registering, we received a yellow triangular patch of cloth that we had to pin to our uniform as a sign of our registration.

After our return to the "R 1" camp, we anxiously waited for our names to be called. Every evening, they called groups to receive three days worth of food rations in preparation for their release on the following day. Finally, on Saturday evening, June 23rd, our names were called and we received our rations of bread, sausage, and other food items. Many of us hoped to be at home with their families on the following evening and immediately started to consume their rations. I didn't dare to do this, because I did not know whether my parents could afford to share their food with me. I divided my food into three equal portions to be eaten on three days.

In the morning of June 24, 1945, we marched to Eutin. We were searched at 8 AM and the convoy of English trucks was supposed to arrive at 8:30 AM. These trucks were to take us to Uelzen. We waited and waited; but no truck came to pick us up. A thunderstorm soaked us in the early afternoon and at about 3 PM we were ordered to return to our old camp. It was Sunday and the English drivers had a day off! Not only our hope to be with our families was shattered,

but also many of us no longer had any food to eat for the next two days. However, the people in charge felt sorry for us and provided us on the following day with an advance of one day's ration.

Finally, on Tuesday evening, we were notified that we would be released on the following day, June 27, 1945. We were in Eutin on time and were divided into groups of 40 men per truck. With good speed and little distance between trucks, which scared us, we soon arrived in Uelzen without accident or delay. We were brought to the R.A.D. camp in Uelzen and officials of the local employment office registered us. While we waited, most of us started to consume what was left of our rations, even though we had been told that the general population received less food than our rations in the camp. This was difficult for us to believe. But, just in case this was true, I saved much of my food ration.

In the afternoon, we finally were brought by truck to the employment office in Uelzen and were confined to the enclosed back yard. Here we were supposed to get jobs assigned to us. I had to get one, too. When I asked about the options I had, I was told that there were two options for me: To help with the harvest on a farm, or to work for the railroad repairing tracks. According to my discharge papers, I was already designated as a farm worker, even though I told the secretary in Eutin that I was a high school student. It didn't really matter, because the schools were still closed.

I had to make my decision quickly, whether I wanted to repair railroad tracks or whether I wanted to work on a farm. The farm work appealed to me more. There was generally more to eat on a farm and chances were good that I would have a roof over my head. This was not certain if I asked to work for the railroad. I now made my decision for the next 7 years! I was referred to a small farm in Emmendorf, where my parents had found a room to live in. The owner of the farm I was to work for was Hermann Niebuhr.

It was already 8:30 PM when I received my papers and could leave the closed-in yard of the employment office. Curfew was at 10 PM. Anybody found walking around outside after curfew could be arrested and jailed. I had no idea how to get to Emmendorf. But soon I found somebody else who knew the area and who lived in Ripdorf, a hamlet on the way to Emmendorf, 4½ miles away. When we parted, he told me that I would see the brick yard of Emmendorf ahead of me, once the road emerged from the forest. In anticipation of seeing my parents, the road seemed to be endless. But I finally saw the smokestacks of the brickyard as described by my companion.

It was turning dark and curfew was rapidly approaching. I knew that my parents were living near the brickyard and I decided to take a shortcut across the fields. I then walked across pastures and suddenly found myself up to my knees in water. In the semi-darkness I had stumbled into an overgrown drainage ditch. I also noticed something ahead of me that I was not sure of. I soon stood at the banks of the Ilmenau River (another lesson on taking shortcuts in an unknown area!). Avoiding streets, I walked through backyards of homes towards the village to find a bridge across the Ilmenau. I finally met a woman, whom I asked for directions to the Koch residence near the brickyard and the possibility of getting caught by the occupation forces for curfew violation. I also asked her about the food situation and whether there were enough

potatoes to eat. In the Gadebusch camp we had received in our soup only one ounce of potatoes per day!

I found the bridge and the street leading to the group of homes where my parents had found shelter. It was the last house in the street and there was still light coming from one of the upstairs windows. It immediately came to my mind that my parents were in that room. The door to the house was unlocked. As I entered, I heard my Mother asking who it was. I just replied: "Good evening, Mutti!"

There is no need to describe the joy evoked by my sudden appearance! I also found out how lucky I was. My parents were in the process of getting all their belongings packed for moving to another village on the following day. This was the reason why they still had the light burning. I also learned that my sister Gundula had joined them on the day before the English troops occupied this area on April 17th and 18th. There was no word, yet, from my sister Reingard. My brother Jürgen was missing and my parents had feared that I was lost somewhere on the Russian front. They had never received the one letter I had been allowed to write and had sent from the camp in Gadebusch.

CHAPTER 5:
A NEW BEGINNING: WESTERWEYHE
(1945-1948)

I spent my first night of freedom sleeping on the sofa of the Koch family and under a *feather bed*, a fluffy bed cover stuffed with feathers. I felt like I was in paradise!

After a good night of rest, my father took me to meet my new employer, Hermann Niebuhr. He agreed to let me have a few days off to recuperate and to help my parents with their move to the brickyard in Kirchweyhe. The owner of the brickyard had offered my father two rooms in his house and the use of the kitchen. This was quite an improvement from the overcrowded room under the roof of the small Koch family home. The owner of my parent's new residence, Mr. Bulig, lived in a nice large home (*villa*) on top of a hill overlooking the large yard and manufacturing facilities. The villa was located right at the edge of a forest and was guarded by a German shepherd dog, Hektor. Hektor had been trained as a police dog and was well known and respected in the area. Nobody dared to walk up to the villa without making sure that Hektor was locked in a room. Since we lived at the villa, the dog quickly accepted us and we, especially my brother Uwe, often took him for a walk in the forest. Hektor, like many dogs, was afraid of thunder and during storms he often came to our rooms to be with us.

After moving to Kirchweyhe, where my father lived until November 30, 1953, I relaxed for a few days by picking wild blueberries and gathering edible mushrooms in the forest. Food was scarce and anything edible we could find helped provide us with much needed calories and a variety of nutrients.

On Monday, July 9, 1945, I reported for work on the Niebuhr farm in Emmendorf. I took the place of Rudi Braun, a former student of my father, and of his friend Ulrich Düsing. Both wanted to start an apprenticeship in bricklaying at the Kirchweyhe brickyard. Both were still trying to locate their refugee parents.

The farmer, Hermann Niebuhr, was very considerate and gave me only light work to do. Although I was relatively tall (5 feet and 10.5 inches), I weighed less than 110 pounds. A former Landser (a term commonly used in Germany for soldiers. It is equivalent to “GI” in this country), who was still trying to locate his refugee family, did all the “skilled” and hard work. The farm was relatively small and had only one team of two horses, a few dairy cows, and some hogs and chickens. The buildings were old and not in very good condition. Hermann Niebuhr himself was elderly and not in very good health. I helped him with feeding and caring for the livestock.

I started on my new job with sawing firewood. In the afternoon, I worked in the field learning how to bundle winter barley into sheaves for shocking. “Shocking” was the stacking of 20 sheaves for drying in the field. I also helped the farmer with getting fodder for the cows from the field. One day, when we were getting another load of fodder, we heard a loud explosion and saw rising smoke in the direction of the explosion. Hermann Niebuhr knew immediately that the location was at or near the place where he had his landser rake the barley field with the other

horse. He envisioned the worst – something may have happened to the horse. No words were lost for the landser; he would be easy to replace with another homeless former soldier looking for a roof over his head, a bed, and three meals and a couple snacks per day. But to lose a good horse would be a catastrophe! He immediately left to find out what happened, while I finished the job.

Fortunately, neither the horse, nor the farmhand had suffered any injury. The landser had been finishing up his work and was running the horse-drawn rake's wheel in a furrow at the edge of the field, when he noticed a *panzerfaust* (disposable bazooka) right in front of the wheel. The safety pin had been pulled and the weapon was activated for firing. This would have happened, if the wheel had run over the trigger. But the landser was lucky and noticed the panzerfaust in time to remove it safely from the furrow. To get rid of the armed weapon, he simply tied the horse to a tree and walked a couple hundred yards. There he aimed the panzerfaust at another tree and pushed down the trigger.

The few weeks I worked on this farm in Emmendorf were quite enjoyable for me. The days were long, but the work was not too hard. I got plenty of good food to eat and slept well at night. But the long period of malnutrition had taken its toll. My immunity system had been weakened. Any injuries I had, healed very slowly. A cat bite caused blood poisoning in my left index finger and a mosquito bite caused a severe infection right above my left ankle. A physician living in the neighborhood advised me to have it operated on without much delay, or I would lose my foot and part of the leg. Well, this was convincing enough and in the evening I walked the little over two miles to the Kirchweyhe brickyard to stay for the night with my parents.

On the following morning, the 15th of August, I walked the 3-4 miles to the hospital in Uelzen, the district town. My father came along on his bicycle, in case I needed some help. As common in those years, the patients waited in a large room for their turn to see the doctor or surgeon. The doctor took only one look at my foot and I was directed to the operating table. There was only a minimum of paper work to be done because very few people had valid health insurance. We saw a medical doctor only when there was a real emergency! Hospitals still operated under wartime conditions with severe shortages in skilled personnel and medical supplies. Many doctors and nurses had still not returned from the war.

As I was lying on the operating table, it took only a couple of minutes to prepare me for the procedure. The area where the incisions were to be made was cleaned with alcohol and a mask was placed over my face. As the nurse dripped some ether on the mask, I was ordered to inhale deeply and to count. Well, I kept counting and counting, while the nurse kept dripping more ether onto the mask. Ether was precious and the nurse did not want to waste any of it. Finally, the surgeon told the nurse to quit giving me more ether and I noticed that he started to make incisions. I then asked him whether I could stop counting and he agreed. After draining all the pus from the incisions, the nurse applied a bandage and told me to get up and sit in the waiting room for half of an hour. I did this, and finally the nurse allowed me to go home and to see a doctor a week later to have the healing process checked.

My father and I walked over to the highway leading to the village of Kirchweyhe. I was lucky and soon was able to hitch a ride all the way to the access road to the brickyard. My father

followed on his bicycle. When we reached the turn-off road to the brickyard, I climbed off the wagon and onto the bicycle for the last half-mile. My father walked the rest of the way.

The healing process of the incisions progressed rather slowly, even though the infection soon cleared up. The wounds formed what we then called *wild flesh*. No skin formed on the wounds, probably because of my long malnutrition. Finally, the doctor cauterized the areas. After his second try, the two incisions finally started to form skin, but very slowly.

I never returned to the Niebuhr farm in Emmendorf. It was already late in September when the wounds on my lower left leg were sufficiently healed to go back to work. I stayed with my parents during my convalescence. I tried to keep myself busy with picking mushrooms, whittling figures for a chess game and by doing unproductive work. I also made useful items from oilcloth. My father had "salvaged" entire bolts of this cloth from a former German army depot, along with fabric, leather and other things of value to us. Since I had nothing but what I had owned as a prisoner of war, I had a great need for anything useful. Therefore, I was extremely happy when a member of the Baptist church visited us one day and presented me with a toothbrush, probably a donation from a Baptist church in the United States of America.

The reason for this visit was to enter us in a registry of refugees to facilitate the reunification of families broken up in the waning days of the War. For this purpose, the Baptists and the Mennonites collaborated and their volunteers visited all places where any of their church members had found shelter. In our case, our name and address had been given to the Baptists by my Aunt Lore Penner, the wife of my mother's youngest brother Reinhold, who had been missing in action in Russia since 1942. The toothbrush was the only donation I ever received after the war. But it was a very welcome gift. We were able to buy in stores only items we had coupons for. Other items were only available through barter (on the gray market) or on the black market for excessive amounts of money, which we did not have.

During my weeks of recuperation, I noticed a severe deterioration in the relationship between my parents. The uncertainty of the future, diminishing funds, my father being idle and frustrated at home, living under very crowded conditions, lack of food, the loss of most of our property, and the dependence on other people, all contributed to stress and tension building between my parents. Heated arguments increased in frequency and deep despair gripped our mother. She often cried and lost her faith in God. She was unable to understand why God had allowed Germany and its people to be exposed to such great misery and "injustice". The expulsion of over 10 million German people from their homes, often owned by many generations of the same family, was incomprehensible to her! Today, these actions are called *ethnic cleansing* and are still taking place all over this world without serious interference from the main political powers. Ethnic cleansing has always been part of our history; but it is little understood by its victims! Sometimes, the victim of today is the perpetrator of tomorrow and vice versa.

This despair led our mother to quit her membership in the Lutheran Church. She also canceled the memberships of my younger siblings, Uwe and Astrid, without telling our father. Even when the first letter from my sister Reingard, who had survived the war in Greifswald, West Pomerania, arrived on September 6, 1945, this did not cheer up our mother. We celebrated her

43rd birthday on September 16th with our relatives from Rosche and Tante Lore in Peine without knowing that it would be her last birthday and without relieving her depression.

In meantime, my father was looking for a new job for me. I certainly added to the stress in our family, since I consumed valuable resources and added to the crowded condition in the two rooms occupied by our family. Although schools gradually opened up again, finishing high school was never considered for me. Whether I liked it or not, I was committed to spend the next years working on farms!

In late September, although the incisions above my left ankle had not completely healed, I went for an interview on the Hinrichs farm in the neighboring village of Westerweyhe, about 1.5 miles southwest of the Kirchweyhe brickyard. This farm had been a teaching farm for many years. It now had an opening for an apprentice in farm management. The owner, Willi Hinrichs, was still a prisoner of war in France. A former first lieutenant in the German Army, Ernst-Rudolf Schmidt, was now managing the farm. He was the "master" for us two male apprentices. Even though he did not waste much effort on teaching, he certainly made it a point to keep us busy for at least 6½ days every week. But I did learn a couple of good lessons from Mr. Schmidt, as we called him. The first was during my interview when he explained that dissatisfaction had split the people on the farm into two camps. On one side were the employees, mostly former landsers waiting to hear from their families somewhere in now Polish territory, and on the other was the Hinrichs family, consisting of the wife of Willi Hinrichs, Elizabeth, with her two small children and the old Hinrichs couple. The old Mr. Willi Hinrichs (79 years old) was the uncle of the present owner Willi Hinrichs and his wife was the aunt of Elizabeth Hinrichs. Mr. Schmidt advised me not to get involved in any of the squabbles and to always keep in mind, what is good for the farm is also in the best interest of everybody. This advice has always been good guidance and I have followed it wherever I worked. I never got involved in the internal politics of any farm or company! The other advice was not to waste my time. Whenever I had to go anywhere on the farm, I should think about taking something along that needs to be taken there or should be brought back from that location. This too, I have adhered to all my life and I still do it!

My apprenticeship in farm management started on Monday, October 1, 1945. The first year was extremely difficult, physically and mentally. I had to work like any other adult male. No allowance was made for my youth or for my very poor physical condition. I had no standards to measure my performance against, other than trying to do a good job, regardless of how long it took to do the work properly. One of my responsibilities was to care for about 70 hogs. Many of these were individually fed twice every day. This also included cleaning the hog pens and getting the potatoes ready for cooking, since boiled potatoes constituted the main rations for pigs. Grain was extremely scarce and was used only as supplemental feed. During my first winter on the Hinrichs farm, I also had to pick up food waste at the kitchen of the English soldiers stationed on the other side of the village. I considered it very degrading to pull a hand wagon through the village with garbage to be fed to the pigs. But with all the eggs, bacon, meat and other good food remnants in the garbage, I often felt that the pigs had better food to eat than we and the majority of the German population.

For the first three years after the end of the war, Germany suffered extreme food shortages. Farms were required to surrender everything they produced to government control and for

distribution by the private sector. Farm families were not allowed to retain more farm commodities for their own consumption than their official rations allowed. Livestock had to be weighed and recorded by an official before it could be butchered. Sixty eggs had to be delivered for every laying hen before the rest could be retained for own consumption. Since chickens did not have a feed allowance, overall egg production was very low. The caretaker of the dairy herd exactly measured our ration of 125 grams (about 4½ ounces) of whole milk. Of course, a lot of cheating went on, particularly on small family farms. But this was very difficult to do on the larger farms, like at Hinrichs, where employees controlled whatever the family could get from the farm. There was even a *pantry law* in Germany that made it illegal to have at any given time more than a certain amount of food in your pantry. If you had more food in your pantry than the law allowed for, it was assumed that you had obtained this food illegally and you could be punished. According to the letter of this law, the majority of German families were in violation most of the time. However, I never heard of anybody being prosecuted under this law. After all, if anybody would have started to inspect pantries without a good reason, it could have sparked a riot. The pantry law was primarily thought of as a tool to combat "black marketers." This is like in the U.S., where income tax evasion is used to jail those who are suspected of being involved in other "questionable activities" that are difficult to prove, especially in cases related to organized crime.

Farming practices during the War had depleted the soil of nutrients and humus. Erosion was a major problem in the fields. Fertilizer was rationed and too little of it was available to produce a "normal" crop. We used the principles of "organic farming" and planted legumes just to enrich the soil with nitrogen and organic matter. There were huge piles of potassium fertilizer about 50-60 miles south of us. But the military government would not release any of it to the farmers. The official policy appeared to be to starve the German people into submission and to reduce their standard of living to a level of subsistence, as the *Morgenthau Plan* had suggested.

The shortages affected everybody and every aspect of our lives. We wore our old uniforms until they had turned into rags. Then we patched the rags with other rags we somehow acquired. My own work clothes started to look like a political map. They consisted of patches of different colors, often several layers of patches on top of each other. For over two years, I had neither socks, nor shoes to wear at work. My father had given me a pair of fur-lined airman's zippered boots that I wore for special occasions. At work, I wore an old and torn pair of rubber boots. In place of socks, I wrapped my feet in rags made from the backing of oilcloth where the adhesive had stuck to the fabric. There was also one type of oilcloth, where the adhesive adhered to the plastic coating and not to the fabric. I had my "good" shirt made from this clean material. I still have a folder for writing material and a pocket folder I had made from this oilcloth. I also still have a leather briefcase that my father had made from the leather he had salvaged from the former German Army depot. We all quickly learned how to improvise!

During the summer, I wore a pair of wooden-sole slippers with leather uppers. I had carved the soles myself from birch wood and wore the slippers wherever and whenever possible. Most of the time, from spring to fall, I walked barefoot on the farm grounds and in the fields. After the grain was cut with a binder, we had to "shock" the sheaves. I can still remember how the hard and dry stubble of rye and rapeseed (canola) fields cut my ankles into a bloody mess.

Fortunately, my nutrition had improved sufficiently, that I no longer suffered from constant infections.

I somehow acquired a pair of canvas mittens that I wore in wintertime, when we worked in the forest. Since there was little chance to replace these mittens when they were worn out, I reserved them for only the times when I worked outside not holding a tool with a wooden handle in my hand. The wooden handles from a fork, shovel, or axe had to keep my hands "warm." We had no lotion and during the winter my hands were covered with deep cracks that never healed until the warm season arrived.

Personal hygiene barely existed. When we returned from the fields in the evening, we got ourselves warm water from the kitchen and washed our hands, upper body, and feet. Since our monthly ration of "Schwimmseife" (floating soap, a soap that contained a lot of air) was less than a small bar of soap one finds in hotels, using soap for washing ourselves was a luxury and reserved for "special occasions." Surprisingly, I never had a problem with pimples or acne! Since our clothing was as scarce as laundry soap and we were not able to change it on a regular schedule, our work clothes were rarely washed. I was also worried that my old uniform would disintegrate when it was submitted to a rigorous washing action. Our standard of living was definitely reduced to "subsistence" and it approached that of medieval times. We just lived from day to day and had little hope that these conditions would ever change for us.

During these years, it not only became a necessity to get maximum use out of everything we had, it also became almost a game for us to find out how little we really needed to get the desired results. Waste of any kind became a concept that many others and I abhorred! I never completely lost this desire to economize my resources, even during the best times of my life! This includes the use of utilities, which most people take for granted until the electric power is turned off or the water coming from the faucet turns into a trickle.

The weekly newspaper not only kept us informed of what was going on in the world, but it also furnished us paper! In the beginning, the newspaper consisted of only a single tabloid size sheet per week. It then doubled in size and soon it was published three times every week. After we had read the newspaper, we used it first to wrap our sandwiches in it for about a week. After that, we used what was left for toilet paper. There was no other paper available for either of these two functions. One newspaper was barely enough to fill the needs of everybody on the farm.

The Hinrichs farm had a long tradition as a teaching farm for young farmers and it had a good reputation long before the war. The farm owned about 240 acres of fields, meadows and forests. Like most farms in Germany at that time, it engaged in *intensive farming* where we grew a large variety of crops that were rotated in 3, 4, and 5 year cycles according to the type of soil found in the fields. The soil ranged from very poor (almost pure sand) to very good (sandy loam with sufficient organic matter dispersed in it). The fields with poor soil were planted with rye, potatoes and buckwheat or mixed grain for green fodder, or sometimes also with lupines (a legume used as feed or to enrich the soil with nitrogen). Fields with better soil were rotated with oats, wheat or barley, and with sugar or feed beets. These long rotation times prevented the infestation of the fields with pests, such as nematodes, and crop diseases. Most of our crops

were certified as seed stock. They needed to be checked for diseased specimen and for foreign plants and noxious weeds that could not easily be separated from the seed grain during the cleaning process.

Like practically all farms in Germany at that time, the Hinrichs farm had livestock. Although we had a 1938 model tractor, diesel fuel was rationed and difficult to get. We were able to obtain some additional fuel from English soldiers in exchange for potatoes they wanted for their German girl friends. Most fieldwork, however, was done with three teams of horses and a team of oxen. Every teamster took care of his own two horses. During the summer, the teamster started to feed the horses at 4 AM, brushed them, and at 6 AM the teams were harnessed and ready to move out into the fields. At 11:30 AM we had to be back from the field for the noon meal and to feed the horses. At 1 PM sharp, everybody moved out, again, and at 6 PM the 10-hour workday was over. In the morning and in the afternoon, we had a 15-minute break to rest the horses and eat a sandwich.

We also had a dairy herd of 20-25 milk cows, as well as heifers to replace the older and less productive cows. A husband and wife team took care of the herd. Paul Reick claimed to be one of the 13 individuals in Westerweyhe who had voted for the KPD (communist party of Germany). He was a true communist and made sure that the Hinrichs family and everybody eating at their table did not receive one extra ounce of milk. Paul Reick smoked a large pipe and his rotten teeth, at least the ones he still had, showed utter neglect. Paul grew his own tobacco and he smoked not only the leaves, but also the stalks, which I had to grind for him with our gristmill. But Paul and his fearless wife (I witnessed her saving Paul from being gored by our bull by going after the bull with her pitchfork), who showed just as much neglect, were hard workers! They milked the cows two or three times every day by hand and took care of the entire herd without outside help. All the cows and the bull were registered. An inspector kept track of the production of these cows and kept the records for the farm.

The cows were usually bedded on straw and confined by chains to their place in the barn. The manure was removed twice every day to an area where the heifers were running loose. Ever so often, we cleaned out this area and hauled the compacted manure to the fields, where it was spread by hand and plowed under. To load the manure by hand onto wagons was always hard work. Mechanized labor saving equipment and devices came gradually into use when the economic conditions in Germany improved after 1948. The manure kept the soil somewhat productive without the use of much fertilizer. Since we used no herbicides or pesticides, we essentially did *organic farming* long before it acquired the positive connotation it has today.

As mentioned earlier, I was delegated to take care of the hogs under the supervision of the older Mrs. Hinrichs. She had much patience with me and I did not mind working with her. Of course, most of this work had to be done in addition to my regular work.

I learned very quickly that the last thing I wanted was to be ill. It did not matter, how miserable one felt, the older Mr. and Mrs. Hinrichs came up with a quick cure: a cold wrap. They soaked a heavy towel in water as cold as they could find it and wrapped it around the sick person's abdomen. Then they followed up with a couple of dry towels to keep the bed dry. If this did not make you miserable enough to get up, total neglect finally would! The farmer's philosophy was,

if you are truly ill, you are not hungry. When you get hungry, you are well enough to eat the regular meals at the table. Since you are then back on your feet, you can also return to work!

Since we did intensive farming with a minimum of equipment and no automation, the farm employed a large staff. Besides Paul Reick, who took care of the dairy herd, we had a few "old-timers" on the farm. One of them drove the tractor and kept the machinery in shape. Then we had Rasche, who was close to retirement and was far past his prime years. There also was Andreas Wojdschenko, who was a former Cossack and had come to Germany during the First World War as a Russian prisoner of war. He refused to be repatriated and stayed in Germany. I never met a man who was better with horses, than Andreas! When he took the reins, he was in total control of the team! His wife came from the formerly east Polish Galicia (now Belarus) and was a hard worker in the fields.

We also had three landser. Helmut Hagedorn came from a small farm in East Pomerania and Paul Ruck had been working on a larger farm in the same area. The third one, Fritz, had worked on a large farm in East Prussia. A year later, we added Bruno, who had escaped captivity in then Czechoslovakia. Bruno still had an open bullet hole in his chest cavity with the bullet still lodged inside and constantly emitting pus. Bruno finally had surgery to correct his condition. There were also a couple of younger fellows from Upper Silesia and who had been members of a R.A.D. unit. They talked like they did not like the Polish. But when they heard from their folks at home, they turned Polish overnight and even remembered enough Polish words to support their claim that they really had always been Polish nationals. Conditions in Poland looked so much more promising than they did in Germany at that time, that these two fellows were soon gone.

We also employed three women full time and about five more on a part-time basis. The law required that every able-bodied person had to work, when requested, in order to receive coupons for their food rations. We, therefore, always had a large pool of women to draw from during the harvest and at threshing time; but many of these women came from urban areas and never had done hard physical work. Some were unable to keep up with the rest of the gang. There were also some men in the village who worked for us whenever we needed extra help.

The pay for agricultural labor was minimal, even for those times. Day labor, women and men who were paid by the hour, received about 70-80 pennies per hour of work. The landser received a monthly salary of 50-80 marks plus food and shelter.

The married workers who worked every day on the farm were called *Deputanten*. Paul Reick, the tractor driver, Andreas, and Rasche belonged to this group and received a part of their wages in the form of a *deputat* (housing and farm products). While Paul Reick received a flat salary, the other deputanten were paid 50 pennies per hour. Their deputat consisted of free housing, 50 kg potatoes per month, 50 kg feed grain per month, and the use of some land they could farm for their own benefit on Sundays or in the evenings. Horses, however, were available to them only on Sundays, since these animals needed their much-needed rest in the evenings. The hourly pay increased slightly with the passing of years, but the size of the deputat did not change much.

There was another apprentice besides me. Hermann Schulz was a couple of years older and was the son of the farm manager prior to Mr. Schmidt. Hermann was much more experienced and was not subjected to as much abuse as I was. We both shared a room in the Hinrichs residence. The three landser shared a large room right next to our room. Their room had been the original dining room, while ours had been Mr. Hinrichs' study. Besides food and shelter, I received a monthly allowance of 20 marks. To put this into the proper perspective, there was very little we could buy with this money. The shelves in stores were empty and the black market was expensive. For example, to buy a regular 1500 gram loaf of rye bread on the black market, one had to pay about 250 marks in those years, equivalent to all my allowances I received during my first year apprenticeship. My allowance was increased to 30 marks per month in the second year and to 40 marks in the third year.

The younger Mrs. Elizabeth Hinrichs, a mother of two, managed the household. She was certified to train female apprentices in home economics. These girls did all the housework and the cooking. They were nice girls and most of them came from other farms. We male apprentices usually had a nice relationship with these girls, but strictly on a platonic level. We were comrades, who shared good and bad times on the farm.

My first year apprenticeship in farm management was a very difficult year for me. It took all the determination I could muster to overcome all the obstacles I faced during the first months. Everything was new to me and I definitely was slow in my work. On November 8th, less than six weeks into my apprenticeship, the elder Mrs. Hinrichs told me that Mr. Schmidt was very dissatisfied with my performance and if I did not improve quickly, he would terminate my apprenticeship. Since I did not want to fail in my attempt to start a professional career in agriculture, I was happy to be given another chance. One of the conditions was that I would take care of all the pigs and related work before and after regular working hours.

The real "test" came a few weeks later. Paul Reick wanted to take a Sunday off. His contract allowed him one free Sunday every month. But during most of the year, Paul preferred to be paid in lieu of these days off. This was very acceptable to everybody. During this month, Paul and his wife decided to take a day off. Arrangements were made for several women to come in to milk the cows. It was my job to do everything else in addition to taking care of the pigs. Except for the women, I had no help! I started before 4 AM, before the women arrived for milking. I cleaned the stalls and fed the cows. I had a very difficult time pushing the heavy wheelbarrows with the manure on the slippery one-foot wide wooden planks to the manure pile. The washing of milk cans, feeding calves, and other work, including taking care of the pigs, kept me busy all day. In the afternoon, I started all over again, until it was late in the evening. I had only taken out a few minutes to eat my meals. It was one of the few days in my life I will never forget! It was certainly a test of my perseverance! But there was no way for me to give up. There was no place else I could go to and I could not tell my parents that I failed in my attempt to start a career. But in retrospect and considering that Paul Reick never again took another Sunday off while he worked on that farm, I now realize that this weekend was most likely "engineered" by Mr. Schmidt to make me quit and leave the farm without him having to dismiss me. However, the thought of quitting never occurred to me!

At the end of November, my sister Reingard finally succeeded to cross the demarcation line between the Russian and British occupied zones. This demarcation line was marked and patrolled by Russian and English soldiers, but it was not fortified until years later. Before Reingard could find a job in her profession as *Kindergärtnerin* (teacher for preschool children), our mother took ill with diphtheria, just a few days before Christmas. Because diphtheria is a very contagious disease caused by a bacterium, our mother was placed under quarantine in an auxiliary hospital, a former school in Holxen, about 6 miles southwest of Uelzen. We all were glad that Reingard could take over for our mother; but little did we know then, that she had to do this for two years.

We "celebrated" Christmas as well as we were able to and without our mother. There were no gifts and very little food; but we were grateful for being alive! We still had not heard from our brother Jürgen and did not know whether he had survived the war. The last time we had heard from him was 10 months earlier.

Although we were under British occupation, the Russians controlled much of our life, and they let us know this! The generating station for our electricity was in their "zone" (occupied territory) and before noon on Christmas Eve, the Russians pulled the switch and left us in darkness and without power for almost three days. Since we also depended on electric water pumps to keep us supplied with this valuable resource, we had to manually pump all the water for the livestock on the farm. Candles were a scarce commodity, too, and consequently, most of us spent the evenings of this holiday in total darkness. Fuel for lanterns was in as short a supply as were the lanterns themselves. I still shudder when I remember getting hay and straw from the hayloft with open candles and lanterns giving us the light! Well, we were very careful and lucky that we did not burn down the farm buildings.

Our mother made good progress recovering from diphtheria. She was scheduled to be released from the auxiliary hospital in Holxen on Saturday, January 12, 1946. I was looking forward to see her on Sunday afternoon, when Elizabeth Hinrichs (the younger Mrs. Hinrichs) told me during the morning of a telephone call from my father. He asked me to come home to see my family. There were no further details; but I expected the worst. When I saw Reingard in Kirchweyhe, she told me what had happened. Our mother had developed thrombosis in her varicose leg with ensuing embolism. The blood clot had passed through the heart, but had gotten stuck in the lung and caused a lung stroke. The blood clot had stopped the flow of blood through her lungs. Since the quarantine unit of the hospital was neither staffed, nor equipped to handle such emergencies, there was little the doctor on duty could do for her.

Our father learned of this new development when he called the hospital on Friday afternoon to find out the time on Saturday that he could pick up our mother to take her home. Without knowing how critically ill our mother was, he and Reingard got a ride to Holxen late in the evening by our family doctor, Dr. Kretschmer. While Reingard returned home with Dr. Kretschmer, our father remained in Holxen, despite the reassurances by the doctors that our mother’s life was not in danger. Shortly after midnight, the local doctor notified our father that our mother had passed on.

My father's first choice for a cemetery was in Uelzen. However, since my parents were no longer members of the evangelical church and since the cemetery in Uelzen was administered by the evangelical church, my mother's burial was not permitted there. The cemetery in Kirchweyhe finally and reluctantly gave permission for my mother's burial on its grounds. The doctor in Holxen arranged for a coffin from a cabinetmaker in a neighboring village. It was a mere box made from pine boards; but it served its purpose.

On Tuesday, January 15th, Reingard and I rode on a trailer hitched to Hinrich's tractor to Holxen to pick up our mother's body for burial on the following day. On the way to Holxen, we stopped in Holdenstedt to pick up the casket. In Holxen, we found our mother lying on the ground in a utility shed behind the former school. Fortunately, it was January and cold outside. Reingard and I placed our mother into the box and closed the lid. Since we did not have a permit to transport a body, we covered the coffin with a tarpaulin to keep it from being noticed. The tractor then took us back to the Kirchweyhe brickyard.

The burial was in the early afternoon of the following day. I was surprised by the presence of so many people from Kirchweyhe, Emmendorf, and Westerweyhe. Some of them I didn't know. Despite my sorrow, I found it amusing to hear so many nice things about our mother from people, I knew, who had never met her. This, somehow, let me doubt the sincerity of the people around us.

Our distant relative, Dr. Hans Doerry from the Rosche branch of our family, gave a very nice and fitting eulogy for our mother. After the graveside services, all family members, relatives, and close friends gathered for a cup of coffee and a piece of yeast-raised cake topped with butter and sugar, and discussed the challenges we all faced.

A few weeks later, the younger Mrs. Hinrichs stopped me when I went to get some warm water from the kitchen. She told me that Mr. Schmidt had complained, again, that I was always too sad and showed no interest in my job. I admitted this and blamed this on my inexperience and on not having completely adjusted to the hard physical work I had to do every day. I lacked motivation and was reactive, rather than proactive. Moreover, I blamed Mr. Schmidt for failing to give me the necessary guidance I needed as an apprentice. Mrs. Hinrichs understood and indicated that she agreed with me. She also suggested that I become more active, or she would have to tell my father about my poor performance. Mrs. Hinrichs gave me some self-assurance and hope for the future. But I was also willing to do everything in my power not to add to my father's worries! On the following Sunday I visited my mother's grave and there I aired my grief by openly crying. I knew that my mother would understand my difficulties!

I repeated the pilgrimage to my mother's grave about 6 weeks later when I was blamed for not getting enough acreage seeded with the drill machine. Except for steering the machine and helping with refilling its hopper, I really had no control over how fast we moved. The teamster controlled the speed and how fast the horses walked. But I was held responsible for everything I was involved with! I was an easy target for Mr. Schmidt and he grew accustomed to blaming me for everything. He held me responsible for what everybody did on the farm, without giving me any authority. In fact, he told the other workers, that they should not listen to what I said! This complicated my life even more. Since I lacked experience, I had little choice but to accept any

blame, no matter what is was for and who was at fault. I also slowly realized that I was not able to please Mr. Schmidt, no matter how hard I tried! I decided to ignore his constant criticism. A framed saying hanging next to my bed became my motto: "I wished I was an elephant, how jubilant I would be. It wouldn't be for the ivory, but for his thick skin."

It was about at this time that we finally heard from my brother Jürgen. He was in a prisoner of war camp in England and waited for his release because of a disability. Since he did not know the whereabouts of our family and he was allowed to write only to his immediate family, Jürgen had written to our Uncle Gerhard Doerry (our father's brother) in Krefeld, as if he was his brother.

Slowly things began to improve for me. The older Mrs. Hinrichs took over the responsibility for the pigs. I started to express my feelings about things and in my decisions I was guided only by Mr. Schmidt's first advice given to me: What is good for the farm, is good for everybody! I started to exert authority and to take charge whenever necessary. I decided that to gain respect, I had to do more and better than everybody else did! Not everybody appreciated this and I must admit that there were times when I was too demanding of everybody and did not treat everybody fairly. But "the pendulum had swung to the other side!"

On April 1, 1946, Hermann Schulz left and was replaced with two new apprentices. Fritz Meyer was the son-in-law of Mr. Pistor, who leased the large monastery owned (Klostergut) farm estate in Wulfsrode. Fritz had been a lieutenant and commanded a mini-submarine in the German Navy. He worked at Hinrichs only to gain outside experience before joining his father-in-law in managing the large estate. He did not depend on completing his apprenticeship and did not care about what others thought about him. The other apprentice was Dieter Roick. Dieter originally came from a large estate in Latvia or Estonia. But his family had lost all its possessions and Dieter, like I, was trying to build a career for himself. He was more reserved than Fritz and I got along fine with him.

One late afternoon in the middle of May, when we were finishing up drilling (planting) sugar beets, Mr. Schmidt told me to go home and eat. When I was finished, I was to be a "fire guard" in a grove of large pine trees right next to a cultivated stand of 12-15 year old trees. He told me to be back at midnight. Since we still had a curfew, he told me to pick up a permit at the village mayor's office. This would keep me from being arrested in case I ran into a patrol of English soldiers. A Mr. Roeper, a retired person, who occasionally helped out at our farm, would join me. The location of the fire was about 3 miles from the farm and on the other side of the village. When I arrived there, I noticed that it was not an "open" fire. The fire smoldered below the surface. It burned dry surface roots below a layer of moss. The wind came from the stand of young trees and as long as we did not walk on the smoldering fire and stirred up sparks, everything was fine.

Shortly before midnight and just about when I wanted to go back to the farm, the wind became stronger and shifted into the direction of the young trees with all their dry branches. It became critical and there was no way for me to leave Mr. Roeper by himself. We were very busy putting out sparks that started small fires among the young trees. Finally, at about 5 AM I left for home and went to bed to get some rest. A few minutes later, Mr. Schmidt came into my room and told

me that the team was leaving for drilling more sugar beet seeds and it was waiting for me in the field. Well, this gave me little choice! I got up, gulped down some breakfast, and hurried to the field for another day's work.

Again, shortly before we finished up our work for the day, Mr. Schmidt told me, since I still had the permit for the previous night to be on the street during curfew hours, I should guard the fire, again. But I was to make sure, that I was back at midnight! I had learned my lesson and nothing could keep me at the fire after midnight! Fortunately, the air was calm and no sparks were flying. But I was so tired that I could not have cared if the entire forest had burned down. On the following day, the last traces of the smoldering fire were extinguished.

The "winds of change" were noticeable even in small villages, like Westerweyhe. Every farm was crowded with refugees and more room was needed for families who wanted to reunite. There was a constant stream of "expellees" coming from the formerly German areas, which were now annexed by Poland. The expellees were victims of what we now call *ethnic cleansing* and in West Germany they were considered to be refugees. Our "landser" on the farm, too, were waiting for their families to be expelled from their homes.

Everywhere, refugees united and demanded more rights and more space for their families. In our local paper appeared an article, which accused farmers of holding back good living space by moving their help into these rooms. The Hinrichs farm was implicated by innuendo. Suggestions were made that some of the workers, who presently occupied this space, could be moved to other areas on the farm, such as grain storage areas and other convertible utility rooms. Somehow, this article offended others and me at Hinrichs. Apparently, those who worked on farms were not considered to be "equal" to other refugees. The local refugee association called for a village meeting to discuss potential actions. Although I had never before attended any of these meetings, I was determined to go to this one. I also asked the other refugees working at Hinrichs to join me. In case it should end up in a brawl, I decided to wear my wooden slippers. They could easily be used as a club.

The meeting was on a Thursday evening and I attended it with my wooden slippers and with three other refugee workers from the Hinrichs farm. When the subject moved to forcing farmers to vacate rooms for more refugees, I asked for a chance to state my opinion. I introduced myself as a refugee working on one of the farms and who was occupying space that the association wanted to have vacated. I asked them why we refugees, who worked on the farm, should not have the same right to live in these rooms as other refugees. This created quite an uproar in the hall. The organizers finally asked us to leave, which we did. There was no more talk about us moving out of the main house to make room for others!

My position at Hinrichs continued to improve during the summer. As time went on, I took on additional responsibilities. I had the only alarm clock in the house and was responsible for waking up everybody on time, starting at 4 AM with the landser, who had to take care of their teams of horses. I then doled out the day's ration of oats for each team (which was never enough!). I also prepared the mixed grain feed for the milk cows. Next I had to wake up the girls, so that they could prepare our breakfast. After I had eaten my breakfast, I loaded the farm implements onto the wagons and checked all the equipment needed by the teams in the fields.

During the noon break I had to do the same. At 6 AM and 1 PM sharp, everybody received his or her assignment and within less than 10 minutes, everybody had left or was busy. In wintertime, we worked only 8 hours and started at 8 AM in the morning, when it turned light outside.

Although the farm operated on a very strict time schedule, most of us had no watch. But it was rare that we missed by more than a few minutes being back at the farm for the noon meal or at quitting time in the evening. We learned to take our signals from the sun, from traffic patterns, and from trains that we heard in the distance. Except for the horses that needed to be fed, we received no compensation for any extra time we spent in the fields because we missed our "signals." When we erred, we rather wanted to be late returning to the farm, than early.

One day I had somehow forgotten to load onto a wagon the 10-foot beam to which the various harrow sections were to be attached. The teamster did not notice this until he reached the field over two miles away from the farm. Mr. Schmidt made me run back to the farm and carry that heavy beam with all the chains for attaching the harrow sections. Well, I never forgot anything like this, again! It definitely was my fault and I learned a good lesson from it.

In the evenings, I made the entries in the farm diary. I had to record what was done during the day. I kept track of how much was harvested and what was purchased or sold. I also provided the accountants with information about inventory, transactions, and the *deputat* dispensed to the workers. At about 9 PM, I doled out to each team its ration of straw and hay. Later on, I also did the monthly payroll. All this kept me very busy, but I learned a lot and I liked to do the paper work, even though I did this all after working in the fields all day.

Mrs. Schmidt was pregnant and gave birth to a daughter during the summer. Mr. Schmidt wanted a son and was so infuriated about his wife presenting him a daughter, that he told her he rather would have had a bull calf! On our farms, bull calves were considered totally useless animals, unless the farm raised certified bulls. Bull calves were usually sold for slaughter, while female calves were registered and raised for milking. As a result of this insensitive statement by Mr. Schmidt, his wife ended up with a severe depression and required a long stay in a hospital.

Potato harvest in Germany was usually in late September and early October and in time for preparing the land for seeding winter rye, the next crop in most rotation cycles. We waited until the foliage of the potato plants had completely dried and had released the potatoes from it. In good years, each plant had up to 20 medium sized to large tubers. But our yields in the first post-war years were much lower – we had fewer potatoes per plant and the tubers were mostly small to medium sized. On the smaller farms, the harvesting equipment consisted of a horse-drawn machine that plowed up one row at a time and flung the potatoes together with foliage and some dirt against a screen, which deposited everything into a row. While some potatoes were buried, most of them were exposed and could be picked up by women. The women gathered the potatoes into wire or wicker baskets, which they then emptied either into jute bags or loose into a box wagon with steel-rimmed wheels.

Larger farms used special machines connected to a tractor with a "power-take-off" for operating and pulling. This machine allowed us to plow up as many rows of potatoes as we wanted. We

then used up to twenty women, one for each row, to pick up the exposed tubers. The women moved abreast and mostly on their knees, while two or three men replaced their full baskets with empty ones and dumped the potatoes into wagons pulled by horses behind the line of women.

After the potato fields were harvested, teams of horses pulling heavy harrows with long tines that uncovered the potatoes hidden from our women beneath dirt and dry foliage. Several women would subsequently go over the field again to pick up the newly exposed potatoes.

In the meantime, the food shortage in the occupied zones of Germany grew severely and people from towns and cities came to the fields to dig for potatoes that had been missed by our women. We allowed them to do this, once we were finished with the field. Until then, we asked them to stay off the field.

One of our potato fields was located next to the road leading through the city forest to Uelzen. We had just finished harvesting the crop, but had not yet gone over the field for the second time. It did not take long, and the first people started to dig for leftover potatoes with hoes. As others saw this activity, they, too, started to dig for potatoes. When Mr. Schmidt saw this, he told me to talk to these people and to tell them that they had to wait until we were done. They took notice of this and left peacefully. The only exception was one young woman, who hastily worked with her hoe in a more isolated area of the large field to fill her bag with potatoes. When I approached her and told her that she had to get off the field, because we had not yet finished our work, she straightened up and looked at me with a very determined expression. While she pointed at her little child next to her, she only told me that she would not leave the field without her bag filled with potatoes. Her child and she were starving and if I tried to force her off the field, she would hit me over the head with her hoe. I will never forget the mixture of despair and determination in her facial expression! I just asked her to move a little farther into a depression of the field, where she could not be seen from the road. She did this and I felt good about this solution. I also still remember other women walking on this road to the train station about 3 miles away with 50-70 pounds of potatoes on their back and small children on their side. The only other time I have seen similar burdens carried by women was in Kenya during the 1980s.

On Friday, October 11, 1946, I took the exam for apprentices in farm work. It was a required exam for everybody seeking a career in farm management. I was totally unprepared and had never received any instructions in milking cows, mowing with a scythe and most other basic farm work. Much of what we were tested on was obsolete and no longer done. But I did manage to pass the exam satisfactorily.

On the following afternoon, Dieter Roick and I were working in a field drilling winter rye when Mr. Schmidt stopped by to give us the news that we all had been fired by the Hinrichs family. While Fritz Meyer had to leave immediately, Dieter, Mr. Schmidt, and I were advised to look for another job. I was surprised and had no idea what had led to this decision. But I did find out. On the evening before, Fritz Meyer and Mrs. Schmidt had a loud conversation during which they criticized the food and badmouthed the Hinrichs family. Dieter and, perhaps, one of the girls were present, but did not participate in the discussion. The elder Mrs. Hinrichs overheard enough of the conversation to know what Fritz and Mrs. Schmidt had talked about. By mere association with the guilty parties, I had become part of the plot!

There was little we could do right then. Dieter and I finished our work and avoided eye contact with the Hinrichs family during the evening meal. But I did notice signs that the younger Mrs. Hinrichs already regretted having given me notice to leave. Instead of spending the evening in the living room, like we usually did, we spent the remaining evening hours outside or in our bedroom. On the following morning, a Sunday, Dieter Roick and I went for breakfast earlier than usually to avoid eating with the younger Mrs. Hinrichs. But soon after we had started to eat, Mrs. Hinrichs sat down at her place across from us and started the conversation. I told her frankly that I knew nothing about what had happened on Friday evening. After a very open discussion between Mrs. Hinrichs and us, she rescinded her notice given to us and gave us the option to remain as long on the farm as we wanted to stay.

Although the issue had been resolved for Dieter Roick and me, there was no unity among the employees. Some sided with Mr. Schmidt and others supported the Hinrichs family or were neutral. I myself lived by my motto: Do what is best for the farm and don't take sides!

A little earlier that year I had applied for admission to the 2-semester School of Agriculture in Ebstorf. This was considered to be one of the best agricultural schools in West Germany. The classes had only limited capacity and I soon received a rejection from the school. However, at the end of November and two days after classes had started in Ebstorf, I received a message from the school that if I was still interested in attending, I should report there immediately. I followed this invitation and three days later, on December 1st, I moved into the crowded quarters of my family in the Bulig villa. Earlier that year, my brother Jürgen had been released as prisoner of war and had joined my father and three of our siblings in Kirchweyhe. He was waiting to be admitted to the Hamburg University.

The winter of 1946/47 was the longest and coldest winter I experienced in West Germany. It also brought us a lot of snow. The weather kept the farmers out of their fields until late March or even later. It was 11 kilometers (7 miles) from the Kirchweyhe brickyard to the school in Ebstorf. During the first weeks, I was able to borrow my father's bicycle. But then he needed it himself. I then borrowed parts for a bicycle from friends. With my brother Jürgen's help, I assembled these parts into a "basic bicycle" that consisted of nothing more than a frame with two wheels and pedals. The tires were tied with twine to the rims to keep the tubes inside of them. During the three months I used this contraption for transportation, it was a rare occasion when I was able to ride it all the way to and from Ebstorf. There was only one time during this time, when I did not need to fix the "bicycle" in the evening for the next day. There were, however, many days when it was in such a bad shape, that I had to carry it for long stretches. On other days, I just left it in Kirchweyhe and walked all the way. There was no other way for me to commute to Ebstorf! I was desperate and all kinds of "bad thoughts" went through my mind; but fortunately, I never converted any of these thoughts to deeds!

The living conditions in Kirchweyhe were far from being "ideal." My sister Reingard tried hard to take our mother's place. My father was still trying to establish a new career in selling insurance policies. He was frustrated and Reingard suffered for it. Uwe and Astrid had returned to school and Jürgen was waiting for the opportunity to be admitted to the University of Hamburg. One of his major problems was getting permission to move to Hamburg and find a

room there to live in. Hamburg had suffered major damage from air raids during the war. Jürgen's field of interest had shifted from chemistry in high school to law and justice. He and our father slept in twin beds placed next to each other. I moved in with them and slept between them at the juncture of the two beds ("Besuchsritze") between them.

The year of 1947 was probably the lowest point in Germany's recent history. The stores were empty and official food rations for "normal" consumers reached a low of about 950 calories per day. All "reserves" stashed away at the end of the war had either been consumed or had been used to barter for other "necessities." I was literally dressed in rags. The conditions turned many honorable persons into thieves and caused them to do things they had never thought to be capable of. It was a very difficult time for the German people! We were always hungry and hordes of people came from Hamburg and other cities to trade their last treasures and heirlooms for potatoes, some eggs, or even a piece of meat. Germany was in a state of general starvation. We, however, were lucky. For Christmas, Mrs. Hinrichs gave me some eggs and I also was able to get potatoes from the farm. It was enough for us to "survive." Jürgen and I even stopped talking about stealing some turnips from a local farmer.

In the evening of January 27, 1947, Jürgen was asked to go down to the village to pick up our father at the local bar (Gasthaus). This was not a likely place for our father to be and we were wondering about the reason for this call. Shortly after midnight, I heard a loud commotion as my brother dragged our inebriated father up to our room. As my brother removed my father's overcoat, field peas fell out of the pockets and scattered all over the bed and the room. It took weeks before they all had been recovered.

My father could never tolerate much alcohol, especially not during our years of starvation. When he attempted to sell life insurance to a couple of local farmers he met at the "Gasthaus", they invited him to join them. There was little alcohol to be had legally, but the farmers all had their supply of schnaps made from sugar beets. These two farmers soon noticed that our father could not tolerate much alcohol and talked him into drinking more and more by offering a handful of field peas for every glass of schnaps our father emptied. Field peas are edible and make good soup. Our father could not pass up this opportunity until he passed out. That is when my brother received the telephone call to pick up our father at the village. He practically had to carry him most of the way (over one mile) and was not too happy because of it.

In Ebstorf, I was one of the youngest in the class. Almost all of my classmates had been in the war and many had been wounded at least once. Some came from their family's farm, while others, like me, were trying to start a career. I was one of the best students without being challenged too much. This made me lazy and I studied very little at home. But I was glad when the semester came to an end and I could return to work.

Since my way to Ebstorf was past the Hinrichs farm, I occasionally stopped in there to talk to Mr. Schmidt and to Mrs. Hinrichs. I soon heard that Mr. Schmidt was leaving on February 28, 1947 to manage another farm in Velgen. He offered Dieter and me to go along with him. Mrs. Hinrichs wanted me to stay and help her new manager, Erich Kruse from Altenmedingen, with getting the farm back under control. I was quite pleased by both offers and felt good about the change in my status as an apprentice. I decided to stay in Westerweyhe and moved back there on

Saturday, March 29, 1947. Dieter Roick followed Mr. Schmidt and, as I heard later, was not very happy with this decision.

The official day for me to start in Westerweyhe was April 1st, even though I still had to attend a few more days of classes. When I moved my belongings to Westerweyhe, my sister Reingard asked me to take along one of the cooking pots to have it fixed by the local tinsmith. The pot had a hole and there was no way for her to replace it with a new one. After supper, I walked over to the shop and noticed that the light was on. I also heard voices. After repeated knocking, the shop owner opened the door and invited me to enter. I immediately noticed that the owner and his visitor, the son of the village mayor, had been drinking homemade schnaps. I wanted to leave the shop as quickly as possible, but the shop owner offered me a glass of his distilled brew. In order not to offend him, I accepted. As soon as I had emptied the glass, it was refilled and I was told that I needed to "catch up" with the others. It did not take long, before I felt that I started to lose my "balance system". This was noticed and I could excuse myself and walked back to the farm, where I sat down on the sofa to regain control over myself. A few minutes later, the younger Mrs. Hinrichs came in to ask me a few questions about the payroll. She soon noticed my condition and told me that she would see me the following day.

My new boss, Erich Kruse, was single and easy-going. I got along real well with him and we complemented each other. The Hinrichs family, however, did not give him as much free rein as Schmidt had enjoyed. I liked my work and dedicated myself to the farm. Although 1947 was in many ways a difficult year, it also provided me with many happy memories. I no longer was kept busy on Sunday mornings with unproductive "busy work" and my relationship to the other workers improved considerably to where they started to show me respect. Klaus von Estorf replaced Dieter Roick. His parents owned a large agricultural estate in Veerssen, on the south side of Uelzen.

Mrs. Hinrichs also took in three new female apprentices and hired a refugee girl to help with her two children, Peter (five years old) and Vera (three years old). We established a nice comradeship with these girls and shared with them many enjoyable hours. But both Mrs. Hinrichs kept a close eye on us to make sure that we did not develop any serious relationships with the girls. The oldest of them was Hanna Behr from Hoopte, near Winsen on the Luhe River, south of Hamburg. Another girl was Elizabeth Hahn, daughter of the owner of the "Gasthaus" in Pieperhöfen, east of Uelzen.

Most villages in Germany have a "Gasthaus." It serves as the official and social meeting place for the community. It usually has a bar and many serve food on request. Most of these places also have a large hall for dancing and town meetings, but only few offer sleeping facilities for travelers which could qualify them to be an inn. The owner of a gasthaus is the "Gastwirt". Many of the Gastwirte used to derive much, or even most of their income from operating a small farm or another business.

The food supply for the German people reached its low point in 1947. The city people had depleted their supply of valuables they could use to barter for food. Organized gangs appeared. They raided farms for their supplies of meat and preserved food. The gang members sold the stolen food items on the black market in the larger cities like Hamburg and Hannover. Chicken,

ducks, and geese were preferred prizes for these gangs. They also raided our supplies of seed potatoes we had prepared for planting. As soon as it turned dark in the evening, one could spot small groups of people walking around, scouting for opportunities to steal something. We even heard of cases south of Hannover and Braunschweig, where occupants of large D.P. camps (camps for *displaced persons* from countries occupied by the Russians and who did not want to return there after the war. Most occupants in these camps were waiting to be processed for emigration to the U.S., Canada, and other countries) raided entire German villages, killing livestock and leaving the farmers' pantries empty. The unarmed German police had no jurisdiction over these D.P. camps and the British Army avoided any confrontation with the armed gangs in these camps. The initials D.P. became for us synonymous with uncontrolled and lawless behavior!

Farmers customarily stored potatoes and beets outside in long rows. The potatoes or beets were dumped into shallow trenches and the rows peaked about 3-4 feet above the ground. After cooling off during the chilly nights in the fall, these rows were covered with a thick layer of straw and dirt to keep them dry and at a temperature of about 40-50°F. If everything had been done properly, potatoes would keep well into the spring. The beets were usually fed to cows during the winter. In early spring, we would uncover the potatoes and clean and sort them right on location. In cold or bad weather, we would move the potatoes into the large granary. These rows of potatoes in the fields soon became targets of roving gangs, especially at the end of the week, when we often lost several hundred pounds of valuable seed potatoes. We soon decided to guard these potatoes during the critical hours of the night.

On one Friday evening, Erich Kruse, our new manager, assigned Bruno, our new landser, and me to the first 2-hour shift. Since it was already turning dark, I told Bruno, who was already in bed, that I was going ahead. I wanted to scout around and make sure that everything was in good order. Our potatoes were stored behind our large granary about 150 yards from the farm and near the cobblestone road to Kirchweyhe. As I walked around the granary and towards the row of stored potatoes with the sorting machine next to it, I noticed that some of the straw had been moved. As I approached the area, I looked up and noticed three men jump up. I was totally taken by surprise and was only able to scream, turn around and run as fast as I could. When I reached the granary, I looked back and saw the fellows run off in the other direction. I don't know who was more surprised and scared, they or I. After getting Bruno, we checked out everything and found some empty bags left behind by these men. They did not return to retrieve the bags.

After we had moved all the potatoes into our large granary, we would discover a significant amount of them missing on some mornings. There was no evidence that somebody had broken in. The heavy padlocks were in good shape and no boards were loose or missing. Again, one Friday evening, Erich Kruse, Klaus and I decided to investigate. The back doors could only be opened from the inside. Thus, we were able to lock ourselves into the granary. We did not need to wait very long after it had turned dark outside, when we heard voices outside one of the large front doors of the granary. Then one of the large sliding doors was pushed open to allow a man to enter. We only had 20-inch long sticks with a diameter of about 1.5 inches for our defense. We used them to load bags with potatoes and grain onto wagons. Erich Kruse took his stick and threw it at the opening in the door. With a big yell, we three then ran after the scattering men

outside. All but one got away. But one unfortunate fellow made the mistake of jumping over the meshed wire fence of Mrs. Hinrichs' vegetable garden, where he stumbled and lost valuable time. When he jumped back out of the garden, we caught up with him and dragged him back to the farm for "interrogation." Somehow, the word had gotten out and soon people from other farms arrived. The culprit had not only fake identification cards in his possession, but also fake ration cards, indicating that he was dealing on the black market in a big way. There was no sense in turning him over to the local police, since the jails were already filled and the police would just let the fellow go. Again, I witnessed the brutality of a frustrated mob! The offender was finally pushed and locked into a shed, where we stored our farm tools and implements. When we turned him loose on the following morning, he threatened us with a lawsuit for inflicting bodily harm on him. We just laughed as he limped away. We never heard from him again and there were no further break-ins into the granary. We changed the locks and never found out who had opened the door that evening, even though we suspected a person we employed on a part-time basis.

The chicken house of the Hinrichs farm was in the large park-like garden behind the house. A high stone wall surrounded this garden. We had already lost the geese to a very bold and efficient thief. This led us to install a crude alarm system consisting of two sets of crisscrossing wires inside of the large windows. The doors were wired, too. When the wires were pushed together or the doors were opened, a bell would ring at the house. After it had turned dark and the girls had locked up everything, they turned on the alarm system. When the alarm went off, the girls generally called Klaus or me to check out the wires. Quite often, a chicken had come too close to the wires and caused them to make contact.

In May was the birthday of the younger Mrs. Hinrichs' father, Mr. Hillmer, a retired teacher. He quite often came to visit his grandchildren to bring them wooden toys he had built for them. He also raised bees for honey and made wine from berries and locally grown fruits. This year, the Hinrichs family held a big party for Mr. Hillmer in the afternoon. In the evening, the girls, Erich Kruse, Klaus and I were given some of the leftover wine, so that we could have our own party. The berry wine was sweet and very "smooth." We consumed quite a bit of it without noticing that this homemade wine was very potent. Then the chicken house alarm went off and the girls asked me to check it out. I agreed under the condition that one of the girls would hold the lantern for me. But when I got outside into the cool and fresh air, the effect of the alcohol hit me. I was barely able to walk. The girl was not in a much better condition. It was only a minor problem with the alarm system, which was quickly fixed. Then we "debated" who was more incapacitated by the alcohol, she or I. While one held the lantern, the other walked the "straight line" along the floorboards. Well, we both did an equally poor job staying on the crack between the boards. When I got back to the house, I went straight to bed and felt like I was in a small boat in the middle of an ocean. I definitely was drunk!

The following morning I had a terrible hangover and I felt nauseated. I was unable to eat anything. People living in the housing for the farm workers later asked me what the girl and I had been doing during the previous evening when we walked back and forth in the chicken house. They had watched us when we tried to walk the "straight line" right behind the large window. It was potato planting time and somebody had to guard the trailer with the seed potatoes during the noon break. Since I still had no appetite, I volunteered to stay in the field. I

spread myself out over the potatoes and had a good nap. It took me over four years, before I was able to "tolerate" drinking another glass of red or berry wine.

As depressing as the conditions were in 1947 Germany, we also found many occasions to experience "the lighter side" of life. We had a tremendous desire for any kind of pleasure. There were "balls" in the winter and barn dances in the summer, before the large granaries were needed to store the new crop. We never passed up any of these Saturday or Sunday night dances. They often lasted until the early morning hours. Since there was no public transportation, it was not uncommon for us to walk 3-7 miles before and after such a dance, even during the winter months. Although there were no legal alcoholic beverages to be obtained, there was plenty of *schnaps* around, which people had made from fermented sugar beet syrup. I personally soon developed a dislike for the taste of this distilled alcoholic beverage. Although I never made any of it myself, one could not avoid getting it offered. Offering and accepting a glass of "Rübenschnaps" became not only a symbol of mutual trust during this difficult time, but it also expressed contempt for a nonproductive law and a powerless government under the control of our occupation forces.

During the summer, I took over the third team of horses for a few months. It was a pair of *Hannoveraner*. This was a local breed of "warm blooded" horses. These horses were suitable for riding and also for pulling light loads and farm implements. The horses were named Freya and Theo. Freya had been Mr. Hinrichs' favorite horse and had been bred a couple of times. Her fillies were still too young for fieldwork.

Although I was not a very good teamster and did not have the control over the horses like Andreas, the Cossack, did, I tried hard and enjoyed working with them in the fields. I especially loved to plow with the walking plow! Every furrow was a challenge for me to get it as straight as an arrow. I developed a strategy for straightening out every "kink" in the furrow, often caused by changing soil conditions or by a hidden rock. There was also pleasure in being all by myself on a large field. I could sing as loud as I wanted, even though I never could carry a tune. Nobody, but the team, would hear! I could daydream, listen to the birds and tune in on my surroundings. I loved it!

Later in the summer, Freya became ill. I wanted to give her a few days of rest, but was told to ignore it! I felt sorry for the horse and was angry that I had to take her to work in the field. I told Erich Kruse that Freya was getting worse and badly needed rest. Again, I was told to ignore it. I felt extremely bad about this and decided to prove my point. Freya and Theo were pulling a harrow and I could see that even this relatively easy work exhausted the mare. But I allowed Freya no rest until she was ready to collapse. I simply unhitched her and slowly returned to the farm. Freya's poor condition was obvious and she spent the following weeks on the pasture. I still feel terrible about this episode and still do not know how I could have avoided it under those circumstances.

During the early summer of 1947, I heard that some fellows had obtained coupons for a new pair of shoes. Since I still had no shoes to wear at work, I asked where I could get one of these coupons. I found out that the local representative of the newly formed farm workers union distributed these coupons. However, he gave these coupons only to members of his union. Well,

this is how I became a union member and the owner of my first pair of work shoes after the war! My union membership lasted until we no longer needed coupons for buying necessities, about one year. I resented having to join the union in order to buy a pair of badly needed shoes!

The summer of 1947 went by quickly and I enjoyed my second year of apprenticeship. In order to overcome poor blood circulation in my left hand, I used this hand whenever I had an opportunity and gradually became ambidextrous. I became one of the few people on the farm able to pitch and shovel to either side. This gave me an advantage over most other workers. By being able to change sides, I did not tire as easily and could get more work done than my coworkers. This enabled me in September 1947 to load by hand 15 tons of bulk potatoes in a day into railroad boxcars without a conveyor or a means to move the trailers I was unloading. I only had a wide board slanting into the trailer that helped me get started. But I still needed to throw the potatoes quite far to fill up the ends of the boxcar. I did this ten days in a row, except for one Sunday. But as I was loading the last of the railcars, I developed a slight pain in my back. This pain came to bother me for the rest of my life. It finally influenced some decisions I made in the following years. By working harder than everybody else around me, I had abused my own body and had to pay the price for it!

As the summer came to an end, I had to decide whether I wanted to study the second and last semester at the School of Agriculture in Ebstorf. There were no rooms that I could rent near the school. My father's comments were very discouraging and I ruled out moving back to Kirchweyhe. Then I heard that there would be bus service between Uelzen and Ebstorf. I could catch this bus about 1½ miles west of Westerweyhe. Although on September 17th I had a confrontation with the younger Mrs. Hinrichs about a rusty table knife, only six days later she had given me 15 kilograms of rapeseed (canola seed) to trade for a pair of shoes. Rapeseed was a precious commodity. It contains about 40% unsaturated vegetable oil, and fats and oils were in very short supply at that time and very much sought after.

In desperation for a solution to my problem, I asked Mrs. Hinrichs if I could stay on the farm in exchange for working in the afternoons and taking care of the books. My other alternative would be to leave Westerweyhe and complete my training on a different farm. After a lengthy discussion by the Hinrichs family and Mr. Kruse, they decided I could stay in Westerweyhe and commute to Ebstorf to attend classes. But Mrs. Hinrichs did not pass up the opportunity to criticize my past "behavior," referring to my reaction to the rusty table knife. She also was afraid that I would complain about the “warmed-up food.” I promised her that I would be grateful for getting the opportunity to finish agriculture school.

When the semester started in Ebstorf, I walked every morning the 2 miles to the highway, where I waited for the bus. It was a much more comfortable way to get to school than what I had faced the previous winter. After 4½ hours of lectures, I rode the bus back and walked to the farm, where my warm meal was waiting for me. During the remainder of the day I did odd jobs, like grinding grain and blending feed. I did my homework and studying in the evenings. I was really surprised when in addition to the privilege of staying on the farm, I also received a small allowance.

I still had my laundry taken care of by my sister Reingard in Kirchweyhe. This was no easy job with the primitive conditions she had to work under in somebody else's home. But Reingard did the best she could, while our father used her as a target for venting all his frustrations. It was an untenable situation for Reingard and I never looked forward to visiting my family. During a brief Sunday afternoon visit on September 28, 1947, I was told to go to the other room, where I noticed someone lying under a blanket. Even the head was covered. Wondering who it may be, I pulled the blanket off the head and stared at the blond head of a young woman. I did not recognize her and was quite embarrassed. Then I was told that she was Wilma, née Fietze, who was to become our father's wife two months later. It was a total surprise for me; but I considered it an opportunity for Reingard to get out of the house! I only hoped that Wilma was able to cope with our father. Wilma was a widow and lived in Celle. She soon moved all her belongings into the two rooms our family occupied in Kirchweyhe. The wedding was on November 23, 1947. It was the beginning of a very "stormy marriage" during which Wilma held her own! Uwe (13 years) and Astrid (12 years) called her "Mutter," while Gundula came up with the name "Mamuschka," which Jürgen and I, too, adopted. Reingard kept calling her Wilma.

We all felt sorry for Mamuschka and we older siblings soon had doubts that this marriage would last longer than a few months. I received a message to see our father in the afternoon of Sunday, February 1, 1948. When I arrived in Kirchweyhe, I was told that Mamuschka was in a hospital in Celle and that the marriage was most likely coming to an end. I also was informed that from then on, I should not expect to receive any more support, of any kind, from my family. I was on my own! This, however, did not mean that my father gave up trying to control me! It only meant that I had to take care of my laundry myself. Since washing machines would not be available in Germany for another 25 years, all laundry had to be done by hand. Taking care of my laundry had been quite a burden for Reingard, and now also for Mamuschka. It was not common at that time that clothing belonging to apprentices was washed and mended by farm personnel.

I had very little choice but to cope with this change and decided to leave Kirchweyhe behind. My "umbilical cord" had been severed! I packed up my laundry and returned to the farm. When I prepared to wash my clothes, I received good instructions and help from the Megeth family, who lived in the basement of the Hinrichs residence and worked on the farm as we needed them. The Megeth family consisted of a widow with two teenage daughters and a younger son. They were ethnic German refugees from Glaserhau, Slovakia, where in the fall of 1944 her husband and all other males over 15 years of age had been shot by partisans. But when the elder Mrs. Hinrichs found out about my predicament, she arranged for my laundry to be taken care of with that of her family.

On January 20, 1948, the younger Mr. Willi Hinrichs returned home from a prisoner of war camp in southern France. He had been an interpreter for a unit of prisoners that was responsible for clearing land mines. On March 11th, his uncle suffered a severe stroke at the age of 81. The elder Mr. Hinrichs was paralyzed and required intensive care from his wife and nephew. I was called quite often to help with moving the elder Mr. Hinrichs to an armchair or back to his bed. I felt good about being able to repay the family for all the things it was doing for me. Mr. Hinrichs passed away on April 25, 1948.

In the meantime I had been preparing for my official examination in agricultural management. Attending classes in Ebstorf, studying, and answering all the many questions in a workbook we had to submit before being tested was very stressful. Being told that I could no longer count on any support from my family complicated things and put me on the verge of a deep depression. I lost my appetite and my desire to communicate with anybody. But I finally overcame this mental state and passed the exam on March 5, 1948 in Sasendorf, near Bevensen. With a grade of 1.0 being the best attainable score, I received a 1.6, the second best score given in our district during that year. I was happy and gradually overcame my depression. I also did quite well, again, in the second semester of the School of Agriculture in Ebstorf.

Mr. Erich Kruse left Westerweyhe to manage a small farm in Lehmke, southeast of Uelzen. He asked me to join him; but when Mr. Hinrichs asked me to stay, I decided to remain in Westerweyhe. I now received a salary of 80 marks, instead of an allowance. Herbert Heemsoth from Ahnebergen near Verden/Aller replaced Klaus von Estorf as the junior apprentice. Herbert came from a nice farm and was very anxious to draw Mr. Hinrichs' attention to him and place himself in the limelight. I did not care much for his personality and did not want to go into competition with him. After a few weeks, I started to lose interest and on June 27th I visited Erich Kruse in Lehmke, who repeated his offer to join him.

The political picture in Europe started to change. Italy and France were in turmoil with strong communist parties causing frequent changes in their governments. West Germany, occupied by the western allies, emerged as a stabilizing factor in Europe. The Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) gradually took over the countries it had occupied at the end of the War and installed communist governments loyal to Russia. By lending support to local communist parties, the sphere of influence of Russia increased steadily. Civil wars were raging in Greece and China. This caused great concern in the U.S.A. and Great Britain and the former ally Russia was now considered a major opposing power. Secretary of State George Catlett Marshall thought of a plan to save the remaining free countries in Europe from falling under the control of the U.S.S.R. He wanted to help them with rebuilding their war ravaged economic base. This became known as the *Marshall Plan* of 1947. The West German occupied zones (American, British, and French) finally started to benefit from this in 1948, after Czechoslovakia had succumbed to the communists in February of that year.

The first major event on Germany's "road to recovery" was the currency reform on June 20, 1948. It was a Sunday and every person in the western zones was allowed to exchange 60 of the old Reichsmarks (RM) for 40 new Deutsche Marks (DM). The other DM 20.00 were to be issued at a later date. The new money performed miracles! It immediately filled store shelves, which had been empty for years. If one had money, one was able to buy almost anything. Initially, the prices were very reasonable. But within a couple of weeks, the economic principle of "supply and demand" prevailed and the price of the most desirable, i.e. most needed, items inflated significantly, while the price of less needed merchandise remained stable. Saving accounts were "frozen" and were gradually exchanged for new money on a sliding scale. Private owners of large amounts of cash had to wait for quite some time before they received one DM for every 10 RM. This procedure helped to control inflation and did not reward those who had accumulated "paper wealth" by illegal means.

The currency reform was also extended to the city of Berlin. This city was occupied by troops of the four major allied powers and was located within the zone occupied by the Russian army. Russia wanted to control this city and intended to integrate the three western sectors into her own zone with a separate currency valid in Berlin and all of East Germany. When the western allies did not yield on this issue, Russian troops simply closed all access roads and railroad tracks from West Germany to Berlin in the hope that the western allies would soon give up and surrender the entire city of Berlin to Russian control. This, however, did not happen and the United States, England and France responded immediately with an airlift. Starting on June 26th, allied planes transported with 277,000 flights about 2.3 million tons of food, fuel, and other necessities to Berlin.

This airlift was not only a great feat, but it was also the first demonstration of the western allies to the general public that they truly cared for the German people. They proved that they were willing to go to any length to protect our freedom from communist oppression. We felt good, when we saw the planes fly over our heads on their way to Berlin with food, instead of with bombs, as we had experienced only 4 years earlier. The German people supported this effort with a surcharge of 2 pennies for every letter we mailed (Notopfer Berlin). This airlift lasted until May 12, 1949, when the Russians realized that the western powers were determined to prevent the integration of their sectors in the city into East Germany and removed the blockades from the roads and railroad tracks. This was the first time that the western allies had openly resisted Russia and had prevailed! This certainly gave us hope for the future and respect for our occupiers.

Although I could not buy very much with my first 40 DM, this money and my next salary in the new currency made it possible for me to buy some of the basic necessities. My work shirts were literally falling apart and I replaced them with U.S. made surplus khaki uniform shirts that had been dyed. A little later in the year, I even bought a bicycle for a little over hundred marks and also a pocket watch. Again and again, I was amazed how quickly all these things had become available, although only a few weeks earlier the store shelves had all been empty. The currency reform had truly performed a miracle! Even our food rations improved slowly and the Marshall Plan started to create jobs. It was difficult for us to judge, whether all the improvements in the German economy were due to the influx of capital or just because the military government started to lift some of the many restrictions. All of a sudden, we could buy all the fertilizer we had money to pay for, and we looked forward to harvest the first good crop since the war had ended.

As we heard of German factories being rebuilt, the Russians still arrived with convoys of trucks to haul the machinery of the few factories that had “survived” the War, back to Russia. Many of these machines were never uncrated and installed at their new locations in Russia. This did not make any sense to us, but it was part of the agreement between the victorious powers. But 1948 brought the beginning of the economic recovery in Europe in general, and in West Germany specifically. I often wondered if this would have happened without Russia's obvious intent to dominate the entire world with communism.

As Herbert Heemsoth gradually took over more and more of my responsibilities on the farm, I felt displaced and unneeded. Mr. Hinrichs offered to get me a position with a newly formed

association of farmers who raised seed grain and potatoes in the Uelzen area. But living space was still scarce and I did not have the financial means to start a household. Although our father and his new wife had not separated in February, I could not expect to receive any support from Kirchweyhe. I, therefore, declined Mr. Hinrichs' offer and accepted Erich Kruse's offer to join him in Lehmke, instead. I left Westerweyhe exactly three years after I had started there as an apprentice and after having worked each year under a different supervisor. I summarized my three years in the guest book of the Hinrichs family.

> "For three long years, however short they appear to be in our memory, Westerweyhe was my new home. During this time, I lived through many happy hours, but experienced also some very difficult times. I, therefore, chose and followed two guidelines: To always keep in mind the welfare of the farm with its employees, and to build for my future life a good foundation of knowledge. Without erring, I adhered to these basic principles and gathered much experience in my chosen profession and for my future.
>
> For this opportunity and for all the help and the kind support I received, I now like to express to the Hinrichs family my most sincere gratitude.
>
> Wishing the family and the Hinrichs farm good luck for the future in a hopefully soon united and prospering Germany.
>
> Yours truly,
>
> Wulf Doerry
>
> Westerweyhe, 30. September, 1948"

On the afternoon of this day, I loaded most of my belongings on my bicycle and moved to Lehmke to work with Erich Kruse. I had my last four days in Westerweyhe taken as vacation, the first days off in three years! I used these days to turn over all the records I had kept during this time and to pay a brief visit to Hanna Behr in Hoopte. I rode my bicycle and returned with a big load of freshly picked fruit.

CHAPTER 6:
SEARCHING FOR A FUTURE
(1948-1951)

I arrived in Lehmke on Thursday, September 30th, 1948, riding my bicycle and with most of my possessions. The farm was owned by the widow Berta Meyer and was managed by Erich Kruse. I was to be his assistant. Kruse was considering returning to his family farm in Altenmedingen and I was to take over the management of the Meyer farm whenever this should happen. This all sounded like a good opportunity for me and I looked into my future with confidence and optimism.

The Meyer farm had about 117 acres of land, about 74 of them "under the plow," (used for growing crops). The remainder was either forest or pasture. Overall, unfortunately, the farm was in sad shape. The soil was depleted of nutrients, lifeless, and in poor condition. The fields were full of rocks and overgrown with weeds. Farm machinery and implements were inadequate, and the livestock was unproductive. But the worst of everything was the treatment of the hired help. Mrs. Meyer showed no respect for the three men and two women who worked for her in the fields. They had not been paid since the currency reform had taken place 3 months earlier. Her attitude probably was the main reason why her farm did not perform in the way it should have. As I found out more about the state of the farm, I became very disappointed. I became totally disillusioned when five days after my arrival, the youngest of the three farm hands was fired for no valid reason. The other help blamed me for his termination and they let me know it! Since I took over the team of this terminated fellow, it was obvious to everybody that he had to make room for me! Consequently, I had to fight the antagonism of the hired help for most of the time I was on this farm, even though I sympathized with the two remaining men, Alouis Czaja and Georg. The two women also resented my presence. If I had known that I would displace someone, I would not have accepted Kruse's offer to come to Lehmke!

Erich Kruse and I shared a room in the house. The hired men shared a chamber in the barn and the two women had their room behind the feed kitchen, from where they could get some heat during the cold winter months. There was no heat in the sleeping facility for the two men, who had to warm themselves in the room shared by the women, and frequently also by their male friends. Mrs. Meyer had two children. The daughter, Elizabeth, was 16 years old and she was always at odds with her mother. Her brother, Horst, was about 13 years old. There was also another 16-year old girl, Magda Schmidt, who helped with the housework. I did not care much for her! A few weeks later, another girl joined the Meyer household. She was Gertrud Richter and was 14½ years old at that time. She was a refugee from the Sudeten area, which is now part of the Czech Republic. Although Gertrud was still acting much like a child, she liked me very much. I liked her, too, but Gertrud was too young for me and I already started to think about leaving Germany for a brighter future somewhere else. This kept me from starting any relationship with a girl while I was still in Germany.

As the weather turned cooler, it was time to butcher a pig. Since we did not have a pig big enough to butcher, Erich Kruse arranged for us to get a large sow from his parents' farm. On Tuesday, November 23, 1948, I left Lehmke to pick up the pig in a crate on a borrowed light

wagon. I had about 15 miles to the Kruse farm in Altenmedingen and arrived there in time for the noon meal. After feeding and resting the horses, I started on my return trip with the pig in the crate. Now began a day I will never forget! One mishap followed another!

As I entered the first village, Secklendorf, I found out that the rear axle on the borrowed wagon had broken. Fortunately, it was near a blacksmith shop and I could get the iron axle jury-rigged within a reasonable time to continue my journey. As I bypassed the town of Bevensen, the pull bar for one of the horses hit its leg going downhill and one end of the bar broke off. Luckily, the bar was still long enough and I continued my trip. I then made the mistake of taking a dirt road to cut across to another highway. This dirt road had deep ruts. As I was trying to pull the wagon out of these ruts, the tongue of the wagon cracked. Fortunately, it did not break off, but I still had to go down a steep hill on the highway and this made it impossible for the horses to hold back the wagon. As I finally reached this hill, I stayed on the lane of dirt road next to the major highway, where the wagon could not roll freely. I finally managed to reach the bottom of the hill without causing the wagon with the pig in the crate to crash.

As I reached Kirchweyhe, I decided to stop at the Manning farm to ask for help. It was already too late for me to get home without replacing the tongue on the wagon. I tied my team to a white picket fence to talk to Mr. Manning, whom I knew casually through my father. As I looked back, I saw one of my horses pulling the fence over on its side. Mr. Manning was nice enough and agreed to let me stay for the night. I could even keep the horses and the wagon with the pig in the granary, as long as I kept the horses from eating the stored grain. He even offered me feed for the horses, while I went to work to fix the downed fence section with some borrowed tools. The pig had to stay hungry. As I tightened the tension of the saw, its frame broke. Well, I was ready to cry! It seemed, everything I touched this afternoon broke apart! Never before and never again in my life did I experience anything like this! Fortunately, I was able to borrow another tongue for the wagon. I spent most of the night keeping the horses from eating the un-threshed bundles of grain and worrying that somebody may come to steal the pig.

On the following morning, I completed my trip back to Lehmke without any further breakdowns. It was a holiday in Germany known as *Repentance and Prayer Day* (Buss und Bettag) and I shall never forget it!

The pig did not live much longer. It was butchered to fill the farm's pantry with meat and sausage. A licensed person did the butchering and the local meat inspector checked the carcass for the potential presence of trichinae. Most of the meat was canned. While some of the fresh sausage was conserved in glass jars, most of it was stuffed into cleaned intestines for consumption in the near future. The sausages made from the liver, blood and tongue, and regular blood and bacon were spiced and cooked. While some farmers had their own recipes for sausages, others depended on the butcher to spice the sausages to their taste. When everything was done and cleaned up, we usually celebrated the event (Schlachtfest) by sampling the fresh sausage and consuming a lot of schnaps.

This old tradition was observed on the Meyer farm, too. When the bottles of homemade schnaps were brought out, I declined to drink any of the homemade liquor. But Magda Schmidt, the 16-year old girl working in the kitchen, teased me. When I told her that I probably could tolerate

more schnaps than she could, she challenged me to a contest. Of course, everybody else in the room supported her challenge and two glasses were quickly filled with schnaps. After Magda and I drank the contents of our glasses, they were refilled and, again, we emptied the glasses together. After consuming a few glasses full of schnaps, Magda lost control over her actions and she grabbed the bottle and drank directly from it. After only a few swallows, she fell on the floor and hit her head against the leg of a heavy desk. Then she passed out completely. I helped to carry her to her room, where Elizabeth, Mrs. Meyer's daughter, took care of her.

Magda was furious when she found out in the morning that I had helped to carry her to her bed. She also had a big dark bruise above her left eye. But she got her satisfaction a short time later. I did not feel too bad when I got up in the morning; but when I brushed my team of horses, the ammonia fumes in the barn hit me and made me so sick, that I went back to bed to get over my hangover.

Although Mrs. Meyer and Erich Kruse treated me very well, I started to dislike my position on the farm. I was not able to speak my mind! Erich Kruse was suffering from an illness and had lost his energy. Despite frequent pain in his abdominal area, the doctors were unable to diagnose Kruse's problem until April 1949. But already in February I had talked to him about leaving Lehmke to find a job in another area of West Germany. However, I still wanted to stay until all the spring planting was done.

On April 23rd, Kruse underwent surgery on his stomach. As we soon learned, the surgeon had only looked at Kruse's stomach. Kruse was then offered a good meal. This indicated to us that the disease had already progressed too far for corrective surgery. He never returned to Lehmke. After his cancerous stomach was finally removed, Erich Kruse passed away in the fall of 1949 and shortly after I had visited him in the hospital. I attended his funeral in Altenmedingen.

Before Erich Kruse left for the hospital, he asked me to manage the farm for him until he returned to work. I promised him that I would do this and worked hard to catch up with the work. Even though we were a week behind in our fieldwork, I received little support from the other help on the farm. I often found them taking extended breaks with no concern for getting the work done. Since we lacked much of the necessary equipment, I had to borrow the implements from the neighbors whenever they were available. The stress was building up and I lost 20 pounds within 3 weeks. I was working from 4:30 AM to 10 PM in the evenings. Mrs. Meyer refused to hire more help so that I could spend more time on managing the farm and supervising the workers. I started to long for some much-needed rest and a position without responsibility for other people. I wanted to be just a plain farm worker, who could freely speak his mind!

When we learned the full extent of Erich Kruse's illness and that it was very unlikely he would return to Lehmke, I considered myself released from my promise. On May 13th, I gave notice to Mrs. Meyer that I would work until noon of June 15th and leave her farm on June 16th, 1949. Her response was verbal abuse and a series of minor mean acts, which did not affect my intention to do the best I could for the farm. This just confirmed that I was doing the right thing! Despite everything, when the day of my departure arrived, Berta Meyer cried! Perhaps, she finally started to realize that she needed to make some major changes in how her farm was

managed. In order for a farm to prosper, one must understand and foster the interdependency between owners/managers and the paid help! They depend on each other! This interdependency must be supported by mutual respect. This certainly was not the case on the Meyer farm in Lehmke. I never returned to this farm, even for a brief visit! I also never found out who managed the farm after I had left. I only heard that initially Mrs. Meyer's neighbors helped her to catch up with the fieldwork.

In the morning of Thursday, June 16th, 1949, I loaded my belongings on my bicycle and headed for Kirchweyhe. I left there, again, on the following morning. I just wanted to relax and to see my cousin Horst Wiehler, who then lived in Bramfeld on the northeast side of Hamburg. My trip took me past Hoopte, but Hanna Behr was not at home. I crossed the Elbe River by ferry at Fliegenberg and continued riding north along the river levee to Moorfleet and on into the City of Hamburg. A light rain seemed to make this trip longer than it actually was. When I reached the city, I quickly learned that the average citizen of Hamburg had no better idea where Bramfeld was located at than I did. Some people admitted this, while others just took a guess and sent me off in any direction. I finally found out that the most reliable source for directions was the policeman walking the beat. One of them finally told me to follow a certain streetcar line to the very end, which I did. From there I had no problem finding Heidlandsweg 16, where my cousin Horst had found a primitive room directly under the roof. There were only three one-family homes on this street and I am still amazed that I found this address with as little information as I had available at that time.

While I was riding through the city of Hamburg, I saw the devastation from the air raids during the war. In some areas, as far as I could see, I saw nothing but rubble. Only here and there stood the remnants of a buildings which people still used as makeshift homes. I also noticed people salvaging bricks, probably to build, or rebuild, their own home.

After shopping for some food, I proceeded to meet my cousin Horst, whom I had not seen for 10 years. As a student, he had served at the end of the war as a "Marinehelfer". He belonged to a unit that was deployed to defend the German coastline along the Baltic Sea. At the very end of the War, Horst was discharged and was able to join his family in Selmsdorf, Mecklenburg. His parents had escaped to Selmsdorf by Treck in the spring of 1945. Since Horst did not like to work on a small farm, he served an apprenticeship in carpentry. Selmsdorf, at that time, was under Russian occupation. In 1948/49 the Russians began to conscript young German men to work in the East German uranium mines under primitive and often unsafe conditions. When in early 1949 Horst found out that he was on the list to be conscripted, he immediately left Selmsdorf and crossed the near-by border into West Germany. He now was working as a carpenter in Hamburg, where the reconstruction of the city had started.

Horst was surprised when he found me waiting for him at his doorstep. I had not informed him of my intention to visit him. He told me that he had just lost his job and had to look for a new one on the following day. We had a lot to talk about that evening!

On the following morning, a Saturday, Horst went to the union hall and was offered a new job starting on Monday. We then took the streetcar to the business section of Hamburg and visited my brother Jürgen in his little one-room student apartment. Later that day, my father came and

on Sunday, my sister Reingard joined us, too. It was her birthday and we celebrated it with whatever food and drink we had available. Although some food items, like meat, were still rationed, there was no real shortage of food anymore. In the afternoon, we all attended the annual meeting of the former citizens of the town of Marienburg, West Prussia. While my father met a number of persons he still knew, I did not recognize anybody. After all this was over, Horst and I went to see a show for which he had some discount tickets. It was the first stage-show I had ever seen, but I no longer remember any details or the name of it.

While in Hamburg, I discussed with Horst my plan to emigrate to another country. I had heard that some countries were actively seeking German farm workers as immigrants or on limited contracts. I already had applied for working in Iceland, but was turned down. Horst told me that he was trying to enroll at the local technical college. But if he failed the entrance exam, he would consider joining me in my attempt to leave Germany. But in any case, he was willing to provide me with addresses of foreign consulates I could write to.

I left Bramfeld on Tuesday morning and spent the night at the home of Hanna Behr in Hoopte. My next destination was Ritterhude, a suburb of Bremen. I had about 85 miles to ride on my single-speed bicycle. Even though the terrain was relatively flat, it always seemed that I had to ride against the wind. Before I reached Bremen, I met a couple of young fishermen who originally came from Leba, Pomerania. They returned from a furlough and were in a hurry to report back to their ship. I had a hard time keeping up with them. Our ways parted as we entered the city of Bremen. Then I noticed, how exhausted and "saddle sore" I was. I dismounted from my bicycle and for quite a distance I just pushed it with my suitcase strapped to its carrier. I was glad when I finally reached my destination and could get some rest.

I wanted to visit the parents of Eva Unruh in Ritterhude. Eva had been a classmate of Reingard and was now engaged to my brother Jürgen. Her father had been a teacher in Naugard, East Pomerania, the seat of our district government when we lived in Gollnow during the war. I stayed with Eva's parents until the following Monday, June 27th, when I left in the morning. Mr. Unruh was still unemployed and very disheartened about his and Germany's future. He was especially upset about things he had to do for his family's survival during the first post-war years. Some of these actions violated his basic principles for leading an honest and law-abiding life. He was telling me of chopping down a small tree in front of his home during a cold winter night, so that he could provide some warmth for his family. He had never thought that he was able to do such a thing, which was obviously wrong for him to do! I understood him only too well, since many others and I had been struggling with similar conflicts during these past years! But I felt that the time had come to leave these kinds of thoughts behind us and to concentrate on building a new existence for ourselves.

My next destination was Ahnebergen, a village near Verden. Here I visited Herbert Heemsoth, whom I had worked with at Hinrichs in 1948. I stayed here for two full days and left on Thursday morning, June 30th, to return to Kirchweyhe via Verden, Visselhövede, Soltau, and Munster. I arrived in Kirchweyhe exactly 2 weeks after my departure for Hamburg.

In Kirchweyhe, I prepared my belongings for "a trip into the unknown." I wanted to look for a job farther south of Uelzen and Celle. On Tuesday, July 5th, I left Kirchweyhe with my

belongings in a heavy suitcase strapped to the carrier frame of the bicycle. As I mounted the bike and tried to steady it, I cracked its handlebar. But I did manage to reach a bicycle shop in Uelzen, where I replaced the broken bar. I then headed for Celle, Wathlingen, Edemissen, and Stederdorf near the town of Peine. My Aunt Lore Penner lived in Stederdorf and I wanted to briefly visit her. When I stopped at a small farm to ask for directions and talked to the farm family, I was offered a job. It was a 26-acre farm with one horse and an ox as a team. After sharing the evening meal with the farm family, I went to see my aunt. I was welcomed and was introduced to my aunt's nephew. He worked as an electrician at the local Ilseder Hütte steel plant. One of his friends visited him from Rotenburg. In Peine was Schützenfest (an annual event similar to a fair) and we decided to go there to have some fun. Unfortunately, repeated rain showers interfered with our fun and shortened our stay at the fair.

I stayed in Stederdorf for another full day. The first thing I did was to decline the offer to work on the small farm. It was too small for me and I also would have displaced a young refugee from East Germany. I had no intention to do this again. On Thursday morning, July 7th, I continued my trip and rode my bicycle to the employment office in Hildesheim, where I registered for a job. I was referred to Heinrich Beicke, who owned a farm in Gross-Giesen, near the highway leading from Hildesheim to Hannover. The Beicke farm had about 200 acres of heavy loamy soil. The farming methods used on that farm were 20-30 years behind those we had used in the Uelzen area. Despite this, Mr. Beicke did not think much of my formal training in farm management. In fact, he told me that he had had only bad experiences with formally trained people. I started to work on his farm on Friday, July 8, 1949.

I soon found out what kinds of games were played on this farm. I had my own little room in the house with a window facing the farmyard. The mattress consisted of only a worn-out box spring section with no regular mattress on top of it to cover the springs. The box spring section had a deep depression in the middle and loose coils in the mattress had a tendency to poke into my back and ribs when I was lying down to sleep. There were times, when I compared my situation with that of Christ on the crucifix hanging above my bed! I had my meals with the family, but had no other contact with any of the family members. The food was rather monotonous. We had stew every day but Sunday, when we had a beef roast. The meat was very tough and probably came from a cow too old to be sold to a butcher. It appeared that Mrs. Beicke cooked new large batches of stew only on Mondays and Thursdays. On the remaining days, she merely warmed up portions of stew cooked previously.

Mr. Beicke was an alcoholic and called his wife only "Mrs. Beicke." She, in turn, called him "Mr. Chef." Mr. Beicke's mistress was a 19-year old girl who helped Mrs. Beicke with the housework. This girl had, over time, assumed enough power that she was able to tyrannize everybody working on this farm. She was the "right hand" of both, Mr. and Mrs. Beicke, and she did whatever pleased her.

Gross-Giesen was one of three catholic villages in a protestant region. The Beikes were strict Catholics and never missed mass in the mornings. They also were very much in agreement on how to exploit and abuse those who worked for them. In fact, they made Berta Meyer in Lehmke look like a philanthropist! I got the feeling that they had to go to mass and confession every morning just to be able to live with themselves!

On the first Sunday, July 10th, I rode my bicycle back to Stederdorf to pick up my heavy suitcase. I had left it there when I visited my aunt during the week. On the following Sundays I often visited my aunt Helene Doerry and her daughters Ilse Beste and Ursula Havemann, who lived with their families in Hildesheim. I had a good time with them and enjoyed my visits!

It was harvest time and we often worked until late in the evening and even on Sundays. There was no compensation for the extra hours worked by us. The treatment of the people was, at best, "shabby". I started to dislike the place, even though I myself was treated fairly well. I was ill twice while I worked on this farm. One time I had a terrible headache and the Beickes called their doctor for me. At another time I had somehow acquired blood poisoning in both of my arms. Both times I recovered within a couple of days.

It was here in Gross-Giesen that I once literally ran for my life. It was shortly before the noon break, when I was asked to take the team of young geldings to get silage from a field outside of the village. The animals had been neutered relatively late in life and acted more like stallions than like geldings. I used a regular heavy field wagon with steel-rimmed wheels and took another worker along to help me load the silage made from fermented sugar beet foliage. I parked the wagon near the pile of silage and tied the reins fairly tight to the wagon's front rung that supported the sideboards. This was for me standard procedure.

This was the first time that I worked with this team. Other teams working in the fields were already unhitching their implements to return to their respective farms for the 1½-hour noon break. As we started to load our wagon, I noticed that the horses became restless as the first teams passed us on the near-by road. I started to watch them very closely when suddenly, as if somebody had given a signal, both horses jumped into their harness and started running in full gallop. I grabbed the sideboard of the wagon with my right hand and the reins with my left hand, but was unable to pull the reins in to control the horses. Well, I literally ran for my life as I noticed that there was less than a foot space between my heels and the rear wheel. The horses were heading back to the farm and I was wondering what I should or could do. While I was half running and half pulled by the wagon, the contents of my pockets fell out onto the pavement. But, as so often in my life, I was lucky. A teamster from another farm noticed my demise and quickly moved his unhitched horses to block the road. When my horses saw this, they slowed down and the other teamster helped me to regain control over them. I turned the wagon around and returned to the heap of silage to finish my job after I had picked up my belongings scattered all over the road. But from then on I tied the reins of this team to a spoke of the wheel. If done properly, the reins tighten up as the wheel turns and makes it difficult for the horses to run. Even though I ran only for 200-300 yards, it had seemed much farther than that! I never again ran this fast!

The housekeeper, the 19-year old mistress of Mr. Beicke, really surprised me one evening. She enjoyed her life and this meant that she liked to stay out late in the evenings, especially on weekends. Mrs. Beicke, understandably, did not like her very much and made sure that all the doors and windows under her control were closed and locked in the evenings, especially when the girl was not back at home yet. She even left the key in the front door to keep the girl from

opening it from the outside with another key. The only window Mrs. Beicke did not control was the one in my room, which was right next to the front door.

One night, it must have been around midnight, I heard a light knocking on my half-open window. When I responded, the girl asked me in a very soft whisper whether she could enter the house through my window. I agreed. I had my head turned towards the wall and was listening with strained ears. I did not hear the slightest sound when she crawled through the window, walked through the room, and opened and shut my door! There was no other way for her to enter the house, but through my room. I did not hear the slightest sound and was amazed about her skill in moving like a cat. I only concluded from this that she had plenty practice and knew her way around.

As time went on, I started to tell Mr. Beicke what I thought about his treatment of those who worked for him. He did not appreciate this! On August 15th, I gave him notice that I would be leaving his employment on September 1, 1949. He told me that I was required to give him a full month's notice. I just replied that I was going to leave his farm on September 1st.

As others working on that farm told me, Mr. Beicke tended to withhold the employment papers and the last pay from those who wanted to leave the farm. These people then had to go to the labor court of arbitration to recover these papers. They were important in those days, because one could not be legally employed by anybody without having these papers. Going to court for these papers was not only inconvenient, but it also took time to deal with the authorities. I, therefore, developed the strategy of becoming a nuisance for Mr. Beicke. He took the bait and a few days before I wanted to quit, he offered to let me leave immediately. I did not accept and stayed until September 1st, when I promptly received without any problem from Mr. Beicke all my papers and pay. My sick-days were subtracted from my pay and nothing was added for overtime and Sunday work.

On August 29th, I received a letter from my father. He informed me of a potential job in Seedorf, a little hamlet west of the town of Bevensen, about 8 miles north of Uelzen. On the previous weekend, my sister Gundula had met a Mr. Wilhelms at a riding tournament in Westerweyhe. Mr. Wilhelms, a farmer from Halligdorf, told her that his sister-in-law Elizabeth Schäffer in Seedorf was looking for someone who could assist her with managing her farm. I immediately called Halligdorf and was told to go as soon as possible for an interview in Seedorf.

I left a few of my belongings with one of the "Deputanten" (married farm worker) on the Beicke farm and rode my bicycle in the direction of Kirchweyhe. I was lucky to get a ride on a truck from Sarstedt to Hannover and rode the remaining 75 kilometers (~50 miles) on my bike. On the following morning, Mr. Wilhelms and I visited Seedorf for an interview with Mr. Joachim Schmeling, who planned to marry Mrs. Schäffer as soon as the court had declared Mrs. Schäffer's first husband "killed in action" in Russia. I was offered a job to drive a small tractor (11 PS Deutz. A PS is the net horsepower developed by a motor and is measured at the brakes) and to assist Mr. Schmeling. My starting salary was 60 DM per month plus board and room. The pay was to be increased on merit. My starting day was to be Monday, September 12, 1949.

On the following day, I attended the required classes for a driver's license 4th class. This license permitted me to operate a farm tractor and a motorcycle with a motor of less than 100 cubic centimeters piston displacement.

On Monday, September 5th, I rode my bicycle back to Stederdorf and on the following day I reported to the police in Gross-Giesen that I was leaving the village. Germany had for a long time a law that required everybody to register with the police in the community where one took up residence. Then I picked up the belongings I had left with a family during the previous week. My next stop was the state employment office in Hildesheim, where I notified the officials of my change in jobs. (Everything was regulated in those days and all changes had to be reported to some local or state agency!)

When I worked in the fields in Gross-Giesen, I could see the *Burg Marienburg* on a mountain not too far away. The castle looked beautiful from the distance and I always had the desire to see this castle from near-by. This was my last opportunity to do this and I rode my bike to the mountain. There I found a paved street and a trail leading to the castle. I took the trail and soon found myself pushing my bicycle up this trail thinking that I would get a "free ride" on the way down. When I arrived at the castle, I found a restaurant near the castle's entrance. There were people sitting at the tables drinking coffee and eating cake. I was jealous, because I could not afford the money to join them and to buy a cup of coffee. But I promised to myself that I would do this at some later time. I finally did this in 1963, together with my wife Edith and our four children. On my way down from the mountain, I soon found it to be too dangerous to ride the bike down on that narrow trail. Walking it down turned out to be just as difficult as pushing the bicycle up the hill. I was glad when I finally reached level ground and could ride my bike, again.

The Marienburg was still inhabited by the descendants of a duke and was not open to the public. As I walked along the outside perimeter of the fortified castle, I noticed much decay in the stone walls and disrepair in the gate and those corner towers, which were no longer in use. One could definitely notice a lack of funds for maintaining this beautiful historical property.

After bidding good-bye to my Aunt Helene Doerry and her daughters Ursula Havemann and Ilse Beste, I left the Hildesheim area in the morning of September 7th together with two students from Hamburg, whom I had met at the local youth hostel. Our destination was Mellendorf at the Hermann Löns Lake, where we found shelter at the local youth hostel operated by the "Friends of Nature" association. From there we rode our bikes through the town of Soltau to Bispingen, where we stayed at an emergency shelter that was very cold and uncomfortable. We were too cold to sleep well during this night. In the morning, I said good-bye to the two students and rode my bike through Emmingen, Munster, Eimke, Uelzen, and Westerweyhe to the brickyard in Kirchweyhe, where I arrived on Friday afternoon. On the following morning, I attended another instruction period for my driver's license and packed my belongings for my move to Seedorf.

On Monday morning, September 12, 1949, I strapped a suitcase with most of my belongings to the carrier of my bicycle and rode the 7 miles to Seedorf to start on my new job. I arrived there in time for breakfast. My main job was to drive the small Deutz tractor and I enjoyed my work. I was treated very well and the food was very good. I gradually assumed more and more of the

book keeping work and used my own time to get all the written records properly organized and filed. This provided me with a good overview of the farm.

As the driver of a small tractor, I soon learned a lesson that could have had a tragic end. I was taking two empty trailers out to the field and had two men and three women riding on them. I had no self-activating brakes on the trailers, just one operational hand brake on the second trailer for emergencies. When I reached the main highway, I had to drive down a short hill. I failed to shift down into the lowest gear and soon realized that the two trailers were heavier than my little tractor. When I stepped on the brake, the trailers pushed the tractor and flames and smoke came out of the exhaust pipe. The women started screaming while I tried to keep the tractor on the road. But one of the two men, Herbert Ludwig, remained calm and climbed onto the second trailer, where he pulled the emergency brake. We then made it safely to the bottom of the hill. It was a scary experience, but I also learned the value of downshifting when driving downhill!

In 1950/51 the Schmeling (Schäffer) farm had 291.6 acres, of which 221.1 acres were under the plow, 34 acres were pasture and meadow, 22.2 acres were woods, and the remaining land was occupied by buildings, farm roads, and land that was not farmed. The farm engaged in intensive farming and cultivated the following 17 crops during those years:

Type of Crop grown	Acres Cultivated	
	1950	1951
Winter Rye	36.5	31
Winter Wheat	11	19.75
Spring Wheat	9.25	10
Winter Barley	6	5
Oats	22.25	11.75
Spring Mixed Grains	15.5	20
Legumes (Field Peas)	5	-
Potatoes, Early	6.75	12.5
Potatoes, Late	48.25	40.75
Sugar Beets	27.25	29.5
Feed Beets	2.5	2.5
Turnips	5.25	7.5
Vegetables (Onions, Cucumbers)	-	2.5
Winter Rapeseed (Canola)	6.25	5
Red Clover	4.5	6
Alfalfa	7.5	4.5

Of these crops, potatoes, beets and vegetables were the most labor-intensive crops. Oats, barley, mixed grains, peas, feed beets, turnips, clover, alfalfa, and some of the late potatoes were grown as feed for the livestock. Although we experimented with a small combine pulled by our large tractor, most grain and the rapeseed were still harvested with a "binder" that cut off the stalks of grain and rapeseed and "bound" them with twine into sheaves that we manually stacked together into "shocks" of 20 sheaves. Although we threshed the rapeseed and the seed grain during the harvest season, much of the threshing was done inside of the large granary during the cold winter months.

The farm had a 30 PS (horsepower) Lanz-Bulldog tractor and a 25 PS Normag tractor that replaced the little 11 PS Deutz tractor. The bulldog tractor was unique in that it had only one

horizontal cylinder with a red-hot metal cone. Fuel, primarily diesel fuel, was injected into this hot cone when the headspace between the cone and the piston was the smallest. As the fuel exploded in the cone, it expanded and drove the piston back as far as it could move. A large flywheel kept the single piston moving in a reciprocating motion. The advantage of this tractor was its sturdiness, low RPMs (revolutions per minute), and it could utilize any fuel that could be injected into the "glow-cone". Some of the smaller "bulldogs" still in use at that time, had been built before WW I and were 40 years old. The disadvantage of these tractors was the long-term effect they had on the health of their operators. The strong horizontal vibration caused by the single piston often produced kidney damage in those who spent long hours on the poorly cushioned seats of these indestructible tractors. The rated PS of these tractors was the net power (braking power) available for work and did not include the power consumed by the idling tractor itself. Practically all farm tractors in Germany during those years ran on diesel fuel and were manually started with cranks. This farm also had 7 workhorses and 3 young horses (a yearling and a couple two-year-olds) that were not yet used for fieldwork.

Our dairy herd consisted of 23-25 milk cows and about 30 heifers and calves to replace aging cows. The farm also had a registered bull. A husband and wife team, Mr. Richard and Mrs. Anna Ludwig, took care of the entire herd. There were also 7 sows and 25-45 pigs that were fed for the market. The pigs were taken care of by the Wippich family, refugees from East Prussia, who also did regular farm work.

Mr. Joachim Schmeling had taken over the management of the Schäffer farm only about two weeks before my arrival in Seedorf. I helped him in any way I was able to get him acquainted with details of the farm's past management. We worked closely together and I was treated like I was one of the family. My laundry was done, but I had to do my own mending. There was no free time for recreational reading. But Mr. Schmeling showed his appreciation for all the extra work I did for him by inviting me several times to join him and Mrs. Schmeling to see a movie in Uelzen. My salary gradually increased to 100 DM per month.

In the morning of Thursday, December 15, 1949, Mr. Schmeling told me briefly that he and Mrs. Schäffer were leaving for a few days to get married and for a honeymoon at Braunlage in the Harz Mountain. Among his brief instructions for managing the farm in his absence was also the request to watch Mrs. Schäffer's four young daughters, Christa (12), Ite (10½), Gisela (9), and Ursula (6). But with all the female help in the household, there was no need for me to get involved with the girls.

I turned 21 in 1949 and was happy that I no longer was a "minor." I no longer had to listen to my father say that I still had to do what he wanted me to do. As long as I was a "minor," he was able to control me and he used every opportunity to remind me of his power over me. Thus, this birthday was my happiest!

Life in West Germany was changing. Everywhere were signs that Germany was recovering from the devastating effects of the War. Villages, towns, and cities were removing rubble in order to rebuild. The blockade of Berlin had forced the western allies to take a position against the expansionist moves of the Soviet Union (Russia). The blockade lasted for about 10½ months until May 12, 1949. The airlift was gradually phased out until it stopped entirely in September

1949. It had proven to the German people that the western allies were serious about protecting their occupied "zones" from any attempts of Russia to place them under communist control.

The three western zones (American, British, and French) were to be combined into one Federal Republic governed by a two-chamber elected government. All the German Länder (equivalent to the “states” in the U.S.) ratified the new constitution (Grundgesetz or basic law) for this new political entity on May 8th. The Allies gave their approval and the new constitution went into effect on May 23, 1949. The first German post-war legislature was elected on August 14th of that same year and an Allied High Commission replaced all three military governments on September 21st. We no longer talked about the British or American zones and started to refer to "West Germany" or the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland: BRD). East Germany evolved similarly and became the German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik: DDR).

Our hopes for a better future for Germany were somewhat dampened when North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. Although the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea helped to resist this major invasion, the North Korean forces were initially very successful and overran most of South Korea. Finally, U.S. Marines landed at Inchon and were able to regain control over South Korea and to occupy much of North Korea, until the Chinese army entered the war and the intense fighting shifted to the area along the 38th parallel for the following 1½ years.

Since the Soviet Union had in September 1948 given East Germany permission to create its own armed force under the disguise of the label "people's police" (Volkspolizei), we expected that East Germany would invade West Germany in the same manner as North Korea had invaded South Korea. This "expectation" did not leave us until the war in Korea turned in favor of the United Nations. I still remember looking out of the window in the mornings of July/August 1950 to check on the arrival of Volkspolizei units. After all, we were less than 35 kilometers (~20 miles) from the border! I often asked myself, where could I escape to, to avoid coming under Russian control. Even five years after WW II, I still was afraid of the Russians and their East German allies. The possibility of being ruled by them strengthened my desire to leave Germany for a place far away from Russia and communism!

Sometime in 1950 we had an election for local representatives. It was the first time that I was eligible to vote and I felt good about choosing those I wanted to represent me. Since then, I have always considered voting for my representatives to be a responsibility, rather than a mere privilege. But I also stuck to the vow I made in May 1945 that I would never join or financially support a political party.

My birthday in 1950 was the first one since 1944 that I was able to celebrate. The Schmelings surprised me in the evening with some delicious sweets the girls had helped to select at the Konditorei (bakery for sweet goods and fine pastries). We all enjoyed these sweets and I felt good about this sign of appreciation for my work on the farm.

Sometime in early 1950, Mr. Schmeling's father joined us. He was a very pleasant gentleman and had a small room next to mine. In fact, he had to pass through my room in order to get to his. We understood each other very well and on weekends and in the evenings, we spent many

hours together in conversation. The elder Mr. Schmeling had owned a large farm-estate (Gut) in East-Pomerania. He had left his home together with his employees and their families on a Treck when the Russian Army approached the village. The elder Mr. Schmeling had a hunting dog named after the Pomeranian river *Rega,* which drains the area where Mr. Schmeling used to live. Both were good companions when they went for long walks through the fields.

On Saturday, January 6, 1951, Mrs. Schmeling gave birth to the only child of Mr. Schmeling, Jutta Schmeling. When the baby was brought home from the hospital, there was an outbreak of flu (influenza) that made a lot of people in Germany ill. To keep everybody's resistance to the flu at a high level, the elder Mr. Schmeling suggested an old remedy, grog. Every evening we all drank a glass of this English sailor's drink according to the old saying (translated):"Rum must be, sugar can be, water does not need be!" The water added to the rum was usually brought to a boil and added hot. The sugar was stirred into the drink and the grog was consumed as hot as one could stand it. I do not know, how effective the grog really was, but most of us liked drinking it and nobody came down with the flu!

It was about 1950 when the working time on farms was reduced from 6 full days to only 5½ days per week. Since we were always busy and never seemed to get all the work on the farm done, this seemed to be a significant reduction in working time. When I discussed this apparent "problem" with Mr. Schmeling, he replied that it was a good change for everybody! When I acted surprised, he told me that the increased productivity would more than make up for the reduced working hours. The Deputanten (married farm workers) would no longer have to do all their own work at home in the evenings and on Sundays and thus will be better rested when they work on the farm. Mr. Schmeling was right! We got all the work done in the reduced working time and everybody gained from this change!

As time went on, I assumed more and more management responsibilities. In order to give me more flexibility, Mr. Schmeling reassigned the new Normag tractor to an unmarried farm worker. Kurt Meyer was the son of one of the married workers, who was in charge of the first team of horses. Kurt and I were good friends. Kurt later tried his luck in the coal mines of the Ruhr District. But he soon returned to the Schmeling farm to assume more responsibilities. Farming technology in Germany gradually changed from "intensive farming" to "extensive farming". The farm labor force was reduced with increasing automation and with a reduction in the number of crops grown. In 1997, the Schmeling farm was operated by only two persons: Mr. Schmeling's son-in-law (Jutta's husband) and one employee. Only 5 years later, in the year 2002, all the land of the farm was leased to another farmer in the hamlet! Farming, as I knew it in Germany, had come to an end!

My management functions included supervising groups of women in the fields. One of the older women, a Mrs. Anders, not only did not try to keep up with the others, she also used foul language and complained constantly. She always blamed everybody else for what she did not do and she was a real nuisance. In the fall of 1951, when we were harvesting cucumbers, she acted up, again. When I asked her to trade her position in the line with one of the other women, she let loose a barrage of cuss words and threatened to stab me with a pitchfork. I grabbed the fork and hit her in the face with my flat hand. This really started a verbal assault from her and Mr. Schmeling finally sent her home. She never worked for us again as long as I was in Seedorf.

Although Mrs. Anders asked for and deserved this treatment, there was really no good excuse for my rash reaction. Because of her obnoxious behavior, none of the other women showed any sympathy for her.

The two years I spent in Seedorf were the best of the seven years I spent working on farms! But my back problem grew worse in the spring of 1951. The constant pain bothered me to the extent that it started to depress me. I was wondering how much longer I could do the manual labor still prevalent on farms. Harboring these thoughts only made it worse. Finally, I sought medical help and received two injections of *Sympathisan*, which significantly reduced the pain in my back. But I believe that the psychological effect of the prospect of emigrating to "America" also contributed to the pain reduction. I still have no idea of what kind of drug Sympathisan was.

On April 13, 1951, I was shown an article in our local newspaper, which told of the possibility for German refugee families working on farms to emigrate to "America," as we called the United States. Even though I was single, I decided to apply for emigration to the U.S. at the employment office in Uelzen and also at the U.S. Consulate. Both applications were denied. But the employment office recommended that I be present when the selection committee chose potential candidates for this special program. Four weeks later, in a letter dated May 24, 1951, I was informed that the selection committee was now considering single applicants at the age of 21 and older. On Wednesday, June 13th, I went for an interview/registration in Lüneburg.

The registration process required filling in a large number of questionnaires that asked for a multitude of my life's details. This took a lot of concentration on my part and I answered all questions as truthfully as I was able to. I was the last one to finish in the evening and returned to Seedorf hoping that everything would work out for the best.

During the following four weeks I concentrated on getting all the required papers and documents ready for the commission. This included notarized copies of my birth certificate and school report cards I had in my possession. I also needed to be "denazified." Everybody had to prove that he/she had not been a leader in the Nazi party or had been involved in crimes against humanity.

I did not have a birth certificate and was unable to get one. But my father had an *Ahnenpass* (a "passport" issued by German authorities during the Nazi era proving our Aryan descent) that contained notarized entries of my birth. Since my father was not very happy about my decision to leave Germany, he initially refused to let me make a notarized copy. This did not bother me very much since there were many more German people without a valid birth certificate. I would, somehow, obtain a notarized statement of my birth. When my father realized this, he handed me the "Ahnenpass" for making copies. On July 11th, I mailed all the required documents and was disappointed when I received an additional request for a copy of an identification card that certified me as a refugee. Soon after I had sent in this final document, I was notified that the USDPC (United States Displaced Persons Commission) had registered me under EC 531104. My anticipated call-up for further processing would be in October. I now had to apply for a passport and had to plan for emigration.

As mentioned earlier, my father hated to lose control over me and tried everything he knew to keep me from leaving Germany. He now tried to interest me in single girls with property, whom I could marry. Among them was a daughter of the Manning farm in Kirchweyhe, who was several years older than I was. Another prospect for him was the daughter of a bakery owner in Uelzen, whom I had never met. I was not interested! He also wanted to make it possible for me to go back to school. It was too late! I continued to prepare myself for a future in the "New World." The Schmeling family was very cooperative and allowed me all the time I needed for my preparations. Mr. Schmeling hired my successor, Hans Goebel, a refugee from Brieg, Silesia. I helped Hans to get acquainted with all my duties and gradually turned these over to him.

On October 17th, I received a letter notifying me that I should report for further processing in Hamburg-Wentorf on October 25, 1951. I packed my belongings and brought some of them to Kirchweyhe. I never saw these again! I am glad that I took my diary and the documents in my possession with me when I left Germany!

Finally, October 25th came and Mr. Schmeling brought me to the train station. I arrived at the DP (Displaced Persons) processing center in Hamburg-Wentorf at about noon and was assigned to Building 16, Room 97. Another new arrival and I picked out the best bunks and lockers and settled down. The camp had been German army barracks, which had somehow survived the War. The fellow sleeping next to me was Victor Radies, who originally came from Bessarabia, a region that formerly belonged to Romania, but was now annexed by the Soviet Union. After the War, he had lived in Heiligendorf 42, near Fallersleben. Other roommates were Reinhold Glässmann from Schitomir, Russia, and an older person from Lublin in the Polish-Ukrainian region. A few days later, Vilhelms Krumins from Riga, Latvia, joined our little group. He had been a well-known vocational teacher (graphic arts), who tried to put as much distance between himself and Russia as was possible! All these roommates were genuine "displaced persons" (D.P.s, as we called them), while I was only a refugee.

Everybody in our room had an excellent relationship with the other roommates. We received "average" rations. They were sufficient for women and children, but not enough for us young men. I soon arranged for receiving additional food rations from families who had too much food. We helped them whenever we could, especially when they were unable to go for their rations, because the women were too busy with their children. They usually gave us what they did not want and we often ended up with so much food that we could share the surplus with others in adjacent rooms. We had a small gas stove in our room and were able to warm up food whenever we needed to.

The first thing we were subjected to in Wentorf was a thorough medical examination. Anybody with the slightest lung defect was rejected immediately. This sometimes produced difficult conflicts in families, where one or more members were rejected, but the rest of the family was cleared for immigration into the U.S. Many families solved this problem by leaving the affected child or spouse behind with relatives in the hope that this family member would be allowed to follow the remainder of the family at a later time. I myself had no problem. The tuberculosis I had almost 10 years earlier had healed and did not show in X-rays of the lung. My interviews with the German and American medical doctors, the D.P. Commission, the consul, and an

inspector went well and without any problems. But the general process was very slow and we spent much time waiting for something and everything. On weekends, I visited my brother Jürgen and my cousin Horst Wiehler in Hamburg.

During this time, we learned more details about the program under which the German refugees were allowed to immigrate into the U.S.A. Originally, the program was restricted to D.P.s from countries behind the Iron Curtain (countries under communist control), and who did not want to return there after the War. German refugees did not qualify under this program until it became obvious that the quota of D.P.s allowed by the U.S. Congress could not be filled with this category of people. Prominent leaders of the German community in the U.S.A. then urged the authorities to open up this program to German refugees from areas annexed by Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia. Subsequently, 350,000 German refugees were permitted to immigrate into the U.S. during 1951-1953. I was one of the lucky ones! The only thing we did not like about this program was that we were considered to be D.P.s, and our image of D.P.s was not very good. Fortunately, we met many real D.P.s in this camp and became friendly with them. We found them to be honest and very much like us. This helped those of us who wanted to reconsider their intention to leave Germany under this program.

I finally found out that my destination in the U.S.A. was Omaha, Nebraska. But I had no idea where Omaha and Nebraska were located at in America. I also did not know who sponsored my immigration and who would be my employer for the next year. We were told that we would be obligated to work for one year for whoever sponsored us. Most people processed at this emigration camp knew already the name of their sponsor and had his address. Church-related groups and organizations had arranged for most of these sponsorships.

In the morning of November 7th, I was called to the Inspector to answer some additional questions. I was lucky and was done with everything at noon and could catch the train back to Bevensen, where Mr. Schmeling picked me up with his car.

I had now two weeks until Thursday, November 22nd, to get all my things taken care of. On the day after my return from Hamburg-Wentorf, I rode my bicycle to Bevensen and Uelzen to shop for a few things. After this was done, I returned to work on the farm and enjoyed being outside in the fresh air. Those were two nice weeks, when everybody tried to make my last days in Germany as pleasant as possible. I was especially happy about the attention I received from Christel Schäffer (oldest daughter of Mrs. Schmeling) during these days. I reciprocated by giving her a few little things. I also bought a silver bracelet I wanted to give her for her approaching 14th birthday on December 17th.

I used the two weekends to say good-bye in Westerweyhe and to my family in Kirchweyhe. My family, too, tried to make this a happy affair and surprised me with a few useful presents. My father gave me a silk scarf, Mamuschka gave me a woolen pullover, and my sister Astrid presented me with a pair of nice gloves. My sister Reingard, who had spent a year in England and was now working in Marienau near Dahlenburg (about 28 miles southeast of Lüneburg), gave me money to buy a new wallet. Overall, I found these last visits to be nice, but also very stressful, because everybody wanted to talk about the same things, over and over.

My last working day in Seedorf was Tuesday, November 20th. I had bought a couple of bottles of *Nordhäuser* schnaps, cigarettes, cigars, and candies to celebrate my emigration and to say good-bye to the employees on the Schmeling farm. They all wished me good luck and success in my endeavor. This response verified the good relationship I had with these people, even though I had often asked for extra effort from them to get the work done on time. I expressed my hope that this good relationship between them and the farm management would persist for the future!

The following day was the religious holiday *Repentance and Prayer Day* and there was no fieldwork done on farms. This gave me the opportunity to finish packing my belongings and to say good-bye to everybody. Mr. and Mrs. Schmeling tried very hard to make this day as pleasant for me as possible. They even asked me what kind of cake I would like to eat with them. Since I like every kind of cake, I could not make up my mind. Thus, Mrs. Schmeling decided on an apple cake with whipped cream. We ate this cake in the evening and reminisced about the past two years while we consumed a couple of bottles of good wine. It was already past midnight, when Mr. and Mrs. Schmeling gave me an Agfa Isolette camera and DM 70.00 as a going-away present.

My relationship to Christel Schäffer intensified during these last days in Seedorf. She definitely let me know that she liked me and I liked her, too! She was very happy when I gave her the little wrapped box with the silver bracelet before I left for the train station. But because of her age, I had no expectations that our mutual feelings would ever develop into a more intimate relationship, especially while an entire ocean separated us. The future proved this to be the case.

At 9:05 AM of November 22, 1951 I left Bevensen by express train (Eilzug) and arrived at the camp in Hamburg-Wentorf at 12:15 PM. Again, I was assigned to Building 16, but to Room 49, which had 12 bunks. Here I met some acquaintances from my previous stay at Wentorf. Among them were the Latvian graphic arts teacher Krumins and two brothers, Dankwart (Dan) and Jörn (John) Bredfeldt from the former Free City of Danzig (Gdansk). I learned that Dan and John had the same destination in the U.S.A. as I had and we soon became friends. In the afternoon, I went shopping in nearby Bergedorf. Since we were not allowed to take any German money with us, I spent most of what I had left on a set of a silver-plated knife, fork, and spoon. I had these utensils engraved with my initials.

On the following morning, we had to prepare a detailed inventory of things we wanted to take along with us. In the afternoon we had our heavy baggage inspected by customs agents. This was, however, not a thorough inspection. After this was done, I had my cardboard suitcases strapped with a steel band. In the evening, I went to see the movie *House of Seven Sins* with Marlene Dietrich. I did not care much for the plot, most likely because I did not understand it properly.

On Saturday, I went shopping, again, for sundries, primarily to spend my leftover money. Among these was a travel alarm clock. I was now down to 4 DM. On Sunday afternoon, November 25th, I visited my cousin Horst Wiehler and together we went to say good-bye to my brother Jürgen and found him very ill with the flu and a high fever. Even though he was a "poor student," Jürgen gave me 20 DM as a farewell present.

Horst and I spent most of the afternoon at the Mennonite Church in Hamburg-Altona, where Horst's sister Erika lived in a basement apartment with three other Mennonite girls. Erika served us some cake and coffee and one of her roommates, Edith Penner, joined us. We spent a nice afternoon together without realizing at that time that Edith would follow me to Omaha 3½ years later to marry me. Edith had just started her apprenticeship in dressmaking and was struggling to make ends meet. I admired her for that, but my thoughts on this afternoon were concentrating on the unknown I faced in the coming weeks. There was no "spark" that ignited "eternal love" between us, just mutual respect for trying to better ourselves.

Before we parted, Horst told me that he would follow me to America, if he should fail, again, his entrance exam for the engineering curriculum at the Hamburg Technical College. He wanted to try it one more time.

In the morning of Monday, November 26th, we were "deloused" (dusted with the pesticide DDT), which seemed to be a standard procedure for everybody who had lived in overcrowded camps, whether we were infested with these little creatures, or not. In the afternoon, we turned in our heavy baggage for shipment to Bremen-Grohn.

Wentorf, Germany
Wulf Doerry and Dan Bredfeldt
November 26, 1951

On Tuesday at 6:45 AM, we had to report for our departure. Our little group consisting of Dan and John Bredfeldt, Krumins, and myself, stayed together. A truck brought us to the rail station in Bergedorf, where we boarded a special train with limited stops (D-Zug). But this special train did stop frequently and even though we left at 8:45 in the morning, we did not arrive at our destination in Bremen-Vegesack until 2:30 in the afternoon. There we were loaded into buses, while trucks transported our baggage to our new transit camp in Brehmen-Grohn. Our new camp made a very nice impression on us. We were registered and immediately underwent a new delousing procedure. We also were searched for food and lost the sandwiches we had saved for the evening.

Our group was assigned to Building A, Room 231, where we soon were joined by a Latvian friend of Krumins, a Dr. Norvilis, a former professor at the University in Riga.

This camp, too, had been German armed forces barracks. We had a very nice and clean room and even received clean bed sheets and blankets. We no longer had to use and clean our own eating utensils and we now ate our meals in a mess hall. It was like staying at a hotel.

On the following day, we turned in our customs declaration and on Thursday, November 29th, we were notified of our departure date. Dan and John Bredfeldt and I were assigned to the transport leaving on Sunday, December 2, 1951, while our Latvian roommates were to leave on December 4th. Dan, John, and I volunteered to work in the mess hall on the Navy troop ship *MS S.D. Sturgis* and to be part of the advance party to help with the embarkation of the other emigrants when they arrive shortly before the ship's departure. The advance party was to embark one day earlier, on Saturday.

We spent our last two days in this camp taking pictures and saying good-bye to our new Latvian friends and the sister-in-law of Dr. Norvilis, Mrs. Konradi and her daughter Marija. I requested a pass for Thursday afternoon and evening and met Evchen Unruh, Jürgen's fiancée, at her place of work. I spent a pleasant evening with her, but also learned that my brother was still very ill.

On the following morning, we helped Mrs. Konradi and her daughter with their luggage. They were leaving for embarkation in Bremerhaven. The weather was not very nice. It was stormy and rainy. We were kept busy with all kinds of activities, starting with a medical examination at 9:00 AM and followed by orientation meetings. In the afternoon we watched a movie about life in the U.S., followed by another orientation meeting about traveling on a Navy transport. Afterwards, we finished packing our belongings and I used the remainder of the evening to write some letters and postcards. Our little group also spent some time socializing. We regretted that our two Latvian friends were crossing the ocean on a different ship. Our parting on the following morning was very cordial.

Our advance party left at 8:45 AM on Saturday morning and arrived a little over two hours later at the Kolumbus train station in Bremerhaven. After a brief customs inspection, we boarded the *MS S.D. Sturgis* 30 minutes later. We soon had our first American meal consisting of a lot of meat and strong coffee.

I was passenger # 889 and was assigned to Deck E, Compartment 9. We in the advance party immediately claimed a bunk as close to the center of the ship as we could find in our compartment. This was the area where there was minimal movement of the ship in heavy seas. The *Sturgis* was built during W.W.II to carry about 2500 troops. The bunks were stacked 4 high with very little space between them. Mess halls and other facilities were in the upper decks. On our trip to New York, the transport carried only about 1250 D.P.s and refugees.

After we had eaten, we acquainted ourselves with the layout of the ship. We were supposed to assist with guiding the other passengers to their assigned compartments when they arrived on Sunday afternoon. The transport was scheduled to leave the port soon after their embarkation.

We also were instructed in the use of the dishwashing equipment in the mess hall. We had to use live steam to heat the cold water and it was easy for us to get scalded.

Our departure day was the *First Advent Sunday* and the beginning of the Christmas season. There was nothing on the ship indicating to us that this season meant anything at all to the American crew. We started to wonder if Christmas was even known in America. We knew very little, if anything at all, about the history and the customs of this country and most of us had very little or no knowledge of the English language. We truly emigrated into the "unknown." But we all carried in us the hope for new opportunities and for a better and more secure future!

The first train with emigrants arrived at 12:50 PM. Two hours later, at 3:00 PM, the "Sturgis" left the Kolumbus Quay in Bremerhaven. It was December 2, 1951 and the beginning of a new life for most of us on board.

As soon as the transport left the Weser River and reached open waters in the North Sea, the ship started to roll and to move up and down with the waves. It did not take long and the first passengers were plagued by seasickness. Many were sick during the entire journey, all 10 days. The group of passengers that was hit the hardest, were families with small children. They were quartered in the officer cabins at the front end of the ship. This was the part of the ship that moved the most in bad weather, and we had bad weather with very heavy seas most of the time. There were times, when the ship heaved so much that the screw propeller came partially out of the water. This always caused a tremendous vibrational shock, as if a mine or a torpedo had hit the ship. Even some members of the crew became seasick and complained that this was the worst weather they had ever experienced in their career. We were cautioned not to go onto the open deck, because waves tended to wash over it. This weather delayed the arrival of the "Sturgis" in New York by one full day. The only calm seas we encountered had been in the English Channel and when we approached the New York harbor.

All able-bodied passengers on the ship had to work. As mentioned earlier, I belonged to the detail that worked in the mess hall. We had to clean up after each meal and had to wash all the dishes. Although seasickness kept many of the travelers from coming to the mess hall, others tried to eat and then spilled the contents of their stomachs onto the trays that we had to clean. This soon thinned our ranks, too. There were not very many emigrants, who were not affected by this miserable illness. We all tried to fulfill our obligation and showed up for work. But when I noticed a tightening around my stomach area and it started to feel like I had a heavy rock in my chest, I quickly returned to my bunk and lay down. After a couple hours of rest, I usually felt well enough to return to work. We worked long hours with only short breaks between meals. Our work detail in the mess hall had the advantage that we could choose what we wanted to eat. I soon started to dislike the regular food we received. Much of it was out of cans and everything had a peculiar taste we identified as "ship taste." After a few days, I limited my diet to fruit and ice cream with a little meat and potatoes.

The remaining "able-bodied" passengers chipped paint and repainted metal surfaces of the ship's super structure. Others were assigned to other short-term jobs at various facilities on the ship.

During our trip, we had to respond to typical alarms to make sure that we knew what to do in case of an emergency. We all were assigned to specific lifeboats and had to wear life jackets when the alarm was sounded. Practically every other day, we set back our watches by one hour. The total time difference between Germany and New York was -6 hours and the distance from Bremerhaven to New York was given to us as 3604 nautical miles or 6487 kilometers (4032 miles).

The little free time I had on board, I spent mostly lying on my bunk. The weather was just too nasty to be on deck, even though I tried it several times. I no longer felt the ship going up and down with the waves. It was the horizon that moved up and down. After a few minutes of this constantly changing reference point, the symptoms of seasickness appeared and I retreated to my bunk. The recreational facilities on the ship were overcrowded, unless the weather conditions were extremely bad. When I was lying on my bunk not sleeping, my thoughts drifted back to Seedorf, in general, and to Christel specifically. I often asked myself whether she, perhaps, meant more to me than just a very friendly young girl. I decided to send her an airmail letter as soon as I arrived at my final destination. I also was wondering if and when I would see Christel, again.

We finally reached the American coast late in the evening of December 12, 1951 and dropped anchor outside of New York harbor at 10:30 PM. It was a short night for us. We were woken up at 2:45 AM in the morning and had breakfast at 3:30 AM. Two hours later, we were finished with our work and turned in our carry-on luggage. We had to remain below deck and thus were unable to see the *Statue of Liberty* when we passed her on our way to the pier, where the "Sturgis" tied up at 7:00 AM. We all were very disappointed about not being able to see this famous and symbolic statue. At 8:30 AM we were called to come up on deck. As we waited for our baggage to be unloaded, the weather turned cold and snow flurries reminded us of the approaching winter. Finally, three hours later, at 11:30 AM, we were allowed to leave the ship. We all were cold and hungry, but glad that we had reached America and were back on solid ground.

CHAPTER 7:
STARTING A NEW LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD: AVOCA, IOWA
(1951-1952)

Before we could leave the ship, we lined up for clearance by US Customs. The lines were very long, but the questioning of the immigrants was brief and superficial. Our baggage was already being unloaded by large nets and a hoist on board of the Navy transport. The hoist and net lowered the bundles of suitcases not very gently to the quay. Everything was dumped in small piles. The weather became increasingly colder and snow flurries started to turn the pavement white. I was glad when the customs officer cleared me and I could start looking for my baggage. I was very disappointed when I found a long crack in the lid of my good and expensive Vulkan-Fiber suitcase, while my other two cheap cardboard suitcases had only a few dents at the corners. Well, there were others like me who had even greater problems. Some suitcases had split wide open and had spilled a part of their contents. There was nothing we could do but to retrieve our belongings and move on.

Our next stop was a large customs hall. Here, all the different sponsoring organizations had tables for people to register and receive instructions for travel to their final destination. The Bredfeldt brothers and I reported to the *Traveler's Aid Society*, a non-profit organization assisting travelers. There we received a bus ticket to Omaha, Nebraska, and $10.00 for expenses. We also were told that our chartered Greyhound bus would leave at 4 PM from the main entrance of the hall. Our group consisted of 19 immigrants, seven of whom had Omaha, NE as their destination. The others traveled with us for only part of the way.

Since we had an early breakfast, we were quite hungry. We were very grateful, when a member of the Salvation Army handed each of us a donut and a paper cup of hot coffee. It was the first donut I had ever seen and eaten in my life. It tasted better than any donut I have ever eaten since! I think of this every year when I send donations to various organizations. There is always a check for the Salvation Army! Some people also invested some of their money in sandwiches and sweets available from vending machines. Even though I was hungry, I was holding out for something cheaper and more substantial at a later time. Nobody could tell us how long we had to live off our $10.00. I had already spent $1.05 for shipping my biggest suitcase by Greyhound Freight to Omaha because we were allowed to board the bus with only two carry-on baggage items.

On Thursday, December 13, 1951, at 4 PM we boarded our bus. The bus soon took us through a section of New York City that did not make a good impression on us. The streets were littered with newspapers and cardboard boxes. We saw few people, but trash was everywhere! It seemed to be an industrial area and there were no signs that reminded us of the approaching Christmas Holiday. However, this soon changed as the bus headed west for the Pennsylvania Turnpike and when we passed through residential areas and business districts in New Jersey. Here we saw homes, yards, stores and streets illuminated with an abundance of colored electric lights. Although we had never seen anything as gaudy and carnival-like as this, the decorations assured us that Christmas was not unknown in this country!

It was very cold outside and it was difficult for us to keep warm. We were not properly dressed for this kind of weather and our heavy woolen coats were inaccessible in our baggage. The Interstate Highway System did not yet exist. The law demanded that whenever a bus came to a railroad crossing, the driver had to stop the vehicle. He then had to open the door and to listen for approaching trains. Every time this happened, the accumulated warm air escaped the bus and it took a long time before the big vehicle warmed up, again.

After we crossed New Jersey and traveled on the Pennsylvania Turnpike (toll road), we were amazed at the speed our bus traveled on the wet expressway. The speedometer indicated 65-70 miles per hour. This was considerably faster than anybody in our group had ever traveled before and we hoped for the best!

We crossed the Appalachian Mountains during the night. The snowy landscape was beautiful and the country seemed to us like a fairyland. It made us forget all the trash we had seen on the streets of New York City.

We soon discovered that our lack of knowledge of the English language was a severe handicap. Our average English vocabulary consisted of about three dozen simple words we still could remember from our school days. One word in particular raised our curiosity. Many signs advertised *gift shops*. The meaning of the word "gift" in German is "poison." Since many words of the same spelling in English and German have a similar meaning in both languages, it took us a while, before we realized that these signs were not advertising places where one could buy poison. It was too dark in the bus for us to look for a dictionary in our carry-on baggage.

Every few hours, the bus stopped at a Greyhound bus station to give the driver a break and the passengers an opportunity to use the restrooms and to buy a snack. Most of us had not eaten anything substantial since our breakfast on the ship. We were looking for some good food, but did not dare to spend our scarce funds on something we had no idea what it actually was. Our English was too poor for asking any questions! The words *hamburger*, *hot dog* and *chili* did not mean anything to me and did not sound worthwhile to gamble my money for. But when I found a Hershey 8-ounce candy bar for a quarter (25 cents), I immediately bought it and enjoyed eating it.

At about 8 AM in the morning, we finally arrived in Cleveland, Ohio. Here we had two hours before we were scheduled to leave with a new charter bus. This gave us an opportunity to scout around for something to eat. We finally found a small retail bakery where we bought some hard rolls, lunchmeat, and cheese. We had a feast!

At 10 AM we left for Chicago. We constantly looked out of the windows and noticed subtle changes in the landscape, in farming practices, and in the prosperity of various regions. As we progressed farther to the west, we noticed an increase in the size of farms, better maintained farm buildings, and more livestock on pastures and in farmyards. The predominant crop appeared to be corn. Soybeans were not yet grown in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.

One of our rest stops was in Gary, Indiana. When we continued our trip, and only a few blocks from the Greyhound station, a truck hit our bus while we were waiting for a traffic light to

change. The radiator of our bus was damaged and we had to wait for four hours before a replacement bus arrived. The weather turned colder and it was snowing. We were glad when we finally arrived in Chicago at about 1 AM. Here we waited for another four hours before we departed with a regularly scheduled bus. Our group of 19 immigrants had shrunk at every major city since Cleveland. After Chicago, only seven remained with Omaha as their final destination.

There was no expressway linking Chicago with Omaha and the bus stopped now at every Greyhound station along the way. We left at 5:15 AM and finally arrived in Omaha at about 11 PM on Saturday, December 15, 1951. The cold weather and the many stops on the way, including those at railroad crossings, kept the bus from ever warming up to a comfortable temperature. We had another minor accident in Iowa City. Our bus hit a car in front of us as it tried to make a left turn. But all formalities were quickly taken care of and about 15 minutes later our trip continued.

Since we were now traveling with a scheduled bus, we met fellow passengers who were willing to try their German vocabulary on us. One of these was a university student. He had been stationed in Germany during his service time and spoke German quite well. He bought each of us something to drink. Otherwise, my diet had not changed very much from eight-ounce Hershey candy bars and an occasional pint of milk.

The president of the German American Society of Omaha, Nebraska, Mr. Val Peter, welcomed us when we arrived in Omaha. His brother and sister-in-law accompanied him. Now we finally found out who had sponsored our immigration to the U.S. In fact, Mr. Peter had been instrumental for the change in the Displaced Persons Act that made it possible for 350,000 German refugees to come to the U.S. He had actively lobbied for this change in the law during his frequent trips to Washington DC. His grandson, Father Peter, is now the director of Boystown, Nebraska (now *Girls and Boys Town*).

Mr. Peter and his brother took us to the German Old Peoples' Home on the south side of Omaha. It felt good to clean up and to sleep in a bed after 56 hours in buses and bus stations. We were very tired and it did not take long for us to fall asleep.

When we woke up on Sunday morning, we had our first real breakfast in three days. We had toast and corn flakes. But we did not know how to eat the corn flakes. We had never before eaten any kind of cold breakfast cereal. We therefore started to eat them as they were and drank milk to "wash them down". Finally, someone suggested pouring the milk over the cereal. This made sense to us! It was the beginning of our learning the local customs.

In the evening, we were invited to the Christmas party of the German Musik Verein (music society). Again, our reception was very friendly and we all received a bag filled with candy and tree nuts. This party was our first direct exposure to a different culture. As we knew it, Christmas in Germany was celebrated on a much more religious level than what we observed at this party. Children performed for the audience by step dancing and twirling batons. Even the songs were more cheerful and "worldly" than we were used from Christmas celebrations in Germany. That this type of Christmas party was not an exception, we saw on the following evening, when we attended a Christmas party given by a grade school.

On Monday morning, Mr. Peter sent us his old chauffeur who took us to register at the local Social Security office. After that, he brought us to the travel bureau owned and operated by his son William Peter. Here we found out how much money we owed Mr. Peter. Our total bill was $29.79 for the bus ticket plus the $10.00 given to us by the Traveler's Aid Society in New York.

I was anxious to find a job and let Mr. Bill Peter know that I wanted to work on a farm. I met a couple of farmers in his office who asked me all kinds of questions about my farming skills.

On the following morning, Tuesday, December 18, 1951, I finally did what I had planned for several days: I did my laundry. There were laundry facilities in the building and it didn't take long to wash everything with a machine. While I was hanging up my clothes to dry, I was notified to be ready in 15 minutes to be picked up with all my belongings. I packed my things and rolled my wet clothes into my blanket. When I was finished, Mr. Peter's chauffeur was already waiting for me. At the travel bureau I was told that a farmer from Avoca, Iowa, was coming to pick me up. I was given the address of the farm and quickly wrote it on the envelope of the letter I was ready to mail to my parents. I also bought a subscription to the German newspaper published by Mr. William Peter three times every week.

It did not take long, before Mr. Raymond Thomsen and his wife Jeannette entered the office. They made a good impression on me. After a brief introduction to the Thomsens, I said goodbye to my comrades. After I had loaded all my belongings into the large trunk of Ray's large 88 Oldsmobile, we drove to the Greyhound station where we picked up my big suitcase. We then drove to Iowa. We had lunch after Christmas shopping in Council Bluffs. Then we proceeded to the farm near Avoca, Iowa. While Ray and Jeannette shopped in the town, I walked behind them like a little dog, making sure that I did not lose sight of them.

Avoca, Iowa, was a small rural town with a population of about 1500. It is located at the junction of US Highway 59 and State Route 83, about 35 miles north east of Council Bluffs. The Thomsen farm was located near an intersection of two mile-roads a few miles west and one mile north of the town. The farm was one *quarter section* (160 acres) of mostly prime agricultural land. Most of it was planted with corn. The remainder was planted with oats and some alfalfa for hay. Practically all of the grain and hay was used to feed the livestock on the farm. Most of the cashflow was generated by the sale of fattened cattle and hogs. At the time of my arrival at the farm, the livestock consisted of one horse, one Hereford (white face) bull, about 17 Hereford (white face) cows to produce calves for feeding, 26 heads of steers and heifers on feed for sale. The farm also had 3 Guernsey milk cows, one boar, 17 sows, and about 50 small pigs on feed. There were also about 150 laying hens, 2 dogs, and 4 cats. The milk from the cows was separated and once every week, the dairy picked up the cream. The pigs received the skimmed milk. The cream and the eggs from the chicken generated some minor cash flow for groceries and incidentals.

Even though this farm was not a very efficient operation, one person could easily do all the daily work, especially during the winter months. As time went on, I started to wonder about the reason for my presence. Besides "board and room," I was to be paid $75.00 per month. Ray also talked about 50% more pay during the peak work season, bonuses and other long-term incentives

I really never was interested in. My main concern was to be treated well. There were no fringe benefits or health insurance. I had to pay taxes and for any insurance I wanted to carry out of my own pocket. Considering the currency exchange ratio and the purchasing power of the dollar, I earned here considerably more than I had ever earned in Germany. Actually, the reason why Ray could easily afford me was the "good time" agriculture experienced in this country after World War II. There was a dramatic food shortage in most parts of the world and, consequently, farmers received a very good price for all their commodities. But this would soon change!

My daily routine consisted of getting up in the morning at 5:45 AM. At 6:10 AM I started to feed the livestock and milked the cows with a machine directly attached to a milk can and connected to a vacuum line. Breakfast was at 7:30 AM. The main meal was at noon and supper was served at 6:15 PM. I started to feed the livestock, again, at about 3:30 PM. The rest of the day I spent with preparing the feed, gathering eggs, and doing other chores around the yard.

One of the main chores during the winter was to keep the water tanks from freezing and to shovel snow to enable us to feed the animals. The sows were in pens in a barn. The Hereford cows were out in the fenced-in fields feeding on corn stalks and on whatever they could find. In very bad weather, we also gave these cows some hay. They had no shelter other than a depression in the fields or the gully of a creek draining the fields. The steers and heifers fed for sale were in the fenced-in feed yard and found shelter in a partially enclosed shed. Their feed tables were outside in the yard and positioned on both sides of an enclosed wagon. This wagon contained the supply of ground corn on the cob. The feeder pigs were mingling with the feeder steers and heifers, but were fed separately in the hog barn.

We had two large open water tanks that needed to be kept full and also kept from freezing. We used a regular garden hose for filling these tanks. The hose serving the tank for the cows in the fields across the dirt mile-road was inside a galvanized steel pipe buried below the road surface. The pipe protected the rubber hose from being damaged by road traffic, but created a problem when the hose was not completely drained and froze. Fortunately, we experienced this problem only a couple of times.

Gasoline heaters kept the water in the tanks from freezing. The heater was submerged in the water and the fire was kept going with gasoline constantly dripping from a small tank into the heating chamber. The real trick was to light the heater. We did this by priming the heating chamber with some gasoline. Then we threw a burning wooden match into the heating chamber. When we were lucky, the gas in the heating chamber would ignite immediately with a minor explosion and with a flame shooting out of the vent pipe. But sometimes, the match would extinguish and nothing would happen. Usually, we would wait for a short while, before we looked into the heater to see whether or not the gas was burning. When the heating chamber was dark, we threw in another burning match. Well, the timing was sometimes perfect for singeing our eyebrows and the stubbles on our faces! But we were always lucky and never were seriously burned!

The arctic storm that had produced the pre-Christmas blizzard had also left the Midwest in a deep freeze with temperatures below zero degrees Fahrenheit. I soon found out that my winter

clothing was not adequate for this climate. On his next trip to town, Ray bought me for Christmas a cap that offered better protection for my ears. His concern for me was reassuring!

On Sunday evening, December 23rd, I joined the Thomsens when they went to a Christmas party presented by the Sunday School at their church. Their daughter Rae Jean (9 years) participated in a play. The church in Avoca was a simple structure and I was surprised that it did not have a steeple with a bell. When we left that evening, I met another ethnic German from the Black Sea region in Russia. His name was Otto Flöther. Otto's family had been deported to Siberia and he knew nothing about their whereabouts and whether his parents were still alive. He now worked on the Fischer farm in Avoca.

On Christmas Eve, we prepared everything in the morning so we could stay away during lunchtime. Ray and I wanted to get our hair cut at the barber shop, but I had no idea that we would first drive to Harlan, about 13 miles north of Avoca, to visit the family of Jeannette Thomsen's sister. I did not know about this intended visit and was very embarrassed, because I wore my work boots and an old pair of pants. I had already noticed the custom of removing all outside clothing when one entered a home. This included shoes. Most homes had carpets in every room and this custom kept the floor coverings clean.

The family of Jeannette Thomsen's sister was very friendly and the little son claimed me immediately as his playmate. He showed me all his toys and also his pygmy chicken. I then played ball with him and he was proud that a *German* spent time with him. After a big dinner at noon, during which I unknowingly ate my first oysters, we visited the barbershop in town and were back on the farm at 4 PM, in time to feed the livestock and to milk the cows. The children were anxious to open their presents after supper. I had gone to my room to clean up and to change clothes, when I was called down to join the family. I received another present: a box of peppermint chocolate wafers, which I consumed during the coming days. Ray also filmed us with his 8-millimeter movie camera as we were sitting next to the Christmas tree. Afterwards, we watched a couple of films taken by the Thomsens during the previous summer on their vacation trip to California. The beauty of the Rocky Mountains impressed me. The films showed the mountains in their best colors and I was wondering, whether I would ever be able to travel to these beautiful regions of this large country.

On Christmas Day, I was invited by the son of the minister to join him, Otto Flöther, Karl Nollert (a Swabian who already lived in this country for 43 years) and another German-American to attend the German church service in Oakland, about 14 miles south of Avoca. This church had a steeple and was beautifully situated on top of a hill and next to a lonely road. It was a very nice service in both languages. Unfortunately, the congregation was unable to get together when the worshipers were asked to sing. About half of the people knew only German songs and the remainder knew only English songs. But it was a nice experience for me and I also met a family that had come to this country only three weeks earlier.

We had our Christmas dinner at the home of Ray's mother in the town, where she lived in her own home. She served us the traditional roasted turkey with all trimmings. At this occasion, I also met a few more relatives of the Thomsens, including Ray's 91-year old grandmother, who came to this country from Holstein, Germany, when she was 8 years old (in about 1868). Even

though Christmas in America, as far as I was able to judge it, was not as "festive" as I was accustomed to in Germany, I liked it! Although my thoughts often returned to Germany, I was not homesick. I thought of Christel in Seedorf, the leisurely walks my family and I took during the Holidays through the village and nearby fields, and the happy children when they received their presents.

After the Christmas dinner, I returned to the farm to feed the livestock. Ray picked me up, again, when it was time for supper. It was already very late in the evening, when we finally returned to the farm to get some rest.

The farmhouse was of a design typical for homes built in the late 1800s. It had two stories with a porch at the front entrance and was "modernized" to contain a nice and large kitchen and a bathroom next to the kitchen. It also had a nice living room where we spent the evenings talking or watching television. The bedrooms for the family were on the second floor, while I slept in an attic room. The original house had only a fruit cellar and a storm shelter under part of the house. These rooms were accessible from the outside, only. The cellar was later enlarged by carefully excavating the remaining area under the house without getting too close to the foundation.

The new room in the cellar contained a "stoker furnace" and storage for "stoker coal." The stoker furnace was automatically "stoked" (supplied) with coal from a supply hopper refilled by us once or twice a day. The warm air heated by the furnace was ducted to heat the house, except my attic room. The only heat my room received came through an 8 inch diameter hole in the floor from the children's bedroom below it. By inserting steel rings into the opening, one could control how much or how little warm air was flowing into my room. Old homes were not insulated and when the temperature dropped to below zero degrees Fahrenheit with a strong wind howling outside, I made use of every bedspread and blanket I could get my hands on. Of course, this lack of heat in the winter turned into too much unwanted heat during the summer, when I had no fan for air circulation. Home air conditioners did not exist, yet. Homes depended on the "natural air conditioning" provided by large trees and a "cool breeze" blowing when one was sitting outside on the porch.

The telephone system was comprised of *party lines*. A single telephone wire connected a series of farm homes. Each home was assigned a sequence of rings, like "three long, two short." When we heard the sequence of rings assigned to us, we picked up the telephone receiver and answered the call. If we wanted to call a neighbor on the same line, we just cranked his sequence of rings. But if we wanted to call others, we had to call for assistance from the operator. It was one of the favorite pastimes for children and adults alike, to listen in on telephone calls made by others. As one spoke, one could hear the clicking noise when people picked up the receiver. Sometimes, one could even hear children fighting in the background, because a child did not want to yield the telephone to the brother or sister, or even a parent. One time I was even told that a neighbor had tape-recorded a conversation I had with John Graff, a German young man working on our neighbor's farm. Although John and I had no secrets to share and no neighbor spoke German well enough to understand us, we never again talked over the telephone to each other.

My birthday, a Saturday in 1951, was like any other day. On the following day, the Thomsen family left for town in the morning and did not return until 6 PM. I fixed my own meal and

enjoyed being alone and having the time to take care of my own business. I had all my work done by the time Ray returned to the farm.

New Year's Eve was a very busy day. It started to thaw and the open barn for the feeder cattle turned wet and muddy. We hauled the manure to the fields and had everything cleaned by the time it turned dark. We all stayed at home in the evening. We watched television and talked about the present state of the world. I also told the Thomsens things out of my own past. I learned quickly that their knowledge of what had happened in Europe during and after World War II was very limited and often also distorted. We went to bed shortly before midnight.

On New Year's Day, I watched my first Rose Bowl parade on television. I was quite impressed by the elaborately decorated floats moving slowly along the wide streets of Pasadena, California. I was also awed by the cost of these. Some were mentioned to cost over $5000. It was difficult for me to understand the expenditure of so much money for only one float for a single parade! But I very much enjoyed watching this parade.

We then watched the Rose Bowl game after dinner. Illinois played Stanford University. It was the first football game I ever watched being played. It was quite different from soccer and I wondered about the accuracy of the game's name. The ball was not a real round ball and it hardly ever was kicked with a foot. It was usually thrown or carried in hand until the opposite team pounced on the player who had possession of the ball. This looked more like a brawl to me than a game!

Watching television was a major occupation for us in the evenings or on Sundays. I was amazed to see so much brutal violence in sport, such as boxing and wrestling. Matches seemed to be more shows of violence and brutality than sport. Even the *western shows* (cowboys and Indians) were primarily based on violence. The most enjoyable shows for me were variety shows based on talent, and documentaries of natural or historical events.

One evening, Ray introduced me to "shopping by mail." He got out the *Sears and Roebuck* catalogue and we assembled an order for warm and solid work clothing for me. I couldn't believe it, how cheap everything was in this country! When the order arrived a week later, I found that the American denim work clothing was far superior to my German clothes. I now had a blue coverall for outside work and a striped coverall to wear around the house or when I went with the Thomsens to visit or shop in town. I also ordered a lined jacket, 12 pair socks, and a pair of rubber boots. The total cost was about $15.

On January 4th, we had to butcher one of our feeder heifers. It had a physical problem (hemorrhaging from the bowels) and it was cheaper to butcher the animal than to call the veterinarian. However, when several days later two more heifers showed the same symptoms, the veterinarian gave all feeder cattle an injection to correct this problem.

Butchering an animal on this farm differed significantly from what I had experienced in Germany. There was no professional butcher present and no official inspector looked at the meat to determine that it was free of disease and parasites, like tapeworms. On the other hand, most organs and the blood were not utilized, like it was customary in Germany. In Germany,

practically all the organs were used as sausage meat. The liver, brain, lung, heart, stomach, and tongue were all eaten in one form or another. There was no sausage made from animals butchered by farmers in this country.

On Friday afternoon, Ray asked our neighbor down the mile-road, Paul Wise, to help him with butchering the heifer. Paul came over with an old 22-caliber rifle and shot the animal in the head. He also helped with the removal of the hide and the evisceration. The chicken got the head without the brain and the pigs ended up with the viscera, except for the liver and heart. The carcass was then put on the roof of the porch to cool down overnight. On Saturday evening, after work, a meat cutter came from Avoca to cut the carcass into small portions, which were wrapped in white paper and the packages were marked as to their content. Some of the meat was ground into hamburger meat. Since it was very cold outside (below zero degrees Fahrenheit), the packages were placed back onto the roof and allowed to freeze solid. On Sunday, we brought all the packages we had no room for in the home freezer, to the *locker*. Practically every rural town had a "locker" facility. This is a commercial storage freezer, where businesses and individuals can rent lockers (freezer compartments) to store frozen meat and vegetables. Afterwards, we had dinner at the home of Ray's mother.

On this weekend, I took the first pictures of the farm and the Thomsen family. Even though it was very cold outside, the sun was shining and there was no breeze. I was surprised, that I did not feel the cold as much as I did in Germany. Apparently, the very calm and dry air and the sunshine had something to do with this perception.

One evening I took my time to darn my socks in the living room. Jeannette offered to do this for me. But when she returned the socks to me, I found that she had merely sewn together the edges of the hole. From then on, I mended my socks myself! I concluded, that she did not have the skill to mend or darn clothes! This also explained to me, why Ray always went to town in his "good" striped coveralls that had a big hole on his right thigh. This never seemed to bother him or her, but it would have embarrassed me very much!

I was anxiously waiting for my first letters from Germany. But every new day brought only disappointments. I slowly realized that I could not expect a very active correspondence with Christel or with my family. I also started to make plans for the future. Like my late Uncle Heinz Penner 20 years earlier, I wanted to stay in the USA for at least 5 years to get my citizenship and to save money to attend the *Thaer Seminar* in Celle, Germany, for an advanced study in agricultural sciences. When I was finished with this training, I wanted to get married and settle down. But I also was very much aware of the fact that all my plans were contingent on political developments during the coming years. I also wanted to stay in Avoca until at least spring 1953. I liked to live with the Thomsens and was impressed by the fact that Ray often helped with washing or drying dishes. We also helped with hanging up the laundry and cleaning the basement. There was no real "division of labor" in this family like it was customary in Germany. Everybody helped until all the work was done! I liked this!

Farm work was much more mechanized in the USA than it was in postwar Germany. Consequently, farm labor here was much more productive! When we wanted to grind the corn on the cob to feed it to the feeder cattle, we hired a hammer-mill mounted on a truck. The truck

with the mill brought along a conveyor to move the corncobs from the wire corncrib to the mill. The truck also had a blower to convey the ground cobs into the covered feed wagon, which was later placed between the feeder benches for the cattle. Some of the corn was shelled, i.e. removed from the cob, before it was ground for the pigs and chicken. This ground corn was stored in bulk in a shed, where I blended it with feed supplements before I fed it to the pigs and chicken. It took only a few minutes to set up all the equipment for grinding, and everything was done in a little over an hour. A very efficient operation!

I was astonished that whatever feed and fertilizer we purchased was packaged in 50-lb bags. When I told Ray that in Germany bags usually contained 50, 75, or 100 kilograms (110, 165, or 220 lbs), he only replied that even 50-lb bags were too heavy for him!

After a few very nice winter days, we had a thunderstorm in the early morning hours of January 14th. Never before had I experienced a thunderstorm with rain in the middle of a winter! Apparently, anything and everything was possible in this country! The rain melted the rest of the snow and converted the surface of the cattle pen into a deep layer of mud mixed with manure. The feeder pigs had a hard time moving through this muck and as time went on, even the cattle had a difficult time with it. I was glad that I had bought the rubber boots. But I had to be careful that my feet did not slip out of them when I walked through the yard. The mud-manure mixture almost reached the top of my boots when I waded through it with pails of hog feed or on my way to the feeder benches for the cattle. The soil below this mud was still frozen and thus was unable to absorb any water. I tried to alleviate this problem by making small drainage trenches, but these lasted only until one steer or heifer walked through it. I did not mind this, because I liked to be outside and by myself. While I was doing this, I practiced to formulate English sentences. There also was plenty time for me to daydream.

My English vocabulary improved slowly, but steadily. My major problem was to first figure out whether Ray spoke English to me, or tried to use whatever German words he remembered from his childhood. When he was a child, he had learned from his grandparents some *low German* words and phrases. "Low German" is a collective name for a large number of different local dialects in the "low lands" of northern Germany. "High German" originated in the "high lands" of southern Germany and was chosen as the formal dialect for all Germany. Of course, *high German* was standardized. It also was determined that the words would be pronounced as they were officially spelled. This was exactly the opposite from what was done when the English dialects were standardized. In English, the attempt was made to spell the words the way they were pronounced. Many combinations of vowels and consonants were used to represent different vocal sounds. Since the pronunciation of English words was never standardized and languages are dynamic, we now find the same combination of letters pronounced differently in different words (e.g. treat & tread; heal & health) and different combinations of letters are pronounced the same (e.g. read & reed; read & red). Some words are even pronounced differently in the US and England (e.g. the word "either"), or by different people in this country (e.g. the word "trough"). Only words derived from Latin roots seem to have retained much of their original spelling and a relatively consistent pronunciation.

Like in the case with small children, I had a difficult time differentiating between words with a similar pronunciation. One day, Ray was trying to tell me something about a neighbor's dad

(father). Since in Germany we use only the word *father* in this context, I understood that our neighbor was "dead" and whatever Ray tried to tell me did not make sense. Well, after a while I finally understood that he was trying to tell me something about our neighbor's father. Actually, this was not a case where I lacked the vocabulary; it was really a cultural difference that prevented me from understanding the word "dad."

I got along real well with Jeannette (Mrs. Thomsen). I was not on the farm for four weeks when she confided to me that she had differences with her mother-in-law and that her 9-year old daughter Rae Jeane was sassy to her. Well, this was no surprise to me, since I had often noticed that this girl needed some stronger disciplinary action. But as it is often the case with parents, Ray and Jeannette could not agree on anything with respect to raising their two children. Ray always sided with his daughter and thus was her "dear daddy." It was only a matter of time before the 2-year old Terry Jean would follow in his sister's footsteps.

On Tuesday, January 15, 1952, the entire Thomsen family left for Omaha and did not return until 8 PM. I knew what I had to do to take care of all the livestock. Jeannette just told me to "help yourself" and to eat whatever I liked. Nobody had ever told me this in Germany and I took it as proof that I was part of the family. I had fun preparing my meals. For lunch I had fried potatoes and hamburgers. I used plenty of butter for frying. For supper I had leftovers, corn flakes and two fried eggs. I was still always hungry and tried to regain the weight I had lost on the ship and during the bus trip. Always being outside in the very cold weather made me hungry too. Ray was telling all his neighbors how much I could eat! But all this had an end and I soon returned to eating "normal portions."

I finally received my first letters from Germany on Wednesday, January 16th. One letter was from my father and the other was from Christel. Although Ray wanted me to open and read the letters right away and in front of him, I waited until after we had finished our noon meal and I had gone to my room. I did not care much for "witnesses" who wanted to know the content of the letters. I read Christel's letter first. She had accepted my offer to address me informally with my first name. She told me about her little sister Jutta, who was now one year old and started to walk. But at the end of the letter, she asked me not to write to her, again, and not to tell anybody that she had written me a letter. I honored this request, but decided to send her mother a card for her birthday on January 30th.

My father sent me a brief letter encouraging me "to see the world" and return to Germany when I was ready to settle down. He urged me to think first of myself. Before I left Germany, he had threatened that he would not send me a letter while I was in America. I was now surprised that he was the first one of my family to write to me. He also wrote that Mamuschka, my stepmother, would write me a more detailed letter. Mamuschka continued to keep me and my family informed of all "family news," as long as she lived and was able to write by hand or, as it was later the case, with an electric typewriter.

My father's suggestion was not much different from my own plans. At this point, I still considered using my time in the USA primarily as an opportunity to add to my experience in agricultural technology and management. I had not yet discovered that this country offered unlimited opportunities to anybody who was willing to learn new things and to pursue new

opportunities in an open market place! It generally involved not only long and hard work, but also risk taking. I myself did not mind the work, but tended to minimize the risks I wanted to take!

The second half of January brought a week of warmer weather, which only aggravated the muddy conditions in the feed yard. The dirt mile-roads became impassable for most vehicles. Deep ruts became even deeper every time a car "plowed" through that mud, until the axles were resting on top of the mud between the ruts. Neighbors were often called to pull out cars with their farm tractors. As soon as the surface of the dirt roads had sufficiently dried, the county graded the roads to make them passable until it rained again, or new snow melted. This became a constant struggle during the winter and spring!

Cold weather moved in again on Sunday, January 20th. On Tuesday morning, the temperature was zero degrees with 40 miles per hour winds. We had a difficult time keeping the heaters lit in the water tanks. The feeder cattle congregated in their shelter and did not want to face the cold wind at the feed benches. The Hereford cows did the same. They did not even have a shelter to protect them from the icy wind. They just crowded together to keep each other warm.

It seemed that Ray suffered more from the cold weather than I did. This was good, because he called me into the house to warm up several times during the day. In the afternoon, he even offered me popcorn during one of the warm-up breaks. Ray did not want me to freeze and I appreciated this!

My stepmother's letter finally arrived on Wednesday, January 23rd, together with a letter from my sister Reingard. Mamuschka reported in detail on what had happened during Christmas and on my sister Gundula's engagement to Willi Eggeling on New Year's Eve. Everybody in my family drank a toast to my health and my wellbeing here in this country when the New Year started. My sister Astrid, 16 years old, had brought home from school a very good report card. Only my brother Uwe (17 years) produced some worries for the family. His promotion to the next grade in high school was not assured. Reingard's letter, as usually, did not say much. But I was very happy to hear from her, especially since I had just written to her.

On the following day I received a letter from Seedorf. Mrs. Schmeling wrote that they all had thought of me and everybody was sending greetings. Even Mr. Schmeling wrote about his long-term plans. The new combine, the first for the farm, had been delivered. The two young horses were now trained and worked well together when harnessed. The wheat yielded well. Even Christel contributed to this letter and told me about the news from Seedorf and about her birthday. At the end of her letter, she asked me to disregard the previous letter and I should act as if that letter had never been written!

Terry Jean's 2nd birthday was on Monday, January 28th. The entire extended families of Ray and Jeannette were invited on the Sunday prior to this day to celebrate this event with an elaborate dinner, including the traditional decorated birthday cake. I was readily accepted as part of the family and participated in discussions. These conversations always provided me with an opportunity to explain the present and past conditions in Germany, including that Adolf Hitler was really dead. I also explained the use of potatoes as a feed to fatten hogs. Although I still

lacked vocabulary and I made many mistakes, I had no difficulty expressing my thoughts and communicating with the guests.

On this Monday, January 28th, I received a letter from our Latvian friend Vilhelms Krumins, who had arrived in the US two days after we did. He now lived in Worcester, Massachusetts and had a difficult time. Although well educated, he lacked the necessary language skills to find a good job. He temporarily lived with Latvian friends and earned his living by washing dishes in a restaurant. He was quite unhappy. I wrote back to him, but never heard from him, again.

The Thomsens attended a lot of parties during the winter and made frequent trips to Omaha, especially on weekends. They usually left the two children with his mother in Avoca and returned late in the evenings. I liked being alone and did not mind to prepare the meals for myself. The absence of the family gave me enough privacy for writing letters. I had more prints made from the pictures I took on January 6th and sent these along with my letters to Mamuschka and to the Schmelings. I liked to write letters and put much effort into them. All the new experiences gave me much material to write about.

On Sunday, February 10th, we all climbed into Ray's large Oldsmobile and he took us for a trip through the countryside north and west of Avoca in Pottawattamie and Shelby counties. It was a beautiful country with farms hidden in the valleys between the rolling hills of the former prairie. In my mind, I visualized this country as it may have been before the first European settlers arrived. I compared this vision with the portrayal of the "Wild West" by my favorite author Karl May. Except for windbreaks around farms and along creeks, there were few trees and no forests. Some small farms in hilly areas still used teams of horses or mules. We also saw some farmers still picking corn in the fields. Winter had arrived too early for them or the fields had been too wet. Much of the corn was picked on the cob either mechanically or by hand. In the early 1950th, I never saw combines harvesting corn. Smaller farms, like the Thomsen farm, usually shelled their corn by a separate process at a later time and after the cobs had thoroughly dried in corncribs. Most of the older wooden corncribs had been replaced with new round cribs constructed from steel mesh on concrete bases and covered with metal roofs.

As the month of February approached its end, the outside temperature started to climb to about 60° Fahrenheit and the feed yard started to dry up. We took the disk and mixed the manure with the soil beneath it. We also started to get the farm equipment ready for spring planting and did general work around the farm.

On Saturday, February 26th, Ray and a couple of our neighbors drove to an auction in Nebraska. After I had all my chores done in the evening, I wanted to quickly run the harrow over the feed yard. A couple of hogs escaped while I had the gate open to drive into the yard. While I was trying to chase the hogs back into the yard, a steer managed to escape, too. Even though I tried long and hard to get all the animals back into the feed yard, I remained unsuccessful until Ray finally came home and helped me. It was already late and it started to get dark.

One day when Ray was gone again, Jeannette Thomsen told me more about her family problems. She also mentioned that Ray had told her that I was the best farmhand he had since he took over the farm. Ray was very satisfied with me! I was not very surprised about this, since most good

American workers were looking for better jobs in larger towns and cities. Only those who were too old or lacked ambition and initiative seemed to remain on farms. This was also the reason why there was so much demand for German immigrant farm workers.

In the morning of Thursday, February 28th, one of our neighbors, Frank Peck, came with his German farm worker, Rudi Wiesener, so that I could interpret and help them communicate with each other. Rudi had received a letter from a neighbor of his parents, but not from his folks, even though he had only written to them. Rudi was very disappointed and Frank wanted to know what Rudi's parents' neighbor had written to him. I consoled Rudi by telling him that he may soon receive the letter he is waiting for from his parents. I had to wait for my first letters, too! People often do not understand how important mail can be for those who are separated from them and are now alone in a new and strange environment. Once the individuals have settled down and established a routine, mail becomes less and less important.

On this day, I received my first letter from my cousin Horst Wiehler. He had passed his entrance exam for the *Bauschule* (Technical College for Construction Engineering) and wanted to enroll in it for the fall semester. Horst also wrote that our Uncle Oskar Penner showed interest in him and me. Also, our uncle wished he had had the opportunity to talk to me before I left Germany. Well, it was too late for this! Horst wanted to continue to exchange ideas with me. I immediately responded and offered him some financial assistance.

March arrived with snow, wind, and temperatures around zero degrees Fahrenheit. But the temperature warmed to around 26°F during the day. On March 4th we bought from the Fischer farm a Holstein heifer pregnant with calf. Ray paid for her with the money he had received four days earlier for two feeder Hereford heifers. In my opinion, the Holstein cattle I had seen in this country, did not match the quality characteristics of registered Holstein cows we had in Germany.

During the bargaining process, I had an opportunity to talk again to Otto Flöther. He was born near Odessa, a port on the Black Sea in the Ukraine. Otto had lived through some very difficult times; but he was disappointed by what he had found in America, so far. He had expected too much! His cousin, who had come on the same ship as I did, worked at a Ford plant in Buffalo, N.Y. and now earned up to $140.00 per week.

On Sunday, March 9th, we shipped 28 hogs and a sow to Omaha for sale at the stockyard. We all drove there on Monday morning to attend the auction. But our timing was not very good. The slaughterhouses were closed by a strike. The average weight of the 6 months old hogs was 202 lbs. This was the most desirable weight for them, because their carcasses contained less fat than they would have, if we had fed the pigs to a heavier weight. Fat is not worth as much as meat! Ray received $17.35 per 100 lbs live weight, or about $35.00 per head. He was satisfied.

After all the business was taken care of at the Livestock Bank, we took a quick tour of the facilities in the stockyards. The large stockyard was divided into small pens for cattle and hogs. The auctioneer was usually riding on a horse along paved paths between the pens. It usually took only a few minutes to sell the lot of animals in a pen. The buyers and sellers were already waiting and knew the price range at which these animals would sell. Brokers usually represented

the sellers. The broker also made sure that the animals were watered and fed. The slaughterhouses had generally their own buyers, who bid for an entire lot of animals. Uniformity in size and appearance of the animals was very important. A "runt" (an animal lagging behind in size and weight) can easily depress the price for the entire lot by more than its own value. Farmers usually remove all “runts” from the lot and either sell them separately or feed them longer with another lot of smaller animals. Sometimes they just butcher these animals for their own consumption.

Everything was well organized and the stockyard was capable of handling the sale of tens of thousands of animals on a single day. The busiest days were usually Monday and Tuesday, with some sales on Wednesdays. The packinghouses near the stockyards and other nearby cities usually covered their needs during these days for the rest of the week. Because the optimal weight range for the animals, 190-220 lbs for hogs and 850-1000 lbs for cattle, is relatively small, timing and plain luck were often the most important factors for the profitability of this business. Just a small change in the auction price can make or break a farmer!

Omaha was only one of several "river cities" in the Midwest that had a stockyard during that time. Others were Kansas City, KS, St. Louis, MO, St. Paul, MN, and Sioux City, IA. The largest stockyard was in Chicago, IL. San Francisco, CA, Charlotte, NC, and many other major cities in the eastern states had smaller stockyards, primarily for receiving animals for sale to local meat processors. The rivers serving these cities supplied not only water, but also cheap transportation. The yards and their supporting industries, such as meat packing, tanneries, soap factories, and feed processors, were usually located next to the river on the south side of the cities and as far away from the affluent residential areas as possible. The odors emitted by the yard and its factories were not pleasant and the prevailing winds in the Midwest come from the west and north.

Most of the processing plants were built around the turn of the century with different standards for sanitation and food safety in mind. Organized unions controlled the labor force and their increasing demands caused a lot of problems for the major meat packers such as Swift & Company, Armour, Wilson, Cudahy, and Rath. Frequent strikes paralyzed the meat industry and caused a lot of uncertainty for the farmers supplying the "raw materials" in the form of cattle, sheep, and hogs.

As road traffic improved with the construction of the interstate highway system during the 1960s, new "state of the art" packing and processing plants were built in rural areas and away from the river cities with their strong unions. With the ongoing consolidation of family farms and increased efficiency on the farms, there was adequate good and cheap labor available to operate these new plants. By the mid-1960s, most of the major slaughterhouses near the stockyards had shut down and the trade of cattle, hogs and sheep in the yards had dwindled to almost nothing. The new slaughterhouses are now located near the source of their raw material and are very efficient. They purchase the animals directly from the farmer for delivery as needed. This method encourages the establishment of large feed yard operations that contract with the processors to provide an uninterrupted supply of cattle and hogs fed to specifications. Farmers, who hold out for higher prices than what the processors offer in their contracts, are at

risk. They may not find a buyer when their steers or hogs have reached the optimum weight and may then have to sell their animals at a large discount.

On Friday, March 14th, I went along with the Thomsens to buy groceries. We went to a newly opened store in Harlan and it was the first "supermarket" I had ever seen. The building had been a former dance hall and I marveled at the size of the store and its large selection of packaged goods, of neatly stacked produce, and sundries I had never before seen in a grocery store. I, myself, bought some food to send to my parents in Kirchweyhe. I wanted them to see what kind of food we eat in this country. I bought corn flakes, popcorn, cake mixes, cocoa, coffee, canned fish, and other "ordinary" items. In fact, I bought so much, that I needed two boxes to pack everything. The bill came to $7.58. The most difficult part was to find packaging material. There was no strong paper to wrap the two boxes in and no strong twine to tie them. Rules by the US Custom service prohibited the use of adhesive tape. The Thomsens finally offered me a couple of feed bags made from cotton. They even helped me with sewing these bags as wrapping around the boxes. The postage was $4.08 (14 cents per pound) for both packages together. As I learned later, my family never consumed some of these food items, like the cake mixes and popcorn. My parents did not know what to do with the mixes and the popcorn, and finally discarded these items. People are reluctant to eat things they do not know and do not consume regularly!

On the 21st of March I received a letter from Mamuschka that contained 15 tablets of *Jacutin*. The letter had been opened and had passed the custom inspection. I only had to pay 10 cents for the inspection. These tablets were fumigants and were very effective against roaches and flies when burnt in a closed room. One just needed to cover exposed food.

As spring approached, we had some very nice and warm days. The temperature climbed above the 70°F mark and Ray decided to remove the snow fences next to the cutout section of the mile-road going west to our neighbor Paul Wise. We soon learned that this was a mistake! On Saturday evening of March 22nd, a blizzard moved into our area. The 30-40 miles per hour winds produced snowdrifts several feet high and filled in the cut-out section of the road where we had removed the snow fence. Many roads remained closed for several days. Unfortunately, on Saturday Paul Wise's mother passed away in town and Ray felt obligated to open up the section of the road that had drifted shut. We worked all Sunday, and we even attached the snowplow to the tractor; but it was all for naught! Within a few minutes, the wind filled up with snow everything we had worked so hard to open up. Paul Wise finally used his Jeep to drive across the fields to the highway one mile south of us.

The calving season started just before the blizzard hit us. Ray was worried about the young calves when it turned very cold. The icy wind could easily freeze a calf's eyes and blind it. We brought the cows with calves into a shed on the farm to keep them out of the wind.

The Hereford cows had no problem with giving birth to their calves, but Ray was concerned about one of the dairy heifers. When she started to go into labor, Ray practically pulled the calf out of her. He made no use of the heifer's contractions like I had learned to do.

In the evening of March 25th, Rudi Wiesener called me from the Peck farm to inform me that four more "German boys," as we were called by the farmers, had arrived in our area. They came right in the middle of the snowstorm. We wondered, what they thought of the weather in this country.

On April 15th, I reflected on the events of the past 12 months. It was on this date a year earlier, when I wrote the letter to the employment office in Uelzen to be considered for immigration into the USA. During this past year, I had suffered a depression caused by my back problems and I also was overjoyed when I was informed of my opportunity to start a new life in the USA. But I still was not sure whether my emigration was really progress for me or constituted a setback in my career. I thought back to this day one year earlier, when I rode my bicycle through rain to Bevensen to mail my application at the post office. I also thought of little Jutta Schmeling being baptized on this day, and of Christel returning home from foot surgery at the hospital, so that she could be present for the baptism. I also realized that my farming days were coming to an end, even if I had stayed in Germany. I just did not know, yet, what kind of profession or craft I should learn. I needed money to start a new career and I needed to save for this!

I considered three options. The first was to return to Germany and complete my formal training in agricultural technologies and management to become a consultant or an instructor at a German agriculture school. The second option was to join my Uncle Oskar Penner and help him start a new business venture in case he, too, succeeded in emigrating to the U.S. or Canada. The last and least likely option would be to become a free-lance reporter for a newspaper. I had already written to a newspaper in Uelzen and sent it an essay about German immigrants in the U.S. But when I later received the edited version of my essay, I was surprised and shocked: I could not recognize what I had written and submitted. I learned enough from this attempt, that I never again submitted anything for publication by a newspaper.

Easter Sunday was on April 13th and it was a "white Easter" with snow on the ground. The snow did not stay long and only added to the deep mud in the feed yard. However, it did not take long before the top of the yard had dried up again. On Good Friday, Ray and I volunteered to help the government recover shelled corn from storage bins in an area threatened by flooding of the Missouri River. We earned $5.00 per hour and most of the time we just stood around, because the motor of the conveyor had broken down.

For Easter, I received another letter from Christel. She was visiting her grandparents in Friesland during the Easter break. She also enclosed an Easter card with three carnations. She remembered that carnations were my favorite flowers. I used this card to decorate my room. I wrote her immediately and enclosed two one-dollar bills as compensation for postage. I also received a letter from Horst, in which he gladly accepted my offer to help him financially. I planned to send him DM 1,000.00 (about $250.00, equivalent to over three months' earnings) before October. I liked Horst and I wanted him to succeed! I also offered financial help to my brother Jürgen. I really did not need much money for myself. But Ray Thomsen did not agree with my generosity and was reluctant to give me money to send to Horst. Ray believed that I could not manage my own money.

After Easter, we planted the garden. We bought enough seed potatoes at the supermarket to plant four rows. This planting was a new experience for me! Nothing was planned. Whereas in Germany we planted only whole and healthy medium-sized potatoes, here we cut the potatoes into pieces with one "eye" each. I was very skeptical! When we ran out of one kind of seed in a row, we just switched to another kind. The Thomsens had no idea of what they were doing! Ray had bought asparagus seed with the assumption that he could harvest asparagus shoots later in the year. They were surprised when I told them that the plants needed three years to develop a strong root system, before they could harvest any shoots. We also planted four apple trees under my directions. I only hoped that these trees would grow well.

On Sunday, April 20th, we all got into the Oldsmobile and Ray drove us to the bluffs on the eastside of the Missouri River flood plain. The abundance of snow that had fallen during the winter months was melting and caused an enormous flood, even worse than the flood of 1881. The river had caused major damage upstream and had crested in Omaha and Council Bluffs on April 18th. Volunteers, including my friends Dan and John Bredfeldt, had feverishly worked to raise the height of the levees from 30 feet to 32 feet. There had been a good possibility for the levees breaking and flooding parts of the two cities. Residents living in the endangered areas were evacuated. But fortunately, the Missouri crested at 30.24 feet and the sandbags on the levees kept the river from flooding the two cities!

The crest of the Missouri River had moved at the rate of 2-2½ miles per hour and was two feet higher in the middle of the river than at its banks. The waters not only flooded fields, but also floated buildings from their foundations and destroyed roads and bridges. From where we stood on the bluffs, we could see several homes and buildings under water with only their roofs sticking out. Since the water was already receding, we could see power and telephone lines covered with debris. I was quite impressed with the damage caused by this flood, and I was wondering, why some people lived in the flood plains. Apparently, flooding was not an unusual occurrence in this area, even if it was not as bad every time as it was in April of 1952.

We were extremely busy during the next three weeks. First, we hauled all the muck out of the feed yard and spread it on the fields to be planted with corn. Then we plowed the fields and prepared the soil for planting. It took us 3½ days to plant 50 acres of corn.

It was also the time for the sows to have their pigs. When it was all over, we had 98 more piglets from 13 sows. Ray had promised me half of the litter from the last sow to give birth. But as it turned out, this sow had only three piglets and we divided these among three other sows, while the sow without piglets was to be butchered within the next two weeks.

On Sunday, May 11, 1952, Dan and John Bredfeldt came to visit me with their newly purchased 1949 Ford. It was already late in the day, but I was happy to see the two brothers, again. Dan had just been elected president of the *Young German Club* and he invited me to a social function of this club scheduled for Saturday, May 24th. They also asked me to inform the other "German boys" on the neighbor farms of this coming event. We could take the bus and return on the following day. I immediately called Rudi Wiesener and John Graff.

As our workload increased, Ray became excited and unreasonable. Ray was always worried that he would not get the work done in time and started to find fault with everything I did. I found it difficult to please him and slowly lost my enthusiasm and my interest in the farm. But whenever there was a conflict between us, it never took very long for Ray to "cool off." He always tried to make up for these episodes. This was enough to keep me from walking out on him, even though I was very disgusted. But whenever I talked to John Graff on the Wise farm west of us, I heard that he was in a much worse situation. John did not want to stay there longer than he absolutely had to.

As the crops were planted and the pressure to get things done decreased, my relationship with Ray improved considerably. He, again, acted as if he was my friend and praised me at every opportunity. Our feeder cattle and the pigs did very well and neighbors started to comment on this. But there were increasing reports of difficulties between farmers and their workers, many of them German immigrants.

As work slowed down after Memorial Day, the Thomsens spent several days of every week at the horse races in Omaha, Nebraska. Ray claimed, he made more money at these races than he did by working on the farm. Their daughter stayed with Ray's mother in Avoca, where she attended school. I was by myself and dismantled an old wooden corncrib. I actually enjoyed working by myself. But the problem was on Sundays, when there were no horse races and Ray stayed on the farm and became extremely ambitious. He castrated the piglets and did all kinds of chores he had no time for during the week. Since I had to help him with everything, I no longer had time for myself on weekends. During the week, when he was gone, I worked too. I totally lost control over my own time!

On Saturday, May 24, 1952, Rudi Wiesener, John Graff, two other German farm workers and I took time off to attend the party organized by the Young German Club in Omaha. We took the 3:30 PM bus from Avoca to Omaha and arrived there at 5:00 PM. After asking other people, we finally found the bus that took us to the *German Home* on the south side of the city. Since we were early and hungry, we went to a nice little Italian restaurant where for $2.00 we had a very good meal with excellent service. When we were finished, we returned to the German Home and headed straight for the bar to have a drink.

During the evening, I met August Brasch. He had immigrated 25 years earlier and had married an American girl. We had a nice conversation and I was invited for a visit. I danced a lot and soon noticed that some of the girls did not know a word of German. I never knew how to address the girls, in German or in English. But this did not bother me, since I knew enough English to carry a conversation. I talked to a lot of people about a wide range of subjects. There also were girls who had recently arrived from Germany.

I spent the night at the home of the Bredfeldt brothers. Dan and John never worked on a farm after their arrival in this country. They had taken a job in a hospital where they helped with renovating the building. As time went on, they took on additional work and painted homes. They finally gave up their jobs in the hospital and went into business for themselves. Dan built up a nice business that he kept until his retirement.

On Sunday morning I went with Dan and John to visit the Rauschenberg family who had immigrated 25 years earlier. This family was part of the large number of German immigrants who, like my uncle Heinz Penner, came to this country in the late 1920s. I already had met the Rauschenbergs at the dance party. When I finally left to catch the bus, I had another invitation to visit at a later date. It was noon, when the bus dropped me off at the mile-road leading north to the Thomsen farm. I was by myself until the evening and in the afternoon I took a good 1½-hour nap. I then packed away all my warm winter clothing and took care of my chores. After that, I began to write another letter to Christel, which I finished on the following evening.

On May 28th I received a letter from my stepmother. She wrote that my packages had arrived and that they also had received the money I had sent for my younger siblings. They liked the corn flakes! My sister Reingard seemed to have passed her entrance exam for the teacher-training seminary and had moved to the city of Lüneburg. My sister Gundula had changed her job and worked now in Itzehoe, Holstein. But since her employer, for some reason, did not want married people working at this place, Gundula had postponed her wedding until the fall. She wanted to save some more money.

I again looked at my situation and evaluated my options of staying in Avoca at least until spring 1953, versus moving to a city. The reasons for staying were: 1) I wanted to send DM 2,000.00 to my cousin Horst before the fall of 1952 and I was not sure, whether I could save this much money after I had moved to town. The exchange ratio at that time was fixed at DM 4.20 per US Dollar. 2) I did not want to leave Ray Thomsen during the peak work season on the farm. Despite his unreasonable behavior under stress, I generally was treated quite well. 3) Since I had written only good things about my life here on the farm, I did not know how to explain my leaving the farm. 4) I did not want to contribute to the growing suspicion by the local farmers towards German immigrants. I felt that I had an obligation to work on the farm for at least one year.

There were as many reasons for me to make the change: 1) I was unable to see a future for me in farming. 2) My earning power on the farm was low relative to what I could earn in the city. 3) The Thomsen farm was too small to support a non-family worker. There just was not enough work for me and I experienced no real challenge! 4) I was getting older and got tired of having other people control me for 24 hours every day. I wanted to be my own boss after I had done my work! I was totally dependent on Ray, who treated me as his "German boy" and as if I was a teenager and had no life experience.

On Tuesday, May 27th, we finally brought the sow which had produced the litter of only three piglets to the butcher in Shelby. Like we had done on the farm with the heifer, the butcher shot the sow three times with an old 22-caliber rifle. She did not die quickly. She bled slowly, since there was no attempt made to keep open the cut made with the knife. In Germany, we scalded the skin of hogs with boiling water and then scraped it to remove the bristles. This butcher skinned the carcass, as if it was a steer. Like with the heifer we had butchered in January, all the blood and the intestines were discarded with the exception of the liver and heart. The finished carcass still weighed over 300 lbs. It was then cooled, before it was cut into smaller portions on the following day. The butcher also rendered the lard from the fatty tissues, but he made no sausage.

The corn had emerged and grew rapidly. We started to control the growth of weeds with a cultivator and rotary hoe attached to the tractor. I also learned the reason why most farm tractors at that time had their two front wheels close together. The two wheels fit between two rows of corn and the spacing of the rear wheels was adjusted to the distance between rows. Ray was quite skilled and maneuvered his International Harvester (IH) Farmall tractor with its attached equipment through the fields in the highest work gear. He rarely damaged a plant in the curved rows. His fields had all been *terraced* with government support to reduce erosion during rainstorms. Terraces were not plowed and were designed to minimize sloping of the fields between the ridges. This prevented serious erosion by run-off water after heavy rains. The rows of corn were, of course, parallel to the terraces and were as curvy as these. I must admit, my skill to maneuver the tractor with its implements through the curved rows of corn did not match Ray's. The soil in the fields was in very good condition. Only in wet areas did we have a problem with controlling the weeds.

June arrived with temperatures in the 90's and it was haymaking time. We mowed the alfalfa on Saturday, raked it into windrows on Monday, and turned it once on the following morning. On Tuesday afternoon, we started baling the hay. Paul Wise with John Graff and another neighbor helped us. We worked until 8:45 PM until we had all 569 bales, weighing 70-80 lbs each, stored on the farm. It was hard work, especially working in the hay-loft, where the temperature was between 120-140°F.

This was an occasion when I did not appreciate Ray's method of working. We had a conveyor to move the bales up to the loft, where they tumbled down into a pile. Ray unloaded the wagon as fast as he could at the relatively "comfortable" temperature of 90+°F. By doing this, he made it very difficult for me to keep up with him working in the 120-140°F loft, where I had to pull the bales apart and drag them to the stack in the back of the loft. Ray bragged about how fast he could work, while I thought that he was very inconsiderate! I started to lose my respect for him. Nobody on the German farms I had worked on would have dared to do what Ray did! He would have gotten the bales thrown right back at him.

On Thursday, June 5th, Ray took me to the Selective Service Board of the Pottawattamie County in Council Bluffs, Iowa, where I registered for possible military service. The law prescribed that all males under the age of 28 had to register within 6 months after their arrival in the U.S., regardless of their nationality and citizenship. I was the first DP (**D**isplaced **P**erson) they registered and the board members had to read up in some old books, whether my registration was legitimate. But since I worked on a farm, my service was deferred. I was classified as 4F and assigned the Selective Service number 13-79-28-526.

On Friday, June 13th, I mowed the 12 acres of clover. As I was trying to avoid a water-filled depression in the ground, I drove smack into a swampy area and got stuck. It took four hours before two tractors finally succeeded to pull out my stuck tractor. From then on, I always made a large detour around this area. On the following Monday, when the clover hay had thoroughly dried, we stacked it without baling in an area where the cows could get to it in wintertime. The haystack would also provide the cows with some protection from cold winds.

Ray Thomsen drove to Omaha on Saturday, June 14th, and I asked him to pay the $20.00 I still owed to Mr. Bill Peter. I also asked him to have Mr. Peter send DM 500.00 to my cousin Horst Wiehler. I paid $119.25 for this amount (DM 4.193 per US dollar). I wanted to send to Horst another DM 500.00 in the fall and would then wait until he asked for more. I also started to mention in my letters to Germany that I considered leaving Avoca before the end of the year. I was wondering what kind of reaction I would get.

In the evening of Wednesday, June 18th, Frank Peck and Rudi Wiesener came to visit me. They were very excited and told me that Walter Tschöke, who had started to work for Frank's 21-year old nephew just three weeks earlier, had left the farm in the morning to join friends in Wisconsin. Walter had given notice on Friday evening that he was going to leave the farm on Saturday. Niels, Frank's nephew, did not like this and responded by hitting Walter. Anyway, there was great excitement, especially since another "German boy," Horst Strassburg, had just recently left his farm for an unknown destination. He took along a car he had not yet fully paid for. The police was now looking for Horst.

As the month of June came to an end, we fertilized the rapidly growing corn with ammonium nitrate. Thunderstorms provided plenty moisture for corn and weeds. Herbicides were not used to the extent as is common now. We cultivated the fields for the second time, even though the corn was already quite high and it was difficult to see the rows. We drove through the rows in the highest field gear and no matter how hard I tried, now and then the cultivator strayed into the cornrows and left some uprooted plants. I felt very bad about this, especially since I knew that Ray did much better than I was able to do.

As time went on, I received less and less mail. I had the feeling that even Christel would soon stop writing. Although I regretted this, I could not blame her for stopping our correspondence. She was still very young and was teased by her sisters. I also did not want to take the responsibility of having too much influence on her. I became resigned to the fact that eventually only my family and Horst Wiehler would continue to write to me, even if it was not very often.

My brother Jürgen wrote me that my father wanted to take possession of the DM 100.00 I had sent for my sister Gundula's wedding, because her wedding had been delayed. My younger siblings, Uwe and Astrid, thanked me in their letters for the two times that I had sent each of them DM 5.00. I was happy to hear from them and Astrid wrote me that she received good grades in school. She only had some minor problems in English, French, and drawing (fine arts class).

The 4th of July 1952 was on a Friday. It was my first Independence Day in the U.S. Everybody had a holiday, but the farmer! But as it turned out, I got a half-day off, too. As had happened many times before during the past weeks, Ray suddenly decided after our noon meal to drive to Omaha to watch the horse races. The next day would be the last day for the season. This gave me an opportunity for a nice afternoon nap and to do a few other things for myself.

As so often when I was alone, my thoughts drifted back to Seedorf and I started to dislike my situation on the Thomsen farm. It was not the work! It was Ray's nervousness, whenever we had work to do in the fields. We wasted a lot of time and then we worked on many weekends to

make up for this. I never knew when we would be done in the evenings. Since the long summer vacations had started for Rae Jean, she started to practice her piano lessons late in the evenings and kept me from getting enough sleep. Because I had no transportation available, I felt isolated on the farm and was totally dependent on the Thomsens. I had no opportunity for an intellectual discussion with others. I started to feel like a dog on the chain! Because of the bad publicity given to the actions of some "German boys," the rest of us were constantly scrutinized for whatever we said or did. The telephone wires were filled with gossip about us! When I did or said anything Ray did not agree with, he immediately called all the neighbors and they did the same when one of their "German boys" did or said anything they did not like.

Ray sent our feeder cattle by truck to Omaha and sold them on Monday, July 7th. We were lucky! It was dry on Sunday afternoon and the animals were quickly loaded and on their way. But it started to rain in the evening and by the next morning, 2¼ inches of rain had made our mile-road impassable for cars and trucks. I pulled Ray's car with the tractor to the highway and drove back to the farm. I did not feel like walking through all the wet muck in the stockyard and declined to ride along with the Thomsens. The average weight of the 22 heads was a little over 900 lbs and Ray received $33.00 per 100 lbs live weight. It was not as much as had been paid for cattle earlier in the year, but Ray was satisfied.

The economic conditions on family farms started to change in early summer of 1952. Europe started to recover from WW II. With the help of the Marshall Plan, the continent started to produce sufficient food for its population. This led to a significant reduction in the export of agricultural products from the U.S. to West European countries. The result was a tremendous surplus of grain and meat in this country. Consequently, agricultural commodity prices dropped to levels that hardly covered production costs. Ray was lucky. He sold his mixed lot of 22 steers and heifers and 12 sows and one boar on July 7th, right before the price for feeder cattle dropped from $35-40 to $16-18 per 100 lbs on the hoof. The same happened to hogs and the demand for old sows and boars vanished entirely. It did not pay to haul a 400-500 pound swine to market to get just $6-7 per 100 lbs, even if one could find a buyer! Some of our neighbors had already invested up to $45 per 100 lbs live weight in "yearling" steer calves weighing 350-500 lbs. There was no hope for them to fully recover their investment.

With prices for corn and wheat dropping in a similar manner, 10 years of "boom" had turned into a "bust" for family farms. Many farmers were eventually forced to sell out. It became almost impossible for family farms smaller than a "section" (640 acres or 1 square mile) to remain profitable. The only way a farmer could remain in business was through increasing his productivity by farming more and more land by himself with larger and better equipment. This trend persisted for at least the next 47 years. Many "family farms" finally became large corporate farms with thousands of acres under the plow.

Because there was nothing I could do outside on that day, I took the day off to write a letter to my Grandaunt Milchen Beckmann, who lived in East Germany under Russian occupation. When the mail finally came, I found three letters in the box, one each from my father, my stepmother, and from my Uncle Oskar Penner. My father was disappointed that I wanted to quit working on farms. He was worried that this would keep me from ever returning to Germany. He also wanted my "power of attorney" for representing my interests with regard to the

"Equalization of War Burden" (Lastenausgleich). This law made me eligible for some compensation for the loss of property suffered as a refugee from the former German area that was now annexed by Poland.

Mamuschka filled me in on what had happened in our family. She also informed me of Gundula's intention to get married in August. My Uncle Oskar informed me that he had doubts that he would ever leave Germany to start a new business and life in the USA or Canada. But he wanted to prepare his two oldest daughters, Regina and Sabine, for possible emigration to the American continent at a later time.

On Saturday, July 12th, we baled our second cut of alfalfa. The hay was nice and dry and we added 389 bales to our inventory. This time, Ray and I were alone and without help from our neighbors. Since I did not have to drag the bales as far anymore in the loft, it was easier than it had been a month earlier.

That evening, Rudi Wiesener, John Graff and I went to Avoca. We walked through the town and even went to the movies, where I lost my billfold. It had slipped out of my pocket without my noticing it. Fortunately, somebody found it and I was able to get it back shortly after I had noticed my loss. There was not much money in it anyway! Overall, we were quite bored in town and just "killed time" by walking around. Our main interest was to meet other German immigrants. Sunday I spent writing letters to my father, Horst, and my Uncle Oskar.

Since the feeder cattle were sold, we took the opportunity to upgrade their shelter with a concrete floor and new walls. We also did other "improvement work" on the farm and prepared for the oat harvest. The weather was warm and humid when we combined the oats on July 17th with a hired 12-foot wide Massey Harris combine. The yield was 1100 bushels from 25 acres (44 bushels per acre), which I did not think was very much. But I was impressed by how easy it was to harvest grain with a combine. The oats was transferred in bulk to a wagon and from there via a conveyor to the storage bin on the farm. There was no bagging or shoveling of the grain! A hydraulic jack raised the front of the wagon and emptied it through a chute into the conveyor hopper.

After combining the oats, we mowed the straw and let it dry. Our neighbor Paul Wise baled the straw for us on July 21st. We had 159 bales, but Ray turned the counter back to 150. John Graff and I noticed this, but we did not say anything. This action disturbed me very much. I could no longer trust Ray to be honest with me, if he cheats even his best neighbor. Ray had never given me an accounting of my earnings and expenditures and I had to ask him for every cent I needed. I started to wonder! But otherwise, I had little reason to complain.

John Graff and I were good friends. His German ancestors had settled as farmers near Belgrade in the Serbian part of Yugoslavia. Partisans had killed his father in October 1944. John was able to escape to Austria where he worked in construction. His sister was married and lived in Cleveland, Ohio. John had only four more weeks left before he had served his full year on the Wise farm. He was ready to join his sister!

A few days later, I received a letter from Dan Bredfeldt who urged me to attend the summer festival and dance organized by the German clubs in Omaha. It was scheduled for Sunday, August 3rd. I told Ray immediately of my plan and he was not very happy about it. He had planned to go fishing. Ray quickly decided to leave right away and within four hours, he was gone with his family. Their sudden departure left the house in a big mess. As before, I enjoyed their absence. I boiled a big pot full of potatoes and fried them whenever I was hungry. There were plenty eggs, milk, and hamburger meat. Occasionally, I cooked noodles in milk. Only the dog Skippy, a terrier, came up short. He just got milk and dry bread to eat. But since he survived the absence of the Thomsen family and did not catch any chicken, he must not have suffered too much! Anyway, Skippy was fat and never acted hungry.

At 9 PM on Saturday, July 26th, Dan and John Bredfeldt surprised me with their visit. They had brought along Siegfried. Since the Thomsen family was not at home, they stayed overnight. On Sunday, we drove to Shelby to visit other German immigrants in that area. Here I met Elsie for the first time. She had come from Germany about 2½ years earlier to live with her uncle. Elsie was no beauty, but she had a nice personality. In the evening, we all drove to Harlan to go swimming in the local pool. It was an enjoyable weekend for me. It also was a pleasant change in my routine on the farm.

On July 31st, Kenneth Jacobsen, whose parents owned one of the neighbor farms, took me to Avova for a haircut and to get the "power of attorney" my father had requested. Kenneth had just finished serving his military obligation. The Jacobsens were always nice to me, although their relationship with Ray was somewhat strained.

I received another letter from Horst, in which he thanked me for the money. He received it from the *German Bank* on July 11th, even though I had made the arrangements on June 14th. The money was routed through Switzerland and the paperwork did not state who had sent it. Horst received the money only after he proved to the bank that I was the sender and that he knew the exact amount by showing my letter to the bank officials. Horst was happy and full of confidence that he now could study construction engineering without any interruption. He, again, had been without work for a while, but with a little luck and much effort, he had found another job.

Ray Thomsen and his family returned from their vacation in the afternoon of August 2, 1952. At noon, our neighbor's son George Wise asked me to help them load bales behind the baler, like his dad Paul and John Graff had done many times for us. I was back on the farm at 5:30 PM. I noticed that Ray had returned and looked forward to a friendly welcome. But Ray did not like it, because he always wanted me back no later than 5 PM. It took me a while before I was able to calm him down. For some reason, Ray started to agitate against his neighbors, even though he depended on their help. He even told John Graff, whose time on the Wise farm came to an end in less than three weeks, to watch out for his "rights." I never found out how Ray got along with his neighbors after I had left Avoca and when he needed their help.

We had a rainy Saturday and the mile-road was quite muddy. My bus was scheduled to leave Avoca on Sunday morning at 8:20 AM. We were still at the breakfast table at 7 AM and Ray did not feel like bringing me to the town. I finally asked him to use the tractor to bring me to the highway. I put some work clothes over my good ones to keep these clean. Frank Peck picked

me up at the highway and took me to the bus station. Only Rudi Wiesener came along with me to Omaha, where we met another German at the bus station. We three walked down 11th street to the home of the Bredfeldt brothers. They were just preparing to leave with Bill Peter for the German Home. We joined them and found everything well prepared for the festivities. We had lunch and then watched the German movie *Razzia*. The movie was about life in Berlin during the post war years of 1945-1948 and seemed to truthfully present the problems of that time in the former German capital.

I met quite a few acquaintances at the festival, including those I had met in Shelby and at the dance in May. We later listened to a speech given by a Mr. O'Conner, head of the *D.P. Commission* in Washington, DC. This was followed by a concert of German and American music. German choirs sang folksongs and other German songs. I enjoyed everything and had no regrets that I had come. Rudi was busy drinking beer and soon he had his fill.

Ray and Jeannette Thomsen came to pick us up when everything was over. After a light meal in a restaurant, we returned to the farm. While at the restaurant, Rudi wanted to drink beer. When I tried to talk him out of it, he hollered in a loud voice: "If I can go into the Army, then I can drink beer, too." But Rudi was only 20 years old and not of legal age to drink alcoholic beverages. I was embarrassed and glad when we left the restaurant. Rudi was soundly asleep in the car before we had left Council Bluffs. When we got back to the Peck farm, I put him to bed. The next morning, Rudi did not remember how he got home.

During the following week I wrote four letters to Germany, in which I announced my plan to move to Omaha, Nebraska, on October 1, 1952.

On the farm, we finished the concrete floor of the shelter for the feeder cattle. The floor was 4 inches thick and was a mixture of 1 part cement and 4 parts sand. We had rented a mixer and it was my job to prepare the cement mix. Ray leveled the concrete and finished it with a trowel.

On Sunday, August 10th, the Thomsens were invited to a pig roast. Ray drove to Avoca to pick up his mother to baby-sit the children. I had everything done but milking the cows, when Ray took over and let me wait for him to get done. I much rather milked the cows myself, than to just watch him doing it. Ray noticed that I was not very happy about this and he asked me why I was in a bad mood. I told him that I was tired working on his farm and that I did not want to stay longer than I had to. This made him mad and he told me to pack my belongings and "go along the road." Although I wanted to accept his offer to leave, I did not like being thrown out. Thus I told him that I wanted to leave, but he should tell me whether he had been satisfied with my work or not. Ray acknowledged that he had been satisfied with me and that I had been the best farm worker he ever had. I, too, told him that he had treated me well. This helped to calm him down and I left to pack my belongings.

When Ray had finished milking his cows, he came to my room and offered me supper with his family and that I could stay until the following morning. When I went downstairs to join the Thomsens for the meal, Ray offered to let me stay for haymaking. I agreed and let him know that I would only do this to help him and to leave on a good note.

On Monday morning, August 11, 1952, I got up at my usual time to do my regular chores. Ray was already up and declared that it would take a few more weeks until we could make hay and that I could leave right away. I went back to my room to finish packing my belongings and had a good breakfast. After that, we reviewed our relationship, he paid me $253.50 as the balance of my earnings, and we parted peacefully. Jeannette Thomson brought me to the bus station, where I could catch the bus for Omaha. I left behind my backpack and a suitcase, which I wanted to pick up at a later time. I had no regrets about having worked on an American farm and now leaving agriculture behind me!

CHAPTER 8:
STARTING A NEW CAREER: OMAHA, NEBRASKA
(1952-1953)

After my arrival in Omaha, NE, on Monday, August 11, 1952, I immediately went to see Mr. Bill Peter at his travel bureau to inform him that I left the farm. My case was not unusual and he was very helpful. He helped me with opening up a savings account (# 180789) at the First National Bank of Omaha and he gave me the address of a German lady, Minna Gutmann, who operated a boarding house. Mr. Peter also wrote down a few addresses of businesses which had advertised open job positions in the local newspaper. I immediately went to apply for a job. I was lucky and at the second place I visited, I was offered a position. The "quality" of the job was not as important for me at that time as the opportunity to earn some money. I was not yet sure what I wanted to do for the long term.

My new job was at the Peter Pan Bakery of the Petersen Baking Company located at 12th and Jackson Streets. I was to be trained as a janitor. It became my responsibility to clean the bread dough moulder after the production shift had finished. I also had to keep the wooden hard wood floor clean at all times. During my initial week, I worked in the day shift with the person assigned to this shift. He was nicknamed *Windy*.

After I had signed up for the job, I went to see Minna Gutmann. She had come to the U.S. in 1929 and lived in a large house at 323 Lincoln Blvd, on the corner of 28th and Chicago Streets. I paid $18 per week and shared a room with Joachim Krüger, who had just started to work at a meat packing plant. There were also three other German and two American young men living at Minna's place. The price included meals. I was satisfied and felt that Omaha offered me more opportunities than I would ever have working on a farm.

On Tuesday morning I reported for work at the bakery. It was a large "factory" and I worked in the department where we produced the "Peter Pan Bread." The bread was baked in a large tunnel oven at the rate of 55-60 loaves per minute. It was not a fully automated plant and still required a lot of manual labor. The bread was popular and the bakery operated with 15 shifts per week. The night shift started at midnight. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays we had only two shifts working. The day shift started at 10 AM and worked until all orders were filled. The bakery worked a lot of overtime and shifts of 10-12 hours were not unusual.

After I was introduced to "Windy," it did not take long before we had the bread production floor and the equipment on it thoroughly cleaned. We then started to wash the walls and the doors of the proof box, where the bread loaves were allowed to rise before baking. I thought that it was easy work and wanted to get it done when Windy told me: "Don't work yourself out of the job." I was not familiar with this phrase and had no idea what it meant. Windy finally admonished me and said: "Slow down or we soon have nothing to do!" Well, now I understood what he was trying to tell me. Finally, when Saturday approached, I was "fully broken in on the job" and ready to work by myself. I had worked 40.8 hours during the first week and had earned $49.45 in gross wages, or $1.18 per hour. My net pay was $41.41. When I started to work in the night shift, I was paid an additional 10 cents for a total of $1.28 per hour.

On Thursday evening, August 14th, Dan and John Bredfeldt took me to Avoca to pick up the rest of my belongings. Ray and Jeannette Thomsen were not at home. They had gone to the dance at the county fair. But I was able to contact their daughter in Avoca and informed her of my intentions. I also left my new address. On the way back to Omaha, we ran into a very heavy thunderstorm near Council Bluffs. Since visibility was near zero during the downpour, we stopped at a supermarket and bought some fruit and ice cream and waited for the rain to stop.

I was off work on Sunday and joined others in the *Young German Club* on a trip to an Indian reservation north of Omaha. We were in three cars. Although we did not find the powwow we were looking for, we enjoyed the trip. But we also noticed the poverty that prevailed on the reservation. The native Americans were living in dilapidated shacks surrounded by trash and rusting cars and trucks. The conditions on this reservation were depressing!

On the way home we passed some inviting ponds of water and somebody in our group suggested taking a dip in one of these ponds to cool off from the summer heat. Well, we soon learned that the water in these ponds was very shallow, while the mud was very deep. We never tried this again!

On the way back to Omaha we had the Missouri River on our left (to the east) and the hilly bluffs on the right. The bluffs consisted of relatively poor soil and were used as pastures for white-faced Hereford and black Angus cows. Wherever the land was more level and where there was sufficient topsoil, we saw lush corn fields. The area was a nice blend of original prairie and cultivated farms. It would have impressed us even more if we had seen a herd of buffaloes grazing between the rolling hills. At one time we spent over one hour looking from a high point in the bluffs over the Missouri River meandering through the valley below us. Behind us were about one hundred Angus cows with their calves serenading us with their deep mooing. I enjoyed the scenery and had no regrets that we had failed to find the American Indian activities.

On Monday, August 18th, I started to work by myself at the bakery. I reported to work at 9 PM and had no difficulty with keeping the bakery clean. However, there was a problem. My new working hours conflicted with the meal times at Mrs. Gutmann's boarding house and there was too much activity in the house for me to find sufficient time to sleep during the day. Moreover, I was not very impressed with the cleanliness of Mrs. Gutmann's boarding house. The refrigerator smelled of spoiled meat and the food was not very tasty. I started to think about renting my own apartment. I was told that it was very easy to find a furnished room with kitchen facilities.

I did not care for working the night shift and started to look for another job, either part-time or full-time. I considered becoming a mechanic. But all my experience in this area was limited to farm tractors and farming equipment. However, there was no urgency and I wanted to take my time to find the right job.

My first letters, forwarded from Avoca, arrived in Omaha. Both my younger siblings wrote about their two weeks of vacation in Schleswig-Holstein. Astrid had been tent camping with a group and Uwe spent his time hiking by himself. Uwe had seen a lot during this time and did a nice job describing his experiences in his letter. He had a real talent for putting his impressions

on paper. Astrid's letter was very nice, too, but her letter was more descriptive than an expression of her feelings.

My sister Reingard sent me a letter, too. She had hitchhiked to Paris and back. It took her 2½ days to get there and 3 days to get home. She liked France and would like to study there for 1-2 years. She had spent 10 days in Paris and had visited all the most interesting places in that city. On the way she also visited the cathedrals in Reims and Chartres. These letters gave me the feeling that we siblings all had a desire to see the world. This urge seemed to be especially strong in Reingard and Uwe. They only differed in their motivations. While Reingard searched for the excitement of city life, Uwe preferred to be alone in a natural environment. I also thought of Gundula, whose wedding had been on the previous Saturday, August 16th. In my thoughts I wished her and Willi Eggeling a good marriage and much happiness for their future. Jürgen, from whom I had not heard for a while, was probably in the middle of exams for his law degree.

Although my official working hours were from 9 PM to 5:30 AM with a ½ hour lunch break, I soon found myself filling in for people in the midnight shift who had called in sick. I liked working in the regular bread production shift, because I had the tendency to "work myself out of the job" and was bored. This also gave me an opportunity to work an extra hour in the morning at the overtime pay rate.

In my search for a job in a garage for car repairs, I also applied at the local Sears, Roebuck and Company store. The manager in the personnel office, a lady, did not have an opening in the garage belonging to the store, but she offered me a part-time job in the stockroom. I accepted and started to work for Sears on Friday, August 22, 1952. Here I had to unpack shipments of clothes and keep order in the storage area. Like at the bakery, I punched a time card and I was paid $1.10 per hour. A valuable fringe benefit for me was a 10% discount for everything I bought at the store. Although this benefit started officially after 30 days of employment, the lady in the personnel department arranged for me to receive the discount after only a few days of work.

I worked for Sears on weekdays for about four hours from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM. The store was only 7 blocks, less than a mile, from my new "apartment." The work was easy. But another young part-time worker was jealous of me because I had access to the candy room and he did not. Apparently, receiving the key to this candy storage area was a symbol of trust that this young man had not yet earned, even though he already had worked several months for Sears. I was quite surprised when I found out about this, because I was asked to clean up this room right after I had started there.

Two days later I moved into my new apartment. My new address was 2543 Capitol Avenue. My apartment was upstairs and consisted of a room measuring approximately 12 X 12 feet. It contained an old gas stove and was furnished with an old refrigerator, a full-sized bed, a dresser, table, and three chairs. I shared the bathroom, where I also got my water, with the other renters in this former one-family home. The place looked fairly clean and I immediately started to supplement the furnishings with a radio, oscillating fan, a desk lamp, and a large assortment of kitchen utensils, such as dishes, pots and pans.

My apartment was about a mile from the business area in "downtown" Omaha and 20 blocks (8 blocks per mile) from the bakery. I walked to wherever I wanted to go. When I wanted to attend an event at the German Home on the south side of Omaha, I walked downtown to catch the bus going south. I had no experience with transferring to other bus lines and did not understand how the system worked. Only once did I try to take a bus on the way home from work. It was a Saturday morning and I was very tired after working for 14 hours. I hopped onto a bus going in the right direction. But after two blocks the bus turned south. Well, I had no intention to ride the bus to the city's south side and thus got off the bus, again. I had spent 10 cents to gain only one block on the way home and I never again tried to ride the bus home from work, even though I finally learned which bus line had a stop only one block from my apartment.

On Sunday, August 31, 1952, Rudi Wiesener showed up at my apartment. He had an argument with his farmer Frank Peck and had walked for almost 20 miles during the night. I let him catch up with his sleep and then we talked about his situation. Rudi soon realized that he had been wrong. He then took a taxicab back to the farm to either retrieve his belongings or to stay on the farm for the rest of his year. I cautioned him not to get involved in another argument. If he wanted to leave, then he should not quit, but have Frank Peck terminate him. A few days later I received a letter from Rudi, in which he told me that he had settled everything with his farmer and that he wanted to stay with him for the remaining 5 months of the year he was obligated to work there. I never heard from him again.

Working on farms gave me very little "kitchen experience" other than frying eggs and potatoes. Cooking meals on a farm was strictly a woman's job. But I had to start sometime! I invited Siegfried Ritzau, bought a piece of meat for a pot roast, boiled potatoes and opened a can of vegetables. I had met Siegfried at the Gutmann boarding house. We had plenty to eat. The food turned out fairly well, even though I knew nothing about making a good gravy for the meat.

The following day was Labor Day. I wrote a 4-page letter to Christel and was wondering whether she would respond to it. I also wrote to Willi Eggeling and asked him to give my sister Gundula my best wishes to her birthday on September 7th and to put some flowers on my mother's grave in Kirchweyhe. My mother's birthday was on September 16th and this year she would have been 50 years old. I wrote to Willi that I would send him some money at a later time.

Time passed very quickly with working in two jobs and taking care of myself. Only on weekends did I have extra time. Since there was no air conditioning in homes and I was unable to keep the windows open while I was at work during the night, my room never cooled off. Its temperature was mostly in the 90’s and my sleep was not very refreshing. The perspiration just dripped from my body in constant little streams. My pillow was always soaking wet. Only on weekends did I find time to cook a meal. I never ate out and most of today's popular fast-food restaurants did not yet exist. There was a small store on the corner next to the house I lived in. When I got off work in the morning, I bought a half-gallon whole milk. Then I took a couple of raw eggs and beat them into a glass of milk and drank the concoction before I lay down to rest. I did the same, again, before I went to work and had a bologna sandwich in between. I also took one of these sandwiches along to work with a thermos bottle full of coffee. I generally had my lunch at work before the arrival of the midnight shift.

After living in the apartment for a couple of months, I noticed tiny bug bites on my body. I concluded that these bites came from bed bugs. I simply removed all my bedding, including the blanket, and had it cleaned at the laundry. Then I fumigated my room with some fumigants I had sent to me from Germany while I was still on the farm. A few days later, the owner of the house told me that other renters in the house had complained about an infestation and that he had hired a professional exterminator to fumigate the entire building. Our combined effort must have paid off! I did not find any more bug bites on my body as long as I lived in that apartment.

On Saturday, September 6th, the bakery had a picnic at the Sokol Park. We all had plenty to eat and drink and watched a magician doing his deceptive tricks. After that, we all played bingo. There were enough people around me who made it their "good deed of the day" to show me how to play this game of chance. I was lucky and won a plastic container for storing fresh fruit.

Since my arrival in Omaha, I started to attend services at a neighborhood church. I went quite regularly initially, but soon found that most sermons provided me with little or no intellectual stimulation. There also was too much time spent on rituals and I did not appreciate the pressure put on me to become a member and to commit myself. My visits gradually decreased in frequency and finally stopped all together.

At the bakery, I started my shift with cleaning the production area. I was usually done with this job before the midnight shift started. It then took very little time and effort to keep everything clean. To pass my time and with permission from Russel, the foreman, I gave extra breaks to the workers. Soon, I also started to do some of the routine paper work for the shift foreman. When one of the shift workers called in sick, I took his place. Within a few weeks, I was familiar with all the jobs in the dough make-up area and at the oven. The foreman, Russel, was glad to be able to call on me whenever he had a need for an extra pair of hands. The only person who did not like what I was doing was the "swing man" Christianson, whose regular job included giving the breaks. Christianson came from a small farm near Council Bluffs and when nobody looked, he took a handful of flour and spread it all over the floor. After this happened a few times and I was sure who the culprit was, I talked to Russel about it and he took care of this problem.

My friends Dan and John Bredfeldt bought themselves a house and closed on it on September 15th. However, both brothers were worried about the possibility of being drafted for military service. John had already completed his physical examination and was ready to be inducted. Then in July, the German government signed a treaty with the U.S. government that exempted German citizens from being drafted against their will into the U.S. Army.

On Monday evening, September 22, 1952, I was called to a meeting with my Selective Service Board in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Because I no longer worked on a farm, I needed to be reclassified. It was a good meeting for me. The board members were very friendly and made an effort to inform me of my educational opportunities in this country. They urged me to complete my high school education and provided me with addresses of schools and names of persons I should discuss my educational plans with. The board then extended my classification as IV-F. This was later changed to IV-C.

Following the advice from my Selective Service Board, I enrolled at the Technical High School in Omaha. This school offered self-study courses in the evenings. In this program, the students could study the material at home and only had to attend classes to ask any questions they had and to write the tests in a workbook. I enrolled in *American History I* and started on September 29th. From now on I spent all my free time studying. But it paid off and for the first three of the seven tests I received "A", "A-" and "A". I not only learned about the history of this country, but I also learned the English language. My vocabulary and my ability to verbalize improved significantly!

But this education came at a price! I did not have enough time to study and work two jobs at the same time. I had to quit one of the jobs and had a difficult time deciding which one. I talked to the personnel manager at Sears. She liked to keep me and offered me a training program in the future. I also talked to the night foreman at the bakery. Russel wanted me to stay, too. To summarize the opportunities in the baking industry, he just said to me: "You know our superintendent John Rody, don't you? John started here a few years ago knowing nothing about baking. Then management sent him to the AIB and look where he is now!" After asking him a few questions about the AIB (American Institute of Baking), I had made up my mind: I was going to the AIB as soon as I had the money for it! I quit the job at Sears right after I had bought a portable Smith-Corona typewriter. Its cost was about $110 and, after the 10% discount, I paid a little less than $100 for this extravagant appliance.

I felt quite wealthy and did not mind to share some of my earnings with my siblings and Horst Wiehler, whom I sent the second installment of DM 500 as a stipend for his studies. He now had a total of DM 1,000 to get started with his studies. I also sent DM 100 to my brother-in-law Willi Eggeling and asked him, without telling anybody else about it, to give Uwe and Astrid a few marks off and on for recreational and cultural events.

I also sent through Mr. Peter's office a CARE package to my grandaunt Milchen Beckmann in the Russian zone, which had become the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (later better known as "DDR"). I paid $5.90 to have 0.5 kg coffee, 1 lb cocoa, 5 lbs sugar, and 5 lbs rice sent to her. She had let me know through my folks in Germany that I should not send her packages directly from here. A package I had sent her earlier had caused her nothing but problems. She had to pick it up at the customs office, where the East German officials levied so much duty on the food items that she could not afford to redeem the package. In later years, I had my family in Germany send her food packages at my expense. There was no problem for my grandaunt when she received packages sent from West Germany.

In early October I was surprised by another letter from Christel. I already had started to give up on hearing from her, again. Although she continued to write in her old style, her letters had gradually become more and more impersonal. I replied immediately, but was wondering if I would ever hear from her again.

My brother Jürgen passed his *Referendar* exam with "satisfaction" (a "C") and went for a vacation to Birmingham, England. During his studies in Birmingham in the winter of 1950/51 he had met Ilse Jahn. He now considered getting engaged to her. His previous engagement to Eva Unruh had ended when she refused to move from Bremen to the Hamburg area where

Jürgen lived and studied. While in Birmingham this time, Jürgen and Ilse decided to get married on October 11, 1952. The reason they gave for this surprise action was that nobody in Germany would have supported this wedding. They probably were correct! Ilse's father was a German medical doctor who had taken a Jewish wife who was also a medical doctor. Sometime during the war, Ilse's father decided to divorce his wife. Shortly thereafter, the wife was sent to a concentration camp where she perished. Ilse and her younger siblings never forgave their father for this. As soon as they were able to leave Germany after the War, they joined their grandmother in Birmingham, England. Their father in Germany remarried and started a new family.

On October 31st, I received a long letter from my father in which he gave me his opinion about this marriage. He rejected Ilse as his daughter-in-law and claimed that he would be "forever stubborn" about his rejection of her. He even considered withdrawing "all the rights of the first-born" from my brother and transfer these to me, because Jürgen had "totally alienated" him. I responded with a 4-page handwritten letter, in which I reminded him of all the evil caused by people who were full of prejudice against those who did not look, think, or worship alike. We ourselves had been victims of such bias when we were either driven from, or prevented from returning to our homes at the War's end. The reason why we lost everything was because the German people had done wrong to others! I briefly reviewed the historical events as they had developed since World War I. I told him that it was time to forget all prejudice, hatred, and the idea that we are better than everyone else! German people had made many mistakes and committed many crimes and that now was the time to learn from this! I then begged him to accept Ilse as his daughter-in-law and as a person equal to all of us. I also wrote him that this was not only my wish, but also the wish of all his children!

My father also complained that nobody was writing to him anymore. But when they do write, they either want something from him, or they tell him something unpleasant. I replied that I had responded to all his letters and that all the letters I write are meant for everybody. I also have paid for everything I had asked for. In addition to this, I encouraged him to take time to write his own biography and to continue working on the family history.

On Saturday, October 4th, The German Home in Omaha celebrated Karl Schurz Day. Karl Schurz came to the US in 1849. He had served as an officer in the Union Army during the Civil War and was a respected leader of the German community in this country. The organizers of this event served fried chicken and wine at the banquet. I enjoyed the fare very much after my rather monotonous diet during the past weeks. But I missed many of the people I had met during previous events. I did, however, meet a fellow who claimed that he was the director of the Hotel Fontenelle in Omaha. He was well dressed and offered to take me on Sunday morning for a visit to his uncle's farm. He was quite pleasant to talk to and since I had no other plans, I agreed to this change in my daily routine. He even invited me to spend the evening and night in his apartment at the hotel. Well, I soon found out that I had made a mistake. This fellow was homosexual and I chose not to spend more time with him and went home. Another lesson in my life!

On Tuesday, November 4, 1952, was the presidential election in the U.S. The two candidates were Dwight D. Eisenhower, the former commanding officer of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO), and the governor of Illinois, Adlai E. Stevenson. It was a contest between a former Army general who later refused to get involved in any world conflict, versus a politician, who lost twice running against his opponent. Although I was not eligible to vote, I personally favored Stevenson. I had a hard time forgiving Eisenhower for turning over about 600,000 German prisoners of war to the Russian Army in May/June 1945, even though he had only followed the agreement negotiated by Stalin and Roosevelt in Yalta.

On Saturday, November 8th, we had the fall festival of the Young German Club. At this occasion I became acquainted with the Pusch family and a friend of their 12 year old daughter Caroline, 15 year old Karla Koenig. Since the girls did not have many dance partners, I danced with them several times. Dan Bredfeldt then suggested that we invite the two girls to see a movie and go horseback riding.

We had a beautiful warm and sunny day on Sunday, November 23, 1952, when Dan Bredfeldt and I invited the two girls to come with us to Peony Park. There was a riding stable at 72nd and Dodge Streets. The girls accepted and I put on my old riding pants and high boots. I was disappointed when I saw the horses at the stable. They were malnourished and looked neglected. They were so dusty that one could hardly recognize their color. The horse I received was the best one in the bunch, while Dan's appeared very nervous. Finally, the horses were saddled and we rode off into the park. On the way home I suggested to Dan that we should trade horses. I soon noticed that the horse's nervousness increased when I pulled in the reins. When I gave it more reins, the horse immediately went into a full gallop. As we left the park and came to a dirt road, I loosened up on the reins and let the horse run to get rid of some of its energy.

I now made the mistake of assuming that the horse would stay on the dirt road and away from the trees along the road. But I was wrong! The horse headed for a lone tree next to the road and appeared to pass it on the right side. It was too late to slow down the horse and I shifted my body slightly to the right side to clear the tree. But about ten feet from the tree, the horse decided to pass the tree on the other side. All I was now able to do was to raise my right arm to protect my head. I hit the tree in full gallop with my right arm, chest and my right thigh. Fortunately, I was thrown clear off the horse and found myself on the ground wondering whether these were the last moments in my life. My chest felt like all my ribs had been turned inwards and I had a difficult time breathing. But when I checked for broken ribs, I could not find any. I had a scratch above my nose and my thigh was badly bruised. After a brief pause, I stood up and with a faint and distorted smile on my face, I limped towards Dan who had caught up with my horse. But I did not feel like getting back up on it. I also started to notice something wrong with my right arm. Dan and I traded horses, again and I returned my original horse to the stable, while Dan and the two girls continued riding until their hour was used up. As I looked back at the event, I became convinced that the horse I had the accident with was a retired racehorse. This horse was used to run on a track with no trees nearby. It also was trained to run as fast as it could when it was given a free rein. I was not quite prepared for this type of behavior from a regular riding horse and now consider myself very fortunate that my injuries were not more severe.

When Caroline's parents arrived to bring us home, they called my doctor, Dr. Bradley, and brought me to him at the hospital. There I was told that I was not seriously injured and I should

come back for X-rays on Monday morning. I then called the bakery to let them know that I was unable to work that evening.

On the following morning, it was a Monday, I went to the hospital. X-rays showed that I had fractures in my right elbow and wrist, but no broken ribs. On Tuesday morning, the doctor put my right arm into a plaster cast to immobilize it from my fingertips to the upper arm. I also walked to the bakery and talked to my supervisor. I convinced him that I was still able to do most, if not all of my work, and that I could not afford to lose my income. After consulting with his boss, my supervisor told me that he would give me a chance to do my job with only one hand. This had never been done before! I was scheduled to return to work on Thanksgiving Day. Because there were no deliveries on this holiday, the bakery would shut down on Wednesday.

The nice warm weather of the weekend had turned into a rainy Monday. It started to snow on Tuesday morning and on Tuesday afternoon we had a full-blown blizzard with high winds and plunging temperatures. In order not to take a chance on breaking my other arm, I did not leave my room on Wednesday. The Pusch family invited Dan, John, and me for Thanksgiving dinner. We all had a good time, but I had to leave early to return to work on that evening. At the bakery I found out that all the cakes and breads produced on Tuesday and Wednesday morning were still in the bakery, and we were allowed to take home whatever we wanted. Because of the bad weather, the trucks had been unable to make any store deliveries on Wednesday.

I had no problem doing my work with just my left hand. In fact, I was told at a later time that I had kept the bakery cleaner with one hand than some other janitors did with two hands. Whenever I needed another hand, I only had to ask for some help. The fellows I had helped out before did not mind to reciprocate. Actually, I set a new precedence. When a few months later my supervisor, who had allowed me to work with only one hand, broke his arm, he too was allowed to continue working on his job.

I never wrote to Germany about my accident. I did not want anyone to worry about me! Since I was unable to hold a pen, I typed all my Christmas letters with my left hand on my new portable typewriter. I excused my scraggly signature with a sore finger. But the most difficult task to do with one hand was opening a can of soup or vegetables with a regular can opener. To get the opener started, i.e. to pierce the lid with the cutting blade, often took over 10 minutes. Once I had this accomplished, the rest of this job was easy. I never ate out in a restaurant during this time!

In school we had the semester break and my disability had little or no effect on my studies. When I returned to school on Tuesday, January 13th, my wrist and elbow had sufficiently healed so that I was again able to write in my workbook.

My cast was removed from my right arm on Christmas Eve. I had received from Germany two small packages, but felt embarrassed that I had written that I would not send any gifts myself. Even my sister Reingard had announced that she had sent something by surface mail as "printed matter."

To share the pleasure of opening the two packages, I invited Ruth Mueller, another tenant in the house I lived in, to join me. I had met Ruth shortly after my accident and she invited me to celebrate Christmas at her family's home in Walnut, Iowa (6 miles east of Avoca). Ruth worked as a stenographer and typist at one of the slaughterhouses in Omaha. Her boy friend was in Korea and she was anxiously awaiting his return home to get married. To reciprocate for her invitation, I invited her to come along with me to the Christmas party of the Young German Club, where she spent most of the time being bored. She desperately avoided dancing with anybody.

The packages from Germany contained crumbled cookies, a marzipan loaf from Astrid, a nice pocket calendar from Uwe, a fabric book protector, a wash rag, two candles, and a book titled *Don Camillo and Peppone*. I enjoyed reading this book about life in post-war Italy. It described in a humorous way the struggle between the priest Don Camillo and his deeply religious communist antagonist Peppone. In one of the parcels I also found several pictures of my brother Jürgen and his bride Ilse. I almost did not recognize my brother. He had gained weight and looked in good health. Ilse could rightfully call him "fatty." These pictures also gave me an image of Ilse so that now I was able to visualize her face when I saw her name.

Of all the Christmas mail I received, I liked best of all the letters I received from Mamuschka, Ilse, and Horst. Ilse was unable to celebrate the holidays with Jürgen, because she had to work at the hospital in Birmingham where she had a nursing position. Horst had to spend the holidays with studying.

On Christmas Eve, Ruth Mueller's sister and brother-in-law drove us to Avoca, where Ruth's father waited to pick us up. The highway was full of snow, the pavement was icy and it was very cold. The Mueller family were simple, but good people. I spent most of my time that evening doing nothing. On Christmas Morning, Ruth's brother Bob, another brother-in-law, and I went rabbit hunting. We saw some tracks in the deep snow, but no rabbits. We then fired a few rounds at a tree branch, but missed it in the high wind. We finally returned to the house with wet pants and shoes full of snow. The family opened the presents after dinner in the late afternoon. The nicely wrapped gifts had been displayed under the Christmas tree. Everybody took turns taking one of the packages and handing it to the person listed on a tag as the recipient. This tag also contained greetings and good wishes from the donor. The recipient then read these remarks to the family and opened the package to show the gift to everybody. I was surprised when my name was called, too. I received a package from Ruth with two handkerchiefs and a tie from her brother Bob. I had brought a nice silver dish for Ruth's mother, a lighter for her father and a billfold for her brother Bob. I already had given Ruth a large table lamp before we left Omaha. Everything was well received and I was hopeful that my visit here helped to further improve our image as immigrants. Actually, letting people know who we German immigrants were had been the prime reason for my accepting this invitation. After all the presents had been distributed and opened, Ruth and I returned to Omaha.

On Saturday, December 27th, I celebrated my birthday two days early with Dan and John Bredfeldt. I served them a hearty supper and we spent the evening talking about our past while enjoying a glass of wine, cookies, and chocolates. Dan told us about his experiences as a Russian prisoner of war in 1945. It was a nice and memorable evening for all of us!

On New Years Eve, the Bredfeldts and I went to the dance sponsored by the German Musikverein (Music Society). Shortly before midnight we visited the Pusch family, where we celebrated the arrival of the New Year with all kinds of delicatessen, punch, and cocktails. The Brasch family, whom I had met at several previous functions of the German community in Omaha, had invited me for dinner on New Year's Day. After a month of being unable to prepare a decent meal, I very much enjoyed the turkey dinner with stuffing and cranberry sauce. I had brought along a bottle of wine and, as I always did, helped with drying the dishes. Automatic dishwashers for homes were not available at that time and helping with the dishes always assured me of being invited again.

I started to spend much of my free time on weekends with John Bredfeldt. We often went to see movies. For a dollar or less, we could watch three movies and spend 6-7 hours in the theater. One of the shows was generally an "A" feature which was a newly released movie with well-known actors and a good rating. The other two movies were usually "B" movies. We could enter the theater and leave it as we pleased. On nice days, we also went for rides in the 1949 Ford John and Dan had bought in the spring of 1952. On Sunday, January 11th, we drove to Lincoln, Nebraska, and took some pictures of the state capitol. A week later, we were invited for dinner by the Pusch family. On February 8th was the "Bavarian Evening" of the German Musikverein, where we heard some very good soloists. A sing-along provided the proper mood for the dance that followed. John and I certainly did not lead a boring life!

On January 13th started the new semester at the Technical High School in Omaha. I was no longer the only foreigner in the evening class. I met Anne Steinbeck, who grew up in East Prussia and lived in Bavaria after the War. When the war ended, she had been in the 7th grade of a German high school. Anne spoke English much better than I did. She now worked in the office of a hospital and like me, wanted to finish her high school education.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in on January 20th, 1953. The foreign policy of this country changed as soon as the Senate had confirmed the appointment of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. All restrictions were removed from Taiwan (Formosa) and Secretary Dulles went to Europe to give some of the western countries an ultimatum to ratify within 75 days the treaty that established NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). If they did not do so, then the United States would no longer assist them in their defense against a potential aggression by the Soviet Union. Eisenhower also was determined to end the hostilities in Korea. Russia responded to this change in our foreign policy with threats to resume the blockade of West Berlin. The East German government started to construct barbed wire fences along its western border to inhibit the escape of its East German citizens to West Germany. The "cold war" appeared to heat up in Europe.

On Sunday, February 15th, my neighbors in the house I lived in invited me for a fried chicken dinner. Ruth Mueller had a new room mate, Hershel Brown, who was recently engaged and very fun loving. She influenced Ruth accordingly. There were also two sisters living in another part of the house. All conspired to put some fun into my life. They brought me pie and cake and came to visit me in my room. I had fun, but made sure that I did not send the wrong signals to the girls! I was not ready to start a relationship with any of them.

On Saturday, February 21st, I went to the monthly meeting of the Young German Club. We had a good discussion and generally agreed on the necessity that the Club needed to be reformed. We were losing too many members and did not attract new young immigrants. There were quite a few suggestions made, especially for the May Dance on May 2nd. This dance was well attended and became a "successful event" for the Club. We also planned to have a pig roast on March 15th and hoped that this would attract new potential members.

Letters from Germany kept me informed of what everybody did or wanted to do. My brother Uwe planned to start his horticultural apprenticeship in Bevensen in the spring. Reingard started the new year by taking ski lessons in Austria, as usual, on borrowed money. My brother Jürgen started in December to work at the municipal court in Uelzen. This was part of his training as a judge and he did not get paid for his work. He asked me if I could help him out with some money. I sent him DM 250 before Christmas. In April, he wanted to move to Lüneburg, where Ilse would join him in May. I had received some real nice letters from Ilse and was convinced that Ilse would fit much better to Jürgen than his former fiancée, Evchen Unruh.

In early February 1953, I was asked at the bakery if I was interested in bidding for the job of a dough room helper in the third shift. Of course, I was interested! This was an opportunity for me to advance to a position where I was able to learn about dough mixing and to earn more money. But the bakery was a union shop and the person with the most seniority in the bakery usually had the right to fill a job opening. Other workers told me not to raise my hopes too high, because there were few in the bakery with a lower seniority than I. But I had the support from all the foremen I had worked with and I was given the job in the mixing room.

Omaha, Nebraska -- Peter Pan Bakery
Wulf Doerry with Harry McGrew in the Mixing Room
Wulf's first job in the baking industry
April 12, 1953

My new job consisted of helping the dough mixer in the third shift. His name was Harry McGrew and he was a nice fellow to work with. I worked four evenings and one day every week. It was my responsibility to move the large troughs with the preferment from the sponge (preferment) mixer to the fermentation room and about four hours later back to the dough mixer. The fully fermented sponge was then dumped into the large horizontal dough mixer as part of the dough ingredients. The mixed final dough then received a bulk fermentation time of about 30 minutes before I dumped it into the chute leading to the hopper of the large 6-pocket dough divider located on a mezzanine below the mixing room. Every 15 minutes we mixed one sponge and one dough for bread. In addition, we also mixed every 20 minutes one sponge and one dough for hamburger buns. There was no time to waste and there was no official break for me! I had to eat my sandwich while I was working. Pushing the heavy troughs around was hard physical work. But I was now paid $1.45 per hour and was able to work more overtime. I started on this new job on Thursday, February 19th.

Omaha, Nebraska
Wulf Doerry returns home from work.
April 12, 1953

By working the late shift, I was no longer able to write my tests at the Technical High School. But I did not want to quit studying and asked my instructor if I could buy more text books at the school. When I explained to her and to the principal that I wanted to continue studying at home and that I was more interested in educating myself than in earning credits for graduation, I was asked to come back a few days later. When I did this, the instructor told me that she had discussed my case with the principal. Even though it violated all rules, they both agreed to let me write all future tests at home. After all, until now I had only received "A"s and this would not change anything in my records. I was happy and walked home with a new textbook and workbooks to write my tests at home. This change resulted in an increased productivity for me and before the school year ended, I had accumulated six high school credits (American History: 2 credits; Problems facing American Democracy: 2 credits; Arithmetic: 1 credit; Algebra: 1 credit). Even though Arithmetic was a very easy subject, I finally became aware of some major

differences between German and American mathematical ways of writing numbers. For example, the American quantity of ".5" is equal to "0,5" in Germany. An American "billion" (1,000,000,000) is equal to a German "milliard" and a German billion is 1000 times larger (1,000,000,000,000) than the American billion.

Every time I wrote to my cousin Horst Wiehler, I asked him to give my greetings to Edith Penner. I had briefly met Edith when I said goodbye to Horst's sister Erika before I left Germany. With every letter I received from Horst, he also sent back greetings from Edith. He finally suggested that I should write directly to Edith. Horst wrote me that Edith would not mind receiving mail from me. I finally wrote Edith my first letter on March 15, 1953, and she replied with her first letter written on March 29th. Our correspondence kept the post offices in the U.S. and in Germany quite busy during the following two years until it ended, when she joined me in Omaha on August 7, 1955. We married three weeks later, on August 27, 1955. We both had saved the letters and these are now documenting some of my writing, especially in regards to our courtship by mail. In 1953, Edith started her third and last year of her apprenticeship as a seamstress and could barely support herself on her monthly allowance. To help defray the extra cost for postage, I sent her DM 200 through Horst. Anticipating that Edith may feel offended by the money I sent her, I left it to Horst to explain to her my intention to help her pay for the extra expenses.

Edith Penner

On May 19th I was called before my Selective Service Board in Council Bluffs. The board members were impressed with my scholastic achievements since September 1952 when they had advised me to continue my high school education. The hostilities in Korea started to wind down and the supply of eligible young men for military service was pretty well depleted. The monthly induction quota for April had reached a new high of over 40000 young men, because many of our troops in Korea were eligible to be rotated back home. The board explained to me that it would be to my advantage to be inducted soon and to put my military service behind me. There also was a good chance that I would be eligible for the *Bill of Rights* for veterans of the hostilities in Korea. Although it was later referred to as the *Korean War*, Congress had never declared war against North Korea. It was generally officially referred to as a "police action" of the United Nations, even though the U.S. forces suffered over 54,000 soldiers killed in action or

by disease. Everything the Board told me made sense, and I had no objections to be reclassified as I-A. The *G.I. Bill of Rights* for Korean veterans was similar to the one legislated for the WW II veterans and it provided a modest stipend for those who wanted to study, low interest rates for home mortgages, free hospitalization for indigent veterans, and other benefits.

My "Order to Report for Armed Forces Physical Examination" was issued by the Selective Service System on June 9, 1953. The order stated that I was to report at 8 AM, Tuesday, June 16th, at the Pottawattamie County Local Board, Water Works Building in Council Bluffs, Iowa. We were 12 young men, including an ethnic German from Yugoslavia, who was 4 months short of 26 years, the upper age limit for eligibility to be drafted. He even worked on a farm and should have been classified as IV-F. But the pool of eligible young men had shrunk to almost nothing and some of the Selective Service Boards started to grab anybody they could get their hands on.

A bus took us to Fort Omaha, where we were subjected to a rather cursory medical examination. I passed all the different examinations and nobody ever noticed my crooked right arm. I finally pointed this out to one of the doctors. He asked a few questions and then told me that it was ok. If I had any major problems with my arm while I served on active duty, the Army would either take care of it or discharge me.

The treaty that exempted German citizens from serving in the U.S. Armed Forces was not worth the paper it was written on! Yes, we could refuse to serve. But this could lead to deportation or we could be denied reentry whenever we left this country at a later time. In any case, any refusal to serve could prevent us from ever becoming a U.S. citizen. I myself had decided to serve my two years, if I was drafted. I felt, if I wanted to live in this country and benefit from all the opportunities it offered to me, then I also had to accept all the responsibilities of a young man living here! Three days later, the Selective Service Board sent me the "Certificate of Acceptability" for induction into the armed services. On July 8th I was sent the "Order to Report for Induction" on August 19, 1953, at 8 AM.

As I started to follow the politics of this country, I was often puzzled by the attitudes of the politicians and the general public. Everybody boasted about the ***Bill of Rights*** in the Constitution that guaranteed everybody a set of basic freedoms. I often was told: "This is a free country and I can do what I want!" Many “good citizens” started to believe that this “freedom” gave them the license to ignore and to violate the rights of others. Many of these "good citizens” also claimed to have the right to pollute the environment with noise and litter. They thought nothing of being inconsiderate towards their neighbors. Anybody objecting to this behavior faced the danger of being called "un-American." This designation was equivalent to being called a "communist." Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, who chaired the committee investigating "un-American activities," set the example by labeling many respectable citizens of this country as “communist” and “un-American.” He recklessly ruined the careers and lives of many respectable people by making unsupported charges. Senator McCarthy brought many to their financial and professional ruin. It was the infamous "McCarthy Era." Although many of my coworkers assured me that what had happened in Germany before the War could never happen in this country, *McCarthyism* reminded me very much of what Germany had experienced 15 years

earlier. Fortunately, my friends were right and even this period came to a sudden end when McCarthy's colleagues in the U.S. Senate realized the danger of his tactics and censured him.

Then, as it is still today, there was the question of which services were to be provided by the local, state, and federal governments and what the people were willing to pay for these services in the form of taxes. The average "Joe" complained about everything. He did not want to pay the "high taxes", but complained when the roads deteriorated. However, this did not keep him from violating the speed limits and from speeding through the potholes in the pavement while complaining that the poor condition of the streets ruined his car. After the savings accumulated during the war years were used up, Joe started to "buy on credit" many things he really did not need. Although this stimulated the economy, it also caused inflation. Then Joe went on strike for more money and for reduced working hours to enjoy the things he had bought on credit. But despite all the complaining and less than perfect conditions, it was a very good time. The veterans of WW II used their GI Bill to go to college and to buy new homes. This was a great country to live in, and I looked forward to a rewarding life and a good future in this country!

I received a lot of mail for Christmas and during the first months of the new year. Among the mail were letters from the Schmelings and Hinrichs. But there was nothing from Christel. I had not heard from her since September and gave up on her. I even received a long letter from my sister Gundula. She and Willi had moved into a nice, albeit small, apartment in Uelzen. I had sent Gundula DM 250. 200 marks were for Uwe so that he could buy himself some clothes. The other 50 marks were for things I would specify at a later time. Both Uwe and Astrid wrote me very nice letters. Uwe liked his horticulture job, and I was convinced that he would do well in this profession. I gave Uwe and Astrid each 50 marks to spend at their own discretion and asked Gundula to occasionally give them some pocket money from the fund she was holding for me. I also asked her to place some flowers on our mother's grave. My sister Reingard sent me three picture postcards from her 6-week vacation in Italy. I sent her 100 marks as a "refill" for her purse.

My brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse had settled down in their new two-room apartment in Lüneburg. They seemed to be happy and our father appeared to have accepted Ilse as his daughter-in-law. He already had visited them in their new apartment and had invited them to an ice cream parlor. Ilse was very happy about this conciliatory gesture and I shared her feelings.

I also heard from my Tante Milchen, who complained about everything in East Germany (DDR). I heard through Horst Wiehler that our grandfather Opapa Penner appreciated receiving the box of cigars I had asked Horst to send him for me. Horst thanked me for the DM 500 I had mailed to him in March and asked me for DM 500 more. With those payments, I had sent him a total of DM 2000. I was happy that I was able to help him and to make it possible for him to study at the Technical College. Horst had now applied to the German government for a monthly stipend of DM 100. This would reduce his dependence on me.

June 17, 1953 saw the start of an uprising in East Germany (DDR). It was the only revolt in the 44-year history of that communist state. After the uprising was suppressed by the East German Military with the assistance of Russian tanks and troops, about 40,000 citizens were arrested and many of those were shipped to camps farther east. 62 persons were allegedly executed and any

desire for political freedom was brutally suppressed and eradicated. Subsequently, the 17th of June was made a national holiday in West Germany.

As usual, the weather turned very warm in the Midwest during the middle of June. Temperatures of over 100°F made life quite miserable in my one-room apartment. Since the temperature did not drop below 75°F during the night, the relative humidity was always above 50%. The fields and lawns started to turn dry and the water level in the Missouri River dropped to a dangerously low level. Watering of lawns and washing of cars was no longer allowed. It even was announced over the radio that the fire hydrants lacked the necessary water pressure for the fire department to fight a major fire. Finally, in late June, thunderstorms moved into the area and brought some relief from the water shortage. But the heat stayed on.

To find relief from the heat in my room, I usually went to the movies on Saturday noon and did not return home until the evening. Movie theaters and bars were the only air-conditioned places in Omaha. Regular stores and supermarkets did not yet have air-conditioning. I sometimes watched three full features in one theater and a couple more in another theater. Admission varied from 50 cents to one dollar and one could come and leave as one pleased.

I gradually started to prepare for my induction into the Army and packed those things I no longer needed into boxes and mailed them to Germany in the hope that Uwe could use some of my old work clothes. I also went to the Technical High School to inquire about my credits and to ask if I had to pass any oral exams. I was told that everything was in good order and that I had received an "A" for all six study courses I had taken.

On Saturday, July 18th, my neighbor Mary Hanna, who was married but seemed to be in love with John Bredfeldt, gave a farewell party for John. Mary had not only invited John, Dan, me, her husband (serving in the Air Force), and her former boy friend Jack, but also other girls living in the house. It was a beautiful evening and we sat outside playing games. We had plenty to eat and drink and we had so much fun that some other neighbors called the police. We followed the advice of the policeman and parted. Mary had a hard time saying goodbye to John. I thought that it was a good thing for her marriage that John and I were leaving Omaha for a while.

On the same morning, Dan had told me that he was going to marry Lilian Goritz on August 8th. Her parents were refugees from East Germany (Mark Brandenburg) and had lived in Uelzen from 1945 until they emigrated in March 1952. I had briefly met Lilian and her parents on March 10, 1952, a few days after their arrival in Omaha and during a visit to Mr. Peter's travel bureau. Lilian's father had been very upset, because there was no job waiting for him in Omaha, even though he had been assured of getting work as soon as he arrived in Omaha. But now, a year later, the Goritz family lived in their own furnished home, owned a car, and Mr. Goritz had a good job as a mechanic. There was no more talk about returning to Germany!

John Bredfeldt reported for induction into the Armed Forces on July 20, 1953. Even though we differed in some of our opinions about what was going on around us, we had become very good friends. When we could not agree on things, I usually told him that he was right. He then responded with a look that expressed incredulity and we both kept our own opinions. But there were times when we openly exchanged our opinion about each other and it was not always very

polite! But this never resulted in any animosity. We spent most weekends together. The person with the most money in his pocket usually paid for any expenses. But in the end, it all balanced!

It was a very nice wedding. I had a long night at work and did not get to bed until 5 AM on Saturday morning. Four hours later, Dan came to my apartment and asked me to help him. I was still very sleepy and asked Dan to come back one hour later, which he did. After shopping for a few items and moving furniture into their proper place in Dan's home, we installed the new gas stove Dan had bought as a birthday present for Lilian. After that, I went home to get some more rest. Dan picked me up, again, at 5 PM.

Dan's and Lilian's wedding ceremony took place in the German Kreuz Kirche (Church of the Cross). Everything was in German. I took several pictures with my little Agfa camera as the newly-weds left the church. After the ceremony, we all met at the hall of the German Music Society. There were about 80-100 guests. Among them were many of my old acquaintances and we all danced to German records. There was plenty to eat and drink and we all had a lot of fun. As midnight approached, I said goodbye to everybody. This wedding had also been a going-away party for me. I only regretted that John could not be with us. I received several offers to stay with friends whenever I got back to Omaha on leave. .

My last day of work at the bakery was Friday, August 14th. It was another long night. It was after 6 AM in the morning when we were finally done with cleaning all the equipment. The neighborhood bar had already opened and I invited my coworkers and Russel, the foreman of our shift, for a glass of beer. Well, everybody else felt obligated to buy a round of beer, too. By the time we finally parted, we all could feel the effects of the alcohol. But I walked my 2½ miles to my apartment as I always did. When I got to my room, I did not waste much time and slept off my hangover. As I then looked back at my year in Omaha, I considered it to be the most rewarding time of my life since 1945.

In response to the announcement of my pending induction into the U.S. Army, I received a lot of mail from Germany. My father's letter was nothing but a tirade in which he accused the USA of luring us to this country by promising us work, but in reality only to use us as "Foreign Legionnaires" for the war in Korea and to block our career development. His letter showed his bias against America and his ignorance of this country. I immediately wrote him a long letter in which I explained to him my own point of view. After I had mailed this letter, I felt bad that I had been too "sharp" with my response. But I soon heard from my brother Uwe, that my father had written a letter to Chancellor Adenauer in Bonn, in which he complained about my induction into the U.S. Army. I immediately wrote another brief letter to my father, in which I asked him to countermand his letter to Bonn. Two days before I reported for induction, I received a letter from the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. I wrote back to the Embassy that I had made up my mind to serve my two years in the US Army and that I was aware of the potential consequences I faced in case I did not report for induction. I also asked that the German officials ignore all future letters from my father.

I was angry about my father's actions. Here we were trying to improve the image of German immigrants in this country, while some "un-German" Germans were destroying everything we had accomplished in this respect!

Offsetting the unpleasant letter from my father was a very nice letter from my brother Jürgen, in which he told me about his own induction into the communications branch (Nachrichtendienst) of the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) 10 years earlier (August 10, 1943). On the way to Augsburg, he was delayed in Berlin for some time by an air raid of American bombers. He then emphasized the difference in the political situation between then and now.

My correspondence with Edith Penner became a weekly exchange of letters in which we expressed our ideas and thoughts. We learned that we understood each other very well and that we both were determined to make the best of our lives. When I wrote Mamuschka (my stepmother) about this relationship with Edith, she immediately spread the news and considered our marriage. Edith had gone home for a 4-week summer vacation with her parents in the Westerwald and would return to Hamburg on September 5th.

I sent Horst another DM 1000 to make it a total of DM 3000. I assumed that this should last him for a while. If he needed additional money at a later time, I would send it to him from my Army pay. Horst wrote me nice letters on a regular basis. There was no more mail from Seedorf. There was, however, the possibility that some of the mail from Germany was lost in February and March, because I never received a letter Gundula had written to me at that time. For this reason, I wrote one more letter, my last one for some time, to Christel in Seedorf.

CHAPTER 9:
U.S. Army: In Training
(1953-1954)

My orders from the Selective Service Board stated that I had to report to its office in Council Bluffs, Iowa, at 8:00 AM on Wednesday, August 19, 1953. As this day approached, I dissolved my "household" by mailing things I no longer needed to my parents in Germany. The rest of it I stored at the home of my friend Dan (Dankwart) Bredfeldt. Dan had married Lilian Goritz just ten days earlier on Saturday, August 8th. They now lived at 4534 South 18th Street in Omaha, NE. Both invited me to stay with them for the last night before I had to report for military service. They offered to let me consider their home as my home too.

On Monday evening, Dan, Lilian and I were invited by the Pusch family for a picnic at a local park. It was supposed to be a going-away party for me. Mrs. Pusch had everything well prepared and plenty of food for us to eat. The hamburgers were quickly grilled while we "younger folks" passed the time on the swings and other recreational equipment in the park. When the hamburgers were done and everything was on the table, we sat down to eat. I only regretted that I was not able to eat more than I did and much of the tasty food was left over. By the time we were finished, it was dark and the mosquitoes were out in force. But we all still returned to the recreational equipment for a while and enjoyed ourselves like young children.

In the morning of August 19th, Dan drove me to the office of my Selective Service Board in Council Bluffs, IA. After reporting to the office, I joined a group of about a dozen young men waiting for the bus to take us to Fort Omaha for induction into the Armed Forces. But even after the bus had arrived, we still had to wait for a couple of fellows to be released from police custody. Apparently, these fellows had done something wrong and had chosen to quickly join the Army rather than stand trial in court.

Finally, we all took a seat in the bus and it took us across the Missouri River to Fort Omaha for registration. After a brief introduction, we and a group of inductees from Nebraska were sworn in as members of the U.S. Armed Forces. We were a total of 34 young men and I was the only German in this group. At noon we ate lunch at Fort Omaha. We also received a Service Number. My number was US 55 407 740. The US signified that I was drafted and I had not signed up as a member of the Regular Army. Those who volunteered their services had a number with a prefix *RA*. The "55" implied that we were inducted by the *5th Army* during the 1950s. The last 6 digits represented our identification number. We had to memorize this number and had to recite it many times during our basic training.

After everything was taken care of, we had dinner at a hotel. At 5 PM, our Greyhound tour bus took us south into Kansas and to Camp Forsyth in Fort Riley. We arrived there in darkness at 9:30 PM. After registering and some other formalities, we were given a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. We then were issued sheets, pillows, and blankets and were assigned to barracks. After washing up, we did not waste much time and tried to catch some sleep.

Early in the morning of the next day, the loud blow of a whistle woke us up. Our first day as a

soldier started with the routine of "hurry and wait." We hurried wherever we had to go to, just to wait in line when we arrived there. After we were called out into formation, a cadre gave us some basic instructions. We then marched to the mess hall to have a good breakfast. After having eaten, we were tested for our blood type, which with our name, service number and our general religious affiliation became part of our *dog tag* (identification tag worn on a light chain around our neck). We then received our *General Issue* (G.I.) of clothing and uniforms. This was a very efficient operation. After being measured for our exact size, we were issued the corresponding sizes of clothing. A specialist checked our uniforms for their proper fit and, when necessary, alterations were made to make sure that everything fit as well as possible and we all looked "uniform." These uniforms would finally become our personal property. But we were required to keep all our clothing clean and in good repair and had to replace them, if necessary. To pay for this, we received a small monthly clothing allowance.

Our *General Issue* consisted of 5 sets of khaki dress shirts and trousers with 2 hats and 2 ties. We also received 2 sets of o.d. (olive drab) woolen winter dress uniforms with 2 hats. Our daily work uniform consisted of 3 sets of fatigues with 2 hats, 2 belts and one brass buckle, which we had to keep polished at all times. 5 pairs of woolen socks, 3 pairs of light socks, 2 pairs of brown combat boots, and one pair of "low quarter" brown dress shoes made up our foot wear. Our underwear consisted of 5 white T-shirts, and 5 boxer shorts. We stuffed everything into a duffel bag and marked the bag with our name and serial number. All our clothing was marked, too, with the initial of our family names and the last 4 digits of our service identification number. All my things were thus marked with a *D 7740*. In the evening, we also received an "advance" of our first monthly pay as a *private E 1*, the "flying twenty." This twenty-dollar bill made sure that we did not have an excuse for not having sufficient financial means to purchase all the *incidentals* we were required to have for display. This included cleaning materials to prepare our barracks for inspection.

Our days were long and we were kept busy at all times, even if it was by just waiting for something to happen. The days started with the wake-up call at 4:30 AM. Breakfast was at 6:00 AM and at 7:00 AM we started to do what was scheduled for us. From noon until 1:00 PM we had lunch break and our evening meal was served at 6:00 PM. Whenever there was any free time, the cadres made us clean the barracks, regardless of how clean they already were. The lights were turned off at 9:30 PM. But this did not mean that everybody was quiet. I was dismayed by the general lack of discipline and the inconsideration for others displayed by some of the new recruits. The worst offenders often justified their actions with "this is a free country and I can do what I want to." Hardly anybody knew how to march in step. The majority walked as if they were just tourists. I was wondering, how the Army could ever transform this bunch of young individuals into a disciplined fighting force.

The weather was quite hot and dry. Fortunately, there were plenty of vending machines in the area and we bought a lot of soft drinks to quench our constant thirst. A bottle of Coca-Cola, or any other soft drink, cost 5 cents. The food in the mess hall was good, but after a year of "taking care of myself," I often would have liked a second helping.

Not only the uniforms made us look alike. Practically all of us lost our "individuality" at the barbershop, where we paid 50 cents for our first military haircut. It took about 2½ minutes to

reduce the length of my hair to about 1cm. The stubble stood straight up and caused a funny feeling on my head when the hair touched my fatigue hat. But the short hair kept us cool during the hot days and it was a blessing later on during basic training. We often lacked the time and water to keep our hair washed and combed. It was the shortest and fastest haircut I ever had.

To differentiate us "untrained soldiers" from those who were assigned to a training company or to a regular unit, we wore our fatigue shirts outside of our pants. We were easily recognized as new recruits. Once we started our *basic training*, we had to tuck the fatigue shirts into our pants. Our fatigues (work and training uniforms) had metal buttons and had no camouflage pattern printed on them. They were not considered a combat uniform. Combat uniforms (*Class A Uniforms*) were khaki in the summer and o.d. woolen uniforms in the winter. The brown jackets were also called *Eisenhower Jackets* after General (and later President) Dwight D. Eisenhower, who introduced this type of uniform jacket to the U.S. Army. Whenever we left our company area without being on duty, we had to wear a *Class A Uniform*. This tradition changed during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. Today, camouflaged fatigue uniforms are worn "off-post" and for "all occasions" and the under-wear is no longer white.

On our second full day in the Army, we were subjected to all kinds of tests. The results of these written tests became part of our permanent service record and comprised the following three categories:

1) Intelligence and educational level
2) Proficiency and aptitude tests
3) Suitability for special military training (e.g. Officer Candidate)

I did quite well in all tests, except the driver's test. I even passed the test for OCS (officer candidate school) and was quite proud of it. Apparently, my lack of a formal high school education did not place me at a disadvantage. My test scores were all in the top third of the group, even though my lack of English vocabulary was definitely a handicap for me. But in the final analysis, none of these good test scores helped me with getting any kind of special training during my almost two years in the Army.

On Saturday we spent the morning and part of the afternoon preparing barracks for the arrival of new inductees. After 4 PM we were free to do whatever we wanted. I used this time to write a letter to Edith. We were off on Sunday, too. In the morning I went with another fellow to a protestant church service at the nearby chapel. In the afternoon I wrote a long letter to my brother Jürgen. The evening I spent with Kenneth Evans (another inductee) at the PX (Post Exchange) buying a few sundries and talking over a glass of *3.2 beer* (beer containing not more than 3.2% alcohol by volume).

On Monday we received a series of vaccinations and we spent most of the day watching training movies and listening to instructions. We also were interviewed for special training. The interviewer suggested that I should apply for "cook and baker training." I agreed to it. We also had to fill in more forms. One of these constituted a *Loyalty Statement*. It was the time when "McCarthyism" was at its peak and many respectable citizens of this country were accused by the then Senator of Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy, of un-American behavior. At that time,

nothing was worse than to be branded a communist or fascist. The statement we had to sign consisted of questions regarding our membership in a long list of communist and nazi organizations. I had not belonged to any of those listed, but to be sure that "and others" did not include my former membership in the Hitler Youth during WW II, I asked the cadre supervising us. He did not know the answer, but proceeded to ask someone else. When he returned, he suggested that I list my membership. The next question was about my training and activities in this organization. I truthfully answered that I had "received cultural, political, and pre-military training." That this was a mistake, I did not find out until almost 2 years later. While I was on guard duty a few weeks before my release from armed service, I had the opportunity to look into my personal file folder. There I found a notation that my loyalty was questionable and I was not to receive any special training or to be sent overseas.

Tuesday was a "lazy day" for me. I finally took my "foreign language proficiency test." There were three other fellows taking this test with me. One was the son of Norwegian parents, who had no formal training in this language. There also was Shunzo, a 28 year old Japanese, who was born in California. But just before the outbreak of the war with Japan, his parents had sent him there to attend high school in that country. After his graduation from high school, he was drafted and served in the Japanese Navy. In 1949 he returned to California and was drafted into the U.S. Army for a couple of years. He now was a corporal and had re-enlisted to serve three more years in the Army. Shunzo requested to be stationed in Japan, where he wanted to look for a wife. He now asked to be tested in his Japanese language skills. I do not recall the language spoken by the fourth member in our group.

I soon noticed that I had difficulties with the test. I lacked the terminology used in American schools, and sometimes I did not understand the meaning of the question. Soon, Shunzo and I were left struggling with our tests while the other two fellows did not seem to have any difficulties, even though their language skills probably were not as good as ours. But we did finally finish and when we compared notes, Shunzo admitted to having the same difficulties as I.

Most of the inductees in my group received their orders on Tuesday, August 25th, and left for basic training on the following morning. While many of them stayed in Fort Riley, some of them were shipped to other camps in the country to receive special training. There were only a few holdovers, and most of these received their orders before the end of the week. Finally, I was the only one left of our original group. I had no idea of what delayed my orders and hoped that it was a special training program. But a new shipment of inductees had arrived and I was kept busy with all kinds of work details. After having taken care of myself for a whole year, I enjoyed the good food served in our mess hall. But the days were long, sleep was short, and the barracks were hot, probably over 100° Fahrenheit!

On Wednesday afternoon and all day Thursday I had K.P. (kitchen police). On K.P. we were the cook's slaves from 4:30 AM until 7:00 PM in the evening. We peeled potatoes, served the food, cleaned pots and pans, washed dishes, and cleaned the mess hall. It was a long day with virtually no breaks! But we could eat all we wanted. Unlike kitchen duty in Germany at the end of WW II, K.P. was not a very popular work detail in the U.S. Army, especially during basic training.

On Friday afternoon I was given an easy work detail. I was asked to help set up an entertainment

center. For its grand opening, the USO service organization sponsored a variety show. I reserved two seats and invited Shunzo to join me. We had a table for ourselves and enjoyed watching the one-act performance, the ballet dancing, and listening to a quartet singing nice songs and a band playing vibrant music. The Coca-Cola was free and we could drink all we wanted. Shunzo and I had no regrets attending this show!

On Saturday evening, August 29, 1953, I had guard duty for two hours. But for the remainder of the weekend I was off duty.

On Tuesday, September 1, 1953, I received my orders for basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. We left by bus on Wednesday morning and arrived at our destination in the afternoon, where we immediately sat down for our evening meal. We then assembled in a large hall, where we listened to a speech welcoming us and informing us of some basic rules for new recruits. We also were given some Army training manuals. It was already late in the evening before we were assigned to barracks and received our bedding for the night. We were tired and it did not take long before everybody in our barracks was quiet and fell asleep.

I spent most of Thursday on minor work details and with much waiting. We also had our eyes and teeth checked. On Friday, I was assigned to K.P.

Finally, on Saturday morning, September 5th, we were assigned to our training company. It was *Company B, 86th Reconnaissance Battalion, 6th Armored Division.* I belonged to the second platoon, 4th squad. After having seen the clean barracks in Fort Riley, which were heated with natural gas, the barracks in Fort Leonard Wood appeared to be stained with coal soot from the soft coal used for heating the buildings during the winter. But it was still very warm outside. Air conditioning, other than as open windows in barracks, was still unheard of. There were no window screens either. Most of these barracks had been constructed for training troops during WW I and had been reactivated during WW II.

After a clothing shakedown, during which we were checked for possessing our complete issue of uniforms and other items, we were turned over to the cadres and NCOs (noncommissioned officers). The cadres were responsible for our training and promptly proceeded to let us know that we were nothing but dumb trainees who knew absolutely nothing, or even less than that! The cadres then marched us to our company area, where we received our company equipment, including the bedding. On Sunday, we were issued M1 rifles. Sunday morning, the entire company marched to church. We had a good chaplain and I enjoyed his service. Unfortunately, he rotated with another protestant chaplain who was not nearly as inspiring to me. In fact, this chaplain was the only one I met during my Army career whom I found worthwhile listening to.

In the afternoon we had our first drill. We learned the basic commands for marching and carrying our rifles.

On this Sunday, we also had our first *G.I. party*. This was actually no "party" at all. This party consisted of a thorough cleaning of the barracks, which usually took place on Friday evenings in preparation for inspection on Saturday morning. This activity was really designed to impress us recruits with the power a cadre had over us. No matter how clean everything was, he always had

to find something wrong to make us work harder until we had "spent enough time, effort and perspiration" on this job. While the barracks became cleaner by the hour, we became dirtier. But we also got to know each other and we soon found out who did his share of work and who didn't. Overall, I was quite pleased with my comrades. But we all suffered from lack of sleep and once we sat down, we could hardly keep our eyes open. This tiredness would not leave us during our entire training cycle.

Monday, September 7th, 1953, was Labor Day. We spent this day on work details and training. Our real training started on the following morning with a speech from the general in charge of all the training units. We all were glad that there was finally some structure entering into our lives. Our days started at 4:45 AM. After dressing and shaving in a hurry, we had reveille followed by *police call* and breakfast. During the "police call", we had to pick up everything that did not belong on the ground, especially cigarette butts. We were not permitted to wash our hands after police call and most of us considered this to be quite unhygienic. After breakfast, we usually had a few minutes to prepare ourselves for P.T. (physical training). This training consisted of some running and calisthenics, such as knee bends, squat-jumping, squat-thrusting, push-ups, and other exercises. We had to wear clean T-shirts for P.T. To do some of the exercises, we had to lie on the dusty and rocky ground. It did not take long before our sweaty shirts turned gray with dirt. But we were not allowed to change shirts when we were done. I tried one time to wear a dirty shirt for P.T. and to change my shirt quickly afterwards. Well, I was caught and had to make some extra push-ups. I never tried this again! Army rules are not supposed to make sense!

Although we had thoroughly scrubbed the barracks on Sunday evening, we did it again on Thursday and Friday evening. Both times we worked until 11:30 in the evening. Since I preferred to work by myself without being pestered by others, I soon learned to pick the dirtiest cleaning job. When somebody wanted to order me around, I just asked him if he wanted to take over my job. I also told him that I was not going to do anything else. Soon, nobody bothered me anymore. I used this strategy during my entire Army career. To me, it soon became obvious that the US Army was not much different from what I had experienced in Germany during the war. Soldiers are not supposed to think and use logic! They are only to carry out orders, regardless whether these make sense to him or not! But I also learned that I could carve out my own niche in the system, where I could feel comfortable to operate in. It was definitely counterproductive to rebel against the system, like some of my fellow recruits did. They wasted a lot of effort and energy on "fighting" unreasonable demands on us. Whenever I pointed this out to them, they generally answered that they were raised in a "free and democratic country," while I had a militaristic background and was used to follow dumb orders. But at the end of our training, one of them confided to me that he had learned a lot from me and that he was going to do the best he knew how for the rest of his military career.

When I was drafted, I was apprehensive about meeting sergeants or other noncommissioned officers who had once fought against the German Wehrmacht. I was wondering, whether they still carried a grudge against all German people who once had served in a German military or paramilitary unit, like I had. But I can honestly say that not once during my almost two years in the US Army did somebody discriminate against me. On the contrary, I often received preferential treatment for my background and often for no obvious reason!

I was glad that I finally had a somewhat permanent address and I was anxious to write everybody in my family, and especially to Edith, so that I could receive some mail. I also changed the address for the German paper I received three times per week from Omaha, NE. It was always very nice to hear one's name during mail call. Mail call was usually during our lunch break and we had to fall into formation for this event. Once I received my first mail, I quickly learned that nobody knew the German pronunciation of my name. Instead, they pronounced the *oe* simply as an *o*. To avoid any further confusion, I accepted this new pronunciation of my name. My German signature was another problem.

We were paid in cash on payday at the beginning of each month and we had to sign for it with our official name. My official signature for documents was Wulf T. A. Doerry. To have two middle initials was rather unusual in this country, but it did not present much of a problem. The problem was that I used the German way of writing the capital letter "A" and the officer in charge read this to be a capital "G". After I was called back a few times, I changed my "A" so that the payroll people could read it correctly. Today, my regular signature does not show the middle initial "A", unless it is an official document.

About a week after I started *basic training* I received my first mail. As I wrote in my next letter to Edith, mail cheers up every soldier's heart! With 1½ days off duty on the weekend for "best platoon" (for having the cleanest barracks during inspection) and a beautiful sunny day outside, I felt like I was in paradise. I tried to write to Edith as often as I could, which was generally every weekend. These were usually 4-5 page letters telling her about my experiences during training and my feelings towards her. She was now starting the last year of her apprenticeship in dressmaking.

During the second week on Thursday, we had our first P.T. test. We received points for our performance and we had to get a minimum number of points for each of the five exercises. We had to do push-ups, sit-ups, squat-jumps, squat-thrusts, and finished with a 300 yard run. Despite the heat, I did better than I had anticipated and passed the test. I ran the 300 yards in 59 seconds, 2 seconds faster than required. About 10% of the recruits exerted themselves so much during the first three exercises that they collapsed and were unable to finish the test. The most difficult exercise for me was push-ups. The fractures in my right elbow always left me with a weakness in this arm. But to make sure that I did not run into difficulties with any of the cadres, I had a letter from a doctor that excused me whenever I was unable to do with my right arm what I was asked to do. I showed this paper only once to a cadre.

During the first two weeks we spent much time listening to instructions, watching training films, doing D.D. (dismounted drill), memorizing "orders of the guard," and learning other more or less useful things. We also rotated through such duties as K.P. and guard duty. After every hour of instructions (50 minutes long), we had a break of 10 minutes. Everything was very punctual and I had no problem adjusting to the lifestyle of a recruit. Our "platoon sergeant" was Pfc. Titel. He made sure that we always were on time where we were supposed to be. He turned out to be a nice fellow who did not want to make life more miserable for us than absolutely necessary.

On Saturday mornings we had one hour of P.T. and one hour of squad and platoon drill. During this drill we learned to march with and without carrying our M1 rifle. We also learned our rifle

commands. After this we had one hour to clean ourselves and to prepare our barracks for inspection by the company commander. We then changed uniform for our inspection outside in the company area. The entire inspection took an hour, but seemed to last forever. We generally stood "at ease" while the barracks were inspected. But the uneven and stony ground made it difficult to stand still for an entire hour. Although we were off-duty after our noon meal, Pfc. Titel insisted on "beautifying" our company area. There was not much we could do; but he suggested that we construct borders for our walks within the company area by using the ample supply of rocks lying everywhere. Some of these rocks we carried for quite a distance. When we had finished the job, we were proud of what we had accomplished. With the resources available to us, our company area finally looked quite nice to us!

On Saturday afternoon I wrote a long letter to Edith and told her about the week's activity. She had written to me that my cousin Horst had come down with a severe case of hepatitis. I hoped that he would quickly recover from this illness. Saturday evening I joined a few of my comrades and we went to the movies. On Sunday morning I went to church and in the afternoon I wrote letters.

During the third week of our training we learned the various positions for shooting our rifles. We also learned procedures for safely firing the weapons on the rifle range. It was still warm with temperatures during the day between 85-95°F. Wherever we walked, we raised a cloud of dust. The ubiquitous rocks also presented a problem for those of us who had never learned to walk on uneven ground. Almost every squad soon had one or two men walking on crutches with sprained ankles. I myself had no problem with this. After having worked behind horses in the fields, I was quite sure-footed on uneven soil.

Marching in step was definitely a problem for us. In Germany before and during WW II, we practically grew up marching in step. In order to stay in step, we sang marching songs with a uniform and an appropriate beat or cadence to them. Every unit generally had a repertoire of 20-30 marching songs to choose from, and everybody knew these songs by heart. Some of these songs were quite old and universally known. They often predated WW I. Other songs were of rather recent origin and were composed by individual members of units to build morale and to enhance the fighting spirit. Others expressed a soldier's longing for his faraway home, family, or lover.

Apparently, the U.S. Army lacks marching songs and depends on "counting cadence." In order to give the marching unit a diversion, some NCOs developed or adopted interesting chants, to which the marching unit responds with counting cadences: " One, two, -- three, four!" Often, when we trudged along the dusty road carrying our heavy gear, the platoon sergeant gave the order to sing a song. However, the only songs everybody knew were either children songs or Christmas songs. None of these had any rhythm that made marching easier. Moreover, it sounded silly to me to sing a Christmas song when we all were perspiring in the late-summer heat.

While most men in our platoon were on work details on Saturday afternoon to prepare for bivouac during the following week, I had a pass to leave the company area. I really did not want to go anywhere, but it was better than doing dirty work. I had earned this pass by volunteering to

be the barracks orderly for the previous weekend. This job had only required my presence in the barracks in case there was an emergency and to keep out strangers. I used my time "on pass" to write letters at our Service Club. It was nice and quiet there and I could sit at a table. When I wrote letters in the barracks, I had to sit on my bunk and write on my lap. The Service Club was well furnished with a television, a piano, upholstered and regular chairs, tables, and vending machines. There, one also could find books to read. Another diversion was the movie-theater. It soon became a tradition for me to go to the movies on Saturday evenings whenever I was not on guard duty or on a work detail, like K.P. The movie-theater showed primarily new releases and "A" movies. A ticket cost 50 cents. This was well affordable on our monthly pay of $78 as private E1 (recruit).

In the meantime, I started to receive mail almost daily. I particularly looked forward to letters from Edith. But I also received letters on a regular basis from my parents, my siblings, and from Horst Wiehler. When I wrote to Mr. Peter in Omaha to inform him of my new address for sending me the German newspaper, he published this letter in its entirety. Soon thereafter I received a letter from an elderly German lady in Kearny, NE, whose two sons were in the Army and stationed in Germany. She also asked for a reply. My correspondence started to grow and there was not enough time to keep up with it! Our nights slowly grew shorter and we rarely got more than 4-5 hours of sleep in a night. Often we were so sleepy that we had a difficult time staying awake during instruction periods. We had a hard time not falling asleep and not falling off the bleachers in the training areas. We were too tired to properly absorb and retain the instructions and I considered this type of training as a waste of time and effort. This was more a stress test than military training!

On Sunday morning I went to the chapel to attend the Protestant service. I always enjoyed listening to the captain and had no difficulty staying awake. In fact, I found his sermons to be stimulating and refreshing. Unfortunately, this was not the case when the first lieutenant, an Afro-American, officiated. I soon started to avoid his services.

In the afternoon I packed the things I needed for the coming week in bivouac. I had already done my laundry during the previous evening and allowed it to dry during the night. Since we needed two shelter halves for a tent, everybody had to have a tent mate. My tent mate was my squad leader John Dollar from Kansas, who had been a member of the National Guard before he was drafted for active service. I had no problem finding someone to camp with me. I was one of the oldest, most disciplined and best adjusted members of our unit. It seemed that everybody came to me for advice or assistance. This was not only flattering to me, but it also took a lot of my free time. But I was happy that I as a foreigner had such a good relationship with my fellow recruits. The only thing I lacked was privacy. There was no opportunity for me to be alone with my own thoughts. The total lack of privacy was the most difficult aspect of life in uniform I had to deal with! It affected various people in different ways and to different degrees. For example, we had a Jewish fellow who always showered after everybody else was asleep. Others found an isolated place behind the barracks and sat there by themselves. Some found solace on weekends by drinking large quantities of 3.2 beer at the service club on post. Others just disappeared somewhere. Later, when we received passes to leave the post for the weekend, some drove hundreds of miles to their home just to be with their girl friends or their family for a few precious and private hours. After a week of very little sleep, this sometimes had fatal consequences.

There was hardly a weekend when we did not hear about serious auto accidents involving carloads of recruits. Fortunately, everyone in our company managed to avoid serious accidents.

On Monday, September 28, 1953, we started our 4th week of basic training by getting up early and marching over 5 miles to the rifle ranges. We were assigned to range #28 and set up our bivouac in the designated area about 500 yards from the range. We pitched our tents in a straight line. The ground was covered with a 1-inch layer of very fine dust that soon formed a crust with the perspiration on our skin. The dust also permeated our clothing and gear. In contrast to practice in Germany, where we always tried to insulate ourselves from the ground with a layer of straw, grass, or dry leaves, this was not the case in the US Army. We always slept on the bare ground when we were sleeping in our pup tents.

It was a very warm week and there was a shortage of drinking water. We only received a quart of water per day for drinking and washing. If we had a cup full of water left in the evening, we poured it into our steel helmet and washed ourselves in it. The rest we used for a "shower" by pouring the few drops left over our heads. We definitely appreciated our short haircuts.

At the rifle range we fired in all four basic positions. I was appointed to be one of the "trainers" and was responsible for a group of 5-6 men. I had to make sure that everybody in my group assumed the proper firing position and followed the orders from the range officer. We started out with the standing position using the *hasty sling* by steadying our arm with the rifle sling hastily wrapped around the right elbow. Our targets were 100 yards away. We then fired in the kneeling and sitting positions using the *loop sling*. This time the targets were 200 yards away. In the sitting position we also fired 9 rounds in "rapid fire." At the 300-yard range, we fired only in the prone position single rounds and rapid fire. We also fired on the 500-yard range. I had never been a good marksman and my performance here was only "average." To pass the rifle range, we needed 160 points and I had only 150 points. But the rest of our company did not shoot much better. During those days, we did not wear any protection for our ears and we trainers were even more exposed to the sound produced during firing of the weapons than the marksmen themselves.

The rifles we had been issued had reached the end of their useful life. One side of my rifle bore was rusty and pitted and no matter how much I tried, I could not get it as clean as I wanted it to be. Of course, this condition was always noted during inspections. But I always kept the other parts of my rifle spotlessly clean and the inspecting sergeant or officer usually accepted my explanation that no matter how much effort I put into cleaning my rifle bore, it never seemed to improve its poor condition. One of the fellows in our platoon, Pvt. Farley from the Panama Canal Zone, had a different idea about cleaning his rifle. He spent all his free time on polishing his rifle bore and probably had the cleanest bore in the company. But he never found time to clean the rest of his rifle and got into trouble for this at every rifle inspection. He never learned during basic training that there was more to a clean rifle than just a shiny bore!

Since we had a very high percentage of marksmen who did not reach the required 160 points, the range officer called Washington, DC, for advice. The higher authorities, we were told, concluded that there had been no cheating and for the first time in the history of Fort Leonard Wood, we did not have to repeat our firing exercises until we reached the prescribed minimum of

160 points. Our entire company had passed by decree from higher authorities! It was Friday afternoon and after some more instructions and firing a series of 8 rounds, we marched the 5+ miles back to our barracks. We all were glad to be able to take a shower to get rid of the crust of dirt on our skin. It was already after midnight when we had everything cleaned for inspection in the morning. It did not take long before everybody was asleep.

The fifth week of our training went by very quickly. The length of our rest at night was further reduced to an average of four hours. We usually were woken up at 3:00 AM and in the evenings we were kept busy with cleaning our gear. There seemed to be an inverse correlation between the length of our sleep and how fast the time passed. Every day, but on Tuesday, we marched 5-6 miles in the morning to our training area and the same distance back to our company area in the afternoon. Fortunately, the weather started to cool off and become quite pleasant.

Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri
Wulf Doerry, Recruit, U.S. Army
Company B, 86th Recon Battalion
October 11, 1953

The highlight of this week was the *infiltration course*. During this training exercise we had to crawl 83 yards out of a ditch, under three barbed wire entanglements, and around some other obstacles and then back into another trench. During all this time machine guns with live ammunition were fired above our heads. Simulated detonations went off all around us. The machine guns were fixed so that the bullets passed about 3 feet above our heads. Although the thought of live rounds above our heads sounded scary to some of us, all we really had to do to be safe was to keep low while we crawled along. I had no problem with it. We had to go twice through this course, once in daylight and once in total darkness when tracers were used. Since I was on K.P. on that day and missed doing it with our "B" company, I had to do it on the following day with "C" company. This was a good experience for me and made me appreciate our cadres in "B" company. The treatment we received in our company was much nicer and the morale of the recruits so much better! We all cooperated and shared the good things with each other. As I had mentioned earlier, many of my comrades came to me first, if they wanted any information or advice. They also shared with me when they received cookies and other snacks

from their folks and girl friends.

During the sixth week, starting October 12th, we had training on special weapons such as rifle grenades, hand grenades, and bazookas. I started and ended this week on guard duty. This time, I was appointed to be the *supernumerary*, probably because I had the cleanest weapon in my group, or I made the best impression on the *officer of the guard*. This turned out not to be much of an advantage. I still walked guard during the first shift. Since the *corporal of the guard* did not show up, I had to make sure that the other guards were relieved on time. I was responsible for waking up the new shifts of guards and for keeping the guardroom in a presentable condition. As I learned many times in the Army, the burden of extra responsibilities often outweighed the "honor" bestowed on an individual. I actually never worked for special recognition by my superiors. I just wanted to be a good soldier, hoping that by doing so, everyone would leave me alone. Of course, I had a good attitude and that stood out among the rest of the draftees, who usually rebelled against every authority and anything they did not like or disagreed with. As the "supernumerary", I was not allowed to sleep at any time. I tried to write a letter to Edith, but almost fell asleep while I was writing. I finally dozed off and "refreshed" myself with an illegal 30-minute rest. I finished writing the letter on Sunday, October 18th.

We spent the seventh week of our basic infantry training in bivouac. My company had already left when I got off guard duty on Sunday evening. We were told to immediately follow our company to the training area. But we finally convinced those in charge that we badly needed rest. They felt sorry for us and arranged for a truck to take us out to the company at 4 AM on Monday morning. When we arrived at the bivouac area, we immediately "pitched" our tents and were ready to start training with our company at 7 AM. This time, it was a *tactical bivouac*. Our tents were scattered in the woods and sometimes we had a difficult time finding our own tent, especially after it had turned dark in the evening.

During this week we learned tactical squad and platoon maneuvers. I did not consider them to be worth the time and effort. Before we started an exercise, we were told all the details. We were told what we must do when the "enemy" made his presence known to us. We were even told when and where this would be. Thus, our participation in these exercises was minimized to merely "going through the motions." It was almost laughable when I compared this to our training in Germany at the end of the war. There, everybody had to think for himself and nobody knew where we would encounter our opponent. But we had fun firing our allotment of blank ammunition and I did not mind trotting down the same trails many other trainees had walked on for many years before us. They all had been instructed to react in the same way to the same cues. It really was a very predictable game! Unfortunately, real wars are not like this! Only our last training exercise on Thursday involved artillery and tanks. In this exercise, we even fired live ammunition.

Again, our days were long and we all suffered sleep deprivation. We were usually woken up between 4:30-5:00 AM to be at the training area at 7:30 AM. We often had to march 5-6 miles to get there. We usually did not return to our tents before 10 PM. By the time we had our weapons and other equipment cleaned and had washed ourselves, it was about midnight. Fortunately, the weather was real nice. It was dry and neither cold nor very warm. Only during our last night in bivouac did it turn cold and we froze under our single blanket. Finally, on

Saturday morning, October 24, 1953, we marched the 5 miles back to our company area. When we arrived there, we were welcomed by the regimental band, which played marches while we *passed in review* before our Commanding General.

While eating lunch, someone told me that I was on K.P. I was unable to find the duty roster and decided to leave the company area before anyone could find me. After having pulled guard duty during the past two weekends and K.P. on the weekend before that, I was not going to make it easy for anybody to assign me to K.P. for another weekend. But as I learned later, this was only a false alarm. I went to the service club to write a letter to Edith. Reading her letters made me forget everything around me and I wished that I could see her personally. Edith was getting ready to move from the basement apartment she shared with two other girls at the Mennonite church to an apartment she wanted to share with a Ms. Franke. This new apartment was closer to her work and Edith hoped to save about 2 hours of commuting every day. Edith also accepted my suggestion to visit my parents in Kirchweyhe. My cousin Erika Wiehler (Horst Wiehler's sister) was going to accompany her.

The eighth and last week of our basic infantry training started on Monday, October 26th. It was raining all day. This week was primarily designed to test us on what we had learned during the previous seven weeks. We started with a proficiency test. We had to pass 20 stations, where we were tested for our military know-how. We received points at every station and I was happy that my performance was well above the average of our company. I received 132 out of a maximum of 150 points. The same was also true for the P.T. test, in which everybody used all his energy and strength. After finishing all five exercises, we could hardly walk. All our muscles had tightened up and started to hurt. I was amazed that I did so well despite the fractures in my right elbow, which made it difficult for me to do the push-ups. I improved my performance from 203 points at the first test to 236 points at this second one. After these tests were finished, we had a couple of hours to clean our gear. Even though it was Monday, we had a "G.I. party" in the evening. During the past weeks we did not have enough time to keep our barracks in tiptop shape and one could see this! During the remainder of this week we received additional training in laying and removing mines, firing machine guns at the range, and other skills useful for a soldier.

Reflecting on the entire training program, I could say that it was quite comprehensive and generally very good. Our treatment by the cadres and other personnel we came into contact with was very fair. The food was good, too. Other than the unrealistic tactical squad and platoon maneuver exercises during our sixth training week, the only criticism I had was the chronic lack of sleep. Often, we were simply too tired to absorb the instructions from the cadres. We would have comprehended the training material much better if we would have had an average of six hours of sleep per night.

As this basic infantry training came to an end, we learned that our company had outperformed all the other companies in the battalion and that our battalion was the best in the training regiment. Our platoon got together and bought Pfc. Titel, our platoon sergeant, an electric heater with a fan. We in his platoon had all been very satisfied with his leadership during these difficult eight weeks. One of our last acts in this training company was undoing the "beautification" of our company area. We were ordered to return and scatter all the rocks we had with much effort

collected for borders early in our training cycle. We all felt a little cheated. But we came to realize that future generations of recruits also needed an opportunity to "beautify" their company area.

During the sixth week of our training, we all had been interviewed for some kind of other training. I had asked for "cook and baker school." But as our last week of basic training came to an end, we heard all kinds of rumors. One of them predicted that most of us would receive advanced training as combat engineers. We also heard all kinds of rumors, good and bad, about the unit where we would receive this training.

On Saturday, October 31, 1953, our new NCOs took charge of us. We immediately noticed a different attitude radiating from our future cadres and the new discipline transformed us into real soldiers. We all marched with our belongings to the new company area. But this was not our "normal" marching. We half-stepped a lot and the command *to the rear march* rang constantly in our ears. But we finally arrived at our new company area like broken mustangs and were introduced to the remainder of our officers and NCOs (noncommissioned officers). All of them gave short, but very intimidating, speeches. Our new leaders left no doubt in us that now we were soldiers and no longer recruits. Our new address was *Company "B", 50th Armed Infantry Battalion CCA, 6th Armored Division.*

After waiting in formation for awhile, we finally were assigned to platoons and to barracks. After we were issued the company equipment, like bedding, footlocker, field equipment (field jacket, mess gear, rifle, cartridge belt, etc.) we met our platoon sergeant, Corporal Yacone. He explained to us the success he had with the previous cycle of recruits and that he expected that we would do as well or better. He promised us that he would set the example. He would not ask us to do what he did not do himself. We then went to work on making our bunks and preparing our footlockers for inspection. On Sunday morning, we all were obligated to attend church service. The rest of the time we spent in uncertainty and with apprehension until we were ordered to have a G.I. party on Sunday afternoon. We worked on cleaning the barracks until after supper. When we were done, our barracks was about as clean as it could ever be! We used a lot of bleach and clean water for scrubbing the wooden floor. After shopping at the PX (Post Exchange) for a few "required" display items, I did my laundry, ironed my uniforms, and cleaned my gear. The boots had never before looked as polished and all our other gear was in tiptop condition. We prepared for daily inspections. There definitely was a new kind of discipline developing in our company and our general attitude towards each other improved with every day.

In order to avoid any potential problems in the future, I asked for a meeting with Cpl. Yacone to explain to him my position. I told him that I had no ambition to be the best soldier in his platoon, since I could gain no advantage from this. I had finally found out that there was a document in my personal *201 file* that restricted me from receiving any special training. I also showed him a letter that excused me from making push-ups and pull-ups. But I also told him that I would always do my best. If I misunderstood any orders, it would not be that I did not care, but I was German and my English was not that good, yet. However, standing in front of him in a starched and ironed uniform must have impressed my new platoon sergeant and I felt good about this meeting.

I was barracks orderly on the Thursday of our first week. I did everything I could to prepare for the daily inspection. The result was that in the evening I found my name posted as the *Best Trainee of the Week* for the second platoon. During the third week I was even made the *Best Trainee of the Week* for the entire company and received a 3-day pass, even though I really had no use for it. I much rather saved my money than spending it off post.

Like during our first eight weeks of basic training, our combat engineer training started primarily with instructions. We learned the names of various tools and how to camouflage objects. Whenever we had breaks, we had D.D. (dismounted drill) until we all knew how to march in step and to follow marching commands. During previous training cycles, our company had already earned the reputation as the best marching unit on post. As we improved our marching technique, our general attitude towards our military service improved too. This even affected many of those who had refused to contribute their share of effort for the common good during the first eight weeks of basic training. Our platoon finished the first week with the cleanest barracks in the battalion. I had 4½ hours of guard duty at the movie-theater on Friday evening, but returned to our barracks early enough to spend another 2 hours cleaning. On Sunday, November 8th, I reported for K.P. I was pleasantly surprised when this duty lasted only from 6 AM to 6 PM, while during the first 8 weeks of training such work usually lasted from 3:30 AM to 10 PM.

As it was now November, cold and miserable weather soon arrived. After the first week of this training cycle, the temperature dropped below freezing in the mornings. However, whenever the sun managed to break through the clouds, the air quickly warmed to a comfortable temperature. The cold weather gear we had been issued kept us warm.

During the second week we learned to operate compressed air tools such as jackhammers. We also learned the basics about ropes and knots and their use with pulleys and beams to lift and move heavy loads. On Wednesday of the second week, we were off-duty to celebrate Armistice Day commemorating the end of World War I. I used this day to write letters to my friends in Omaha and also to some friends and relatives in Germany. Edith had moved into the apartment of Ms. Franke. Our relationship, even though limited to writing weekly letters, became increasingly cordial. I even started to project our relationship beyond my time in uniform! I arranged to have 100 Deutsche Marks sent directly to her for Christmas. As an apprentice, Edith only received an allowance. She was always short in money. I hoped that this gift would help her in some way without obligating her to reciprocate. In fact, I wrote her that I was well taken care of and that a German lady in Kearny, NE, had already announced that she was sending a package with cookies and German sausages.

During the third week we learned about explosives and how to use them to destroy buildings and other structures. On Friday evening, our first sergeant called my name while we were in formation. In front of everybody he asked me if I had any money. After I had acknowledged this, he told me that there was a three-day pass waiting for me in the orderly room. I was officially the company's *Best Trainee of the Week.* This was the first time in our training cycle that anybody was bestowed with this honor. Although most of my fellow trainees would have been happy about such a pass, I really had mixed feelings about this. I felt that I did not really

deserve this distinction. Also, my ambition still was to remain an "unknown soldier." But none of my comrades was jealous or felt that I did not deserve the three-day pass. Since I did not want to waste my money on spending the night in town (Waynesville or Rolla, MO), I helped my platoon with the G.I. party like I always had done. Also, in the morning I helped to get everything into shape for inspection. But then I took my writing utensils and disappeared to the Service Club. When I returned at noon, I was told that the inspection committee was unable to select the best platoon, because all barracks were equally clean. But we did not mind. Even the laziest among us slowly developed pride in our company and started to turn into real soldiers. We cherished the reputation of our battalion as the best training unit in Fort Leonard Wood. I certainly appreciated the "Prussian discipline" that prevailed in our unit! It made life more predictable and easier for everybody.

Our fourth training week started on November 23rd. It was dedicated to the construction of bridges and ended with an exercise on Friday evening, when we searched for landmines in darkness. The two bridges we built were the *timber trestle-bent bridge* and the very versatile *Bailey bridge*, a bridge of English design and capable of carrying heavy loads. This floating bridge did not require a crane for its construction. Bridge construction was fun. But the cold weather reduced this "fun" considerably. When we were lying on the cold ground while searching for mines on Friday evening, the warm weather we had during our bivouacs a couple of months earlier appeared much more preferable. It was already 9 PM before we were back at our barracks to start the G.I. party and it was 1:30 AM before we were in our bunks. Again, all this extra effort was rewarded with *best platoon* in our company. We also learned that the company in which we had received our infantry basic training had been selected as the *best company of the regiment* during our training cycle.

The Thursday of this fourth training week was Thanksgiving Day. We were off-duty and surprised by the special treatment we received. Except for those who were on K.P. or on guard duty, there were no other work details. We all had to wear our "class A" uniform, even while we were in the company area. Our cadres and NCOs served the dinner. The tables were covered with cloth and decorated with flowers. There were plenty of snacks to indulge in. The roasted turkey could not have been better prepared in a restaurant. It was served with all the trimmings and lots of fruit. Everybody, officer, NCO, and recruits could bring along their families or girlfriends. It was an outstanding meal we would not forget!

I spent the remainder of the day resting and writing a letter to Edith. I told Edith not only about the good meal I had, but I also explained to her the historical meaning of this holiday. In the letter I had received from her on the Monday of that week, Edith had written to me about her visit to my parents, who were preparing to move from Kirchweyhe to a new apartment house in Uelzen, Germany. I explained in my letter to Edith what I thought about my siblings, my stepmother "Mamuschka" and my father. My father still resented my last two letters to him, in which I told him that I was not going to avoid my military obligation to this country. He had not written to me in the three months since I was inducted and he even refused to read any of my letters.

On the Tuesday of this week I had contacted an Army attorney to explore the possibility of becoming a U.S. citizen while I was in the Army. Foreign nationals in the U.S. Armed Forces

were in great jeopardy if they became prisoners of war in the Korean conflict, especially when they came from countries behind the "iron curtain." To give us legal protection by the U.S. government, President Eisenhower decreed that all foreign nationals who had served a minimum of 90 days on active duty were eligible to immediately apply for U.S. citizenship. This decree became effective in 1953 as *Public Law* 86, and I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity. I filled in all the necessary forms and hoped for the best. I definitely had decided to build my future in this country!

I started the fifth week by waiting practically all of Monday for a letter from our company commander. I needed this letter for my citizenship application. On Tuesday I had guard duty. It started to rain that evening and the rain continued until Wednesday noon. Apparently, someone felt sorry for us on the following morning and arranged for us relieved guards to be brought by truck to the 50 caliber machine gun firing range. The rest of the company marched the almost 10 miles through constant rain. After we had fired the heavy machine guns, we prepared for our night exercise. We were supposed to follow directions by using a compass and counting our steps. Well, we must have miscounted and did not find the marker where we had to start moving into a new direction. But we were not the only group who encountered this problem. Our major and our chaplain had joined other groups of trainees for this exercise and they got lost, too. This night we spent in bivouac and listened to the heavy downpours outside of our tents. In the morning we marched 4½ miles through constant rain to another training area where we were sitting soaking wet for two hours on bleachers listening to a cadre. This was followed by an assault exercise during which I carried a light machine gun. But I was lucky, again! A truck waited to take some of us back to the company area to exchange pieces of our uniforms.

On Friday morning I had another appointment regarding my citizenship application. When I reported back, I was handed a carbine and some live ammunition. I was to guard a prisoner while he was being court-martialed and then return him to the stockade. This fellow had enlisted for a total of 10 years in the Army when he was 17 years old. He had already served 5 years and had spent 2½ of these years in Korea. There he had quickly risen to the rank of sergeant. However, once the hostilities stopped, he was unable to adjust to the orderly life in a "peace-time army" and he went AWOL (absent without leave) on several occasions. Every time he did this, he lost a rank. He had already served two sentences in the stockade and managed to escape imprisonment on a couple of occasions. This court-martial was for one of these escapes and I was given the strict order to shoot him if he should try to run away. I was told about a policy in the Army that requires a guard who allowed a prisoner to escape from his custody, to serve the prisoner's time in the stockade until the prisoner was back in custody. Well, I was not too happy with my new assignment. But I was determined that I would not give my prisoner an opportunity to escape! I later heard that it was against Army regulations to have a recruit in training guard a prisoner, especially with a weapon he had not qualified for. I had never fired this carbine.

We had to wait until after lunch before I could deliver the prisoner to the court-martial proceedings. Except for the time when we ate in the almost empty mess hall, we sat in the company orderly room. I was careful to place myself between the door and the prisoner and with an empty chair between us. I was not allowed to have my weapon loaded to shoot while I was inside of a building. But as soon as we left the orderly room, I replaced the magazine and put a

cartridge into the chamber. I always walked 3 paces behind the prisoner. He never made any attempt to run. He knew that I was always on guard! Even though we talked to each other, I never gave him the impression that I felt sorry for him! During the court-martial he was convicted of having been AWOL. I had to return him to the court-martial for sentencing on Monday morning. His sentence was confinement for 6 months of "hard labor" in a stockade, forfeiture of 2/3 of his pay during confinement, and dishonorable discharge from the Army after he had served all his time in the stockade. The discharge was exactly what the prisoner had wanted.

Later, when I asked why I had been chosen for this assignment, the first sergeant just replied that he did not know anybody in the company whom he trusted enough to shoot the s.o.b., if he should have tried to run away again. Well, I was not too sure whether I would have shot this fellow! Later, I also heard from others that my platoon leader had mentioned that he was very reluctant to give me any dirty work details. All my superiors seemed to be anxious to give me special and favorable treatment. But I never found out the reason for this, other than that I had at one time worn a German uniform and always tried to do my best. This was exactly the opposite of what I had expected when I was drafted, especially from those NCOs who were WW II veterans. Not once during my almost 2 years in uniform did I feel disadvantaged because of my background!

I missed the inspection on Saturday morning, because I had to make up for all the training I had missed during the week. Our platoon was, again, the "best in the battalion."

Our sixth week of training started on Monday, December 7th. I missed this day, because I had to guard the prisoner during the sentencing proceedings. During this week we were scheduled to have our "roving bivouac." On Monday and Tuesday, our company received training in timber bridge construction. On Wednesday morning we moved on to be trained in carpentry and concrete construction. It was cold and very unpleasant, especially when we had to shave with cold water. In the evening of that day we were trucked to a new campsite, where we stayed for the remaining two nights of this week. On Thursday we learned platoon tactics and were "attacked" during the night by our aggressors. On Friday morning we marched 5 miles to the training area for "house-to-house combat". This was a well-prepared and rehearsed event. Our supporting tanks and machine guns expended much live ammunition during this event. I, however, had a relatively easy assignment. I supported and provided security for a demolition expert whose job it was to blow up a bunker. At about 4 PM we marched home with our heavy equipment. We had about 4 miles to the company area. Suddenly, somebody hollered "GAS"! Allegedly, it was mustard gas. Immediately, we all got out our raincoats and put them over our heads. It was turning dark and with the raincoats over our heads and the heavy load of our gear on our backs, we could hardly see where we were running at *double time* to get out of the "contaminated" area.

After our return to the company area, we had supper and our usual G.I. party. But the week had been cold and dry and the barracks had been unoccupied, so we did not spend very much time on cleaning and were finished at 11 PM. When I noticed on Saturday afternoon that there was a need for a lot of "volunteers" for various work details, I grabbed my writing utensils and "disappeared" to the Service Club to write Christmas letters.

We spent the seventh week of our combat engineer training in bivouac again. We all had 3 blankets and a sleeping bag liner. Trucks took us to the training area at the Big Piney River. There we found tents set up on concrete slabs, a heated toilet with showers, and also a mess hall. It looked like a nice bivouac area for good weather. The facilities had once belonged to a prisoner of war camp.

Our first training exercise was to cross the river in boats. The banks of the 100-foot wide river were very soft and muddy and it was difficult to get into and out of the boats without getting our feet wet. While we crossed the river, it started to snow. This added to our misery. In the evening, it started to freeze and the temperature dropped to single digits during every night of this bivouac. But I was lucky. For the first two nights I was "ordered" to keep the heater going in the tent occupied by our NCOs. The recruits did not have heaters in their tents. Besides taking care of the stove, I also polished the boots for my superiors. But I did not mind this, because the tent was warm and I was not freezing during the night.

After we were dismissed in the evenings, many of the recruits headed straight for the heated latrines to secure a warm space for themselves. When we received our ration of milk in the mornings, the milk had turned to ice. In order to drink it, we had to carry the container in our field jacket until our body warmth had melted the ice. We also learned about the bureaucracy of the army. Everybody in the Army received the same ration, no matter where he was stationed and what the weather was like. When we received ice cream for dessert, it was so hard that we could not even cut it with a knife. Since we were cold ourselves, many of us threw the ice cream away.

During this seventh week of training we worked primarily with floating bridges of all kinds. During the instruction periods we almost froze to the bleachers we were sitting on. While we were building the bridges, we made sure we did not get our wet feet. In good weather, this would have been fun; but always being cold made this a miserable week for us. On Wednesday morning, I was relieved from my job as "fireman" and moved into one of the tents. This gave somebody else the opportunity to get a good night's sleep. I now slept on a concrete slab in a sleeping bag liner and rolled up in three blankets. Many recruits had no idea of how to keep warm under these conditions. They just tried to find a spot on the latrine floor. Most of them never washed themselves during this week, while I made it a point to especially wash my feet every night and to change my socks. I also put on everything I could wear during the night. This strategy kept me fairly comfortable during the two nights I slept in the cold tent.

We received our new orders at the end of the seventh week. Together with some of my comrades, I was to report for 8 weeks of Leadership School at Fort Leonard Wood on Christmas Eve. The training at this school was said to be as good and tough as what officers received before their commissioning. Up to half of those starting this training were expected to drop out before graduation. For this reason, very few of us had volunteered for this advanced training. I had not requested it either! Half of us were allowed 5 days of leave for Christmas, while the other half would get their furlough one week later for New Years. Since I had no intention to impose on anybody during the Holidays, I chose the latter.

The eighth week was not only the last week of our training cycle, but it was also the week of Christmas. On Monday we had our proficiency tests in carpentry and concrete construction, where I received 91 points out of 100. The company average was 80 points. On Tuesday we had our P.T. test. Because of my bad arm, I was exempted from doing push-ups and pull-ups and only had to do sit-ups, squat-thrusts and squat-jumps. Even though I did only three of five exercises, I still had over 200 points and was very happy with my physical condition. I felt better than at any other time during the previous 5 years.

We graduated on Wednesday morning and listened to a speech given by Lieutenant General Pence. In the afternoon we had the usual "shake-down" of our belongings, to make sure that we still had our complete issue of uniforms and other equipment. After that we were driven to our new unit, the Fort Leonard Wood Leadership School. Our first impression of the new unit was quite good, but the uncertainty of what we were facing made us a little apprehensive. Our new address was now: Hq & Hq Company, 5th Armored Cavalry Group, 6th Armored Division. We were 64 men in the 123rd class of the Engineer Leaders Course.

Those with 5-day passes left the company area at about midnight to travel home and to spend Christmas with their families. The rest of us were off-duty, starting at noon of Christmas Eve. I took a cab to Waynesville, a small town not very far from Fort Leonard Wood, to mail large colored photographs of me to Edith and my parents, and smaller black and white pictures to my brother Jürgen and my sisters Reingard and Gundula. The remainder of the afternoon I spent sewing new patches on my uniforms. The Leadership School issued us these patches to identify us as members of the school. Since there were no tables or chairs in the platoon barracks, I sat on my bunk. One of my friends had entrusted me with his record player and records. I listened not only to Christmas songs, but also enjoyed classical music. Next to me were the contents of a Christmas package sent to me by my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse. It contained marzipan, honey cakes (Nürnberger Lebkuchen), smoked sausages, two pocket editions with selected German short stories and poems from Friedrich Hölderlin, and also a candle with candleholder. I also had received a large package from Mr. and Mrs. Grosche in Omaha. It contained a fruitcake, cookies, chocolates, nutmeats, a variety of sweets, cigarettes, and handkerchiefs. I gave the cigarettes away and shared the cookies and sweets with my comrades. I also found out that marzipan was not something that was appreciated by the average American and decided to consume most of it myself. My former coworkers at the bakery in Omaha sent me several much appreciated Christmas cards.

After supper I went to the movies. They showed not only the regular movie, but also a newsreel that commemorated Franz Gruber who had written the lyrics for the popular Christmas song "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht" (Silent night, holy night). I was especially moved when the children's choir from Arnsdorf, Upper Bavaria, sang this song in German with shiny eyes. It reminded me of my own childhood, when we sang this song in front of our Christmas tree in anticipation of receiving our presents. This part of the show put me into the proper mood for the holiday season and let me forget everything around me. After I returned to our barracks, I started to write a long letter to Edith and let my thoughts wander to Germany. It was almost midnight when I finally went to sleep.

On Christmas morning, I continued to write the letter to Edith and to sew on Leadership School

patches. I also worked on my uniforms to get them into tiptop shape. Dinner was served a little later than usual. I had ample time to think of Edith and to reflect on my own life. I considered myself very fortunate and looked into the future with optimism! I had no regrets for leaving Germany and wearing the American uniform. Germany had very little to offer to me, while in this country I saw unlimited opportunities for a rewarding future. But I did miss some aspects of the German culture, especially during the holidays!

Like Thanksgiving, the Christmas dinner was fabulous! The tables in the mess hall were covered with clean tableclothes and we were served. The turkey was excellent and all the trimmings and side dishes were delicious. Again, we could not have bought a better meal in a first class restaurant! Once again, everybody was permitted to bring his family or girlfriend as guests. But what impressed us the most was that we were not kept busy with special work details and were free to do whatever we felt like doing.

Our training cycle was to start on Monday, December 28th, 1953. Since half of our platoon was on leave and very little cleaning was done during the Christmas holiday, we decided on Sunday evening to get the barracks into shape. I also did my laundry in anticipation that there would not be time for this during the week.

We started our training Monday morning. It began with general instructions regarding our training and another P.T. test. In the afternoon we had dismounted drill for squads, platoon, and company. It seemed that we would repeat our entire basic training in only 6 weeks. But at noon we were surprised with the announcement that our group's leave would start at midnight and that we must report back one day earlier than originally scheduled – before midnight on Saturday.

Shortly before midnight, we lined up in front of the orderly room to get our 5-day passes. I received mine 25 minutes after midnight on my 25th birthday and found out that I did not need to be back until Sunday evening. I immediately took the bus to Waynesville, where I purchased a bus ticket to Omaha. Not knowing much about the distance to Omaha, I was surprised to find out that we needed 19 hours to cover the 470 miles with a two-hour layover in Kansas City. The landscape did not vary much and I soon adjusted my seat to a comfortable position and went to sleep. In Kansas City I had a good lunch and also had my hair cut. When I arrived in Omaha at 8 PM, I tried to call Dan Bredfeldt, but was unable to reach him. Since the temperature was in the teens, I tried to reach other friends; but they, too, were not at home. I finally started to walk and arrived at Dan's home just as he and Lilian returned. They had already expected my visit for several days. We had a lot to talk about. Dan's brother John had visited a few weeks earlier and now was in a camp in New Jersey, waiting to be shipped to Germany. According to Dan, he had lost weight during basic training and I had gained a few pounds.

On Wednesday morning I visited the bakery to say "Hello" to all my colleagues in the second shift. In the afternoon I went back to do the same during the evening shift. In the evening of New Years Eve I was picked up by a German friend who took me to the New Years dance of the German Musik Verein. The hall was quite crowded and I met there many of the friends I had made during the previous winter. The music was very good and it did not take long before we all were in the proper mood to dance. Even though there were many young Americans present, this event was more like one in Germany. There was no restriction on who danced with whom. We

could ask any girl present to dance with us without worrying about objections from her partner. She could always refuse to dance with us, if she didn't want to. We danced and celebrated the New Year until 1 AM. But before I went home from there, I went back to the bakery to meet my friends in the midnight (first) shift. Like Dan had told me earlier, my friends at the bakery commented that the Army must feed me well. I guess, I had gained a few pounds during the holidays and I felt that I was in very good physical shape. When I finally left the bakery at 2:30 AM, I could not find a cab or bus on the streets and I walked the 60 blocks back to Dan's home. It was a beautiful, crisp winter night and the fresh air felt good!

I was back on my feet at 10 AM and checked out the personal belongings I had left with Dan. I then went to see the Grosches to thank them for the big Christmas package they had sent me. They invited me to stay for the noon meal. Mrs. Grosche had made meat rolls and I could not pass up this delicious meal. From there I went to visit the Pusch family, where I indulged in roasted goose prepared like in Germany. I felt like I was in paradise!

My return trip to Fort Leonard Wood, MO, started on Sunday morning at 1 AM and I arrived at my destination at about 6:30 PM. I had spent 4½ memorable days with my friends in Omaha.

On Thursday, New Years Eve, I had written a long letter to Edith in which I asked her to start thinking about coming to the U.S. She did not need to worry about money to finance the trip. If I would not be able to take care of her because of my service time in the Army, my friends would do it for me. But first I must know where my next assignment would be. I asked Edith to just think about this. I also told her that life here is different from what she experiences in Germany. Some aspects are better and others she must get used to. I tried not to promise too much, but I also was sure that we had much in common and that we were a good match.

A few days after my return to Fort Leonard Wood, I was surprised by a package from Edith. I had not expected this! The package not only provided me with delicious sweets, but it also strengthened my attraction to her! I felt very good about this. Our relationship became increasingly cordial and one could almost say that our respect for each other slowly turned into love. We freely expressed our feelings towards each other and we communicated well in our weekly letters. We longed for the time when the ocean would no longer separate us. Edith's visit to my family just before my parents moved to Uelzen went very well. Edith had found a good friend in my stepmother, with whom she could share some of her thoughts. Even my father tried very hard to make this visit a pleasant experience for Edith. I considered this a good opportunity to thank him and he replied with a nice letter to me. I had high hopes that we had restored our lines of communication.

When I returned to my unit on Sunday evening, I found the entire barracks in disarray. When I left for my leave, I had all my belongings on the upper floor of the barracks. I was now told that I had a bunk on the lower floor and had to move all my gear downstairs. Our training class consisted of 64 men and we all lived in the same barracks. Our bunks were stacked two high. There were all kinds of rumors and we did not know what to believe. But one thing we knew for sure, our training had started on December 28th, and we had to make up for the time we had spent on leave. This meant, we had long days ahead of us!

We had all our special duties, K.P. and guard duty, during the first two weeks. On Monday evening we were issued our company equipment, like field jackets, rifles, mess kits, etc. We also received our assignments. Everybody had to prepare a lecture for presentation to the class. All lesson plans were due on Thursday. I had K.P. on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings until 10 PM and worked on my lesson plan until midnight. Since the lights were turned out at 10 PM, I wrote the plan sitting on the steps of the stairway. My subject was *Explosives and Demolitions*. The lecture was to be graded for content, delivery, and adherence to time limits. My 30-35 minute presentation was scheduled for Tuesday of the following week.

On Wednesday, January 6, 1954, I became citizen of the United States. Sergeant Fine and Corporal Bormann of our unit sponsored me, even though they hardly knew me. Corporal Bormann was my platoon sergeant. He was a very fine person and we all liked him. A judge in Waynesville interviewed me and tested me for my knowledge of the American government and its three branches, the Constitution, and some American history. I was glad that I had learned about these subjects in Omaha and was able to correctly answer most of the questions. At the end of the interview, he asked me whether I had been in agreement with Hitler's philosophy and actions. I answered truthfully that I was 4 years old when Hitler came to power and I was 16 when the war was over. During these years I was too young to form my own opinion, especially since I heard only what the German government wanted me to hear. Apparently, this answer satisfied the judge. At 4 PM, 17 soldiers from Fort Leonard Wood and I were sworn in as new citizens at the Pulaski County Courthouse. Originally, there had been about 30 applicants, but the remainder failed the "citizenship test" administered by the judge. As it appeared, most judges must have decided not to make it too easy for us to become citizens of this country. Later on I met several other foreign born G.I.s who had failed this test three or even more times and had given up on it.

On Friday evening, our platoon sergeant asked for a volunteer to act as barracks orderly during the big inspection on the following morning. Since everybody had to do this sooner or later and there was nobody who was anxious to take this job, I volunteered. I had plenty time to get everything ready for the inspection. As the lieutenant entered our barracks, he was impressed! As I was told later, I also impressed him with the looks of my uniform and the way I reported to him. Later on, I even found a report in the orderly room that praised my job as a barracks orderly and another report from Sergeant Harrison that stated that I participated very actively in the discussions after training sessions. Actually, I started to enjoy leadership training!

During the first three weeks we primarily had classroom instructions in leadership. We learned the basics of instructing troops and the responsibilities of a leader. We had to make presentations and critique ourselves. There was always an interesting discussion after every presentation and we learned a lot from this. We also received ample opportunities to drill our units in D.D. and to lead during P.T. We were graded for everything we did. We lost about 20 men during this time. They were unable to keep up with our training schedule and were either shipped out to another unit or transferred to a later class.

Our barracks and our uniforms and gear had to be ready for inspection at all times, day or night. The floor was bleached to a light color. Every time we had to change uniforms, we had 2-3 minutes to do this and to properly display everything. Every second and minute were precious

and counted! We were told that this training was even more demanding than the training received by our officers. But most of us did not mind it and we were slowly developing a pride in our unit. Our esprit de corps could not have been any better! We all supported each other and could depend on each other, too! Even with some night training, we seemed to get sufficient rest to absorb our instructions and to function properly. Our training could not have been any better! I was especially impressed with the positive change in the attitudes of some of the fellows I knew since our infantry basic training. From sloppy and rebellious recruits they had metamorphosed into sharp soldiers.

During our fourth week of training we moved out into the field for a couple of days. This week was practically a refresher course for the 8 weeks of infantry basic training, only better. Instead of just going through the motions during a field exercise, this training was more like the one I had experienced in Germany. Generally, one of us was in charge and we all were graded for our performance.

On Wednesday morning, January 20, 1954, we moved with all our combat gear to our training area. It looked like it was going to rain, but we just had some sprinkles. The temperature was quite comfortable when we went on reconnaissance patrols in the morning. But when at noon we ate our C-rations "warmed" under our field jackets, a cold wind came from the north and it turned very cold. In the afternoon we ran platoon-sized assault patrols with the objective to force the "enemy" to retreat. In the evening we were on night patrol. Our assignment was to blow up the enemy's ammunition dump. Everything was well prepared and everybody was in his proper position when one overzealous fellow was too rough when he "killed" an enemy guard. This guard hollered a warning to the other guards, who started to shoot. Our own machine guns responded. To save the situation, the demolition squad advanced to do its job. However, one of them tripped a wire and released a flare. In all this confusion, one of the fellows in the demolition squad thought that his partner had already lit the 90-second fuse on his explosives and he was not going to be near it when it exploded. He threw his explosives away and "retreated" in a big hurry. The rest of the patrol followed. A few minutes later, everything was cleared up and we started over. But this time, everything went according to plan. I assume that the culprits did not get very many points for their "leadership" on this assignment. But we all learned that a small mistake can have major consequences.

Apparently somebody felt sorry for us. When we returned from this night patrol, a truck took us back to our barracks. It seemed nobody wanted to take the risk that anybody got frostbitten during the night.

A truck also returned us to this training area on Thursday morning. We started with an uninterrupted 50-minute bayonet assault, during which we had to run an obstacle course through barbed wire entanglements, around logs and rocks, and through shell craters and trenches. A light snow cover added to our misery, and soon we all were panting like dogs chasing after rabbits. In the afternoon we had the famous *Leaders Reaction Test.* We were divided into groups of four men and faced a series of 20 unknown situations we had to react to. Everybody in the group took a turn leading the others during four of these events, while nobody was in charge during the last four situations. We were observed by a NCO at all times and were graded according to our reactions and leadership. This was a fun exercise for us.

We had no inspection on Saturday morning. Our barracks had been nominated as the "honor class" at the inspection on the previous weekend. As a reward, we did not have to pass inspection on this Saturday. Since we had no G.I. party on Friday evening, I went to the movies where I saw a documentary film on salmon fishing in Alaska and the effect of sound waves on glaciers. On Saturday morning, some of my comrades and I went to the Service Club where we had coffee and some cake while we had some lively discussions. After the PX opened, I bought some writing paper. We then returned to the company area where we enjoyed delicious roast chicken for our noon meal. In the afternoon I wrote my weekly letter to Edith, who had written to me about the storm floods that had ravaged Holstein, Germany.

The fifth week started with my appointment as platoon leader for that day. Despite some minor difficulties, I did not run into any major problems all day. That evening we had a night exercise during which we laid anti-personnel mines. After we were done, we had to remove the mines again. On Tuesday we built a pontoon bridge across a 160-ft wide river. We were only about 40 men and had to carry everything from the storage area. We worked hard and finished the bridge in a good time. After we were finished and while we discussed everything, it started to rain, sleet and freeze. This made the disassembly of the bridge even more miserable than its construction. When we were finished, we were soaking wet and freezing. Trucks returned us quickly to our barracks, where we changed our clothes. On Wednesday we listened to lectures presented by our comrades. We also were tested in giving commands during squad and platoon drills. On Thursday I acted as "enemy" for the 4th week exercise of class #124. Fortunately, the weather was dry and not very cold. It was fun to watch the fellows moving through the woods and react to the different situations. In the evening we had another night exercise, during which we removed the anti-tank mines we had laid on Monday. But one hour before we started, the rain began and turned into a very heavy downpour. We started out by using a mine detector to clear a path through the minefield. This worked quite well. But the remainder of the mines we had to locate and remove without any help from detectors. We worked hard until 11:20 PM without being able to locate all of the mines in the muddy and partially frozen dirt. Again, somebody felt sorry for us and we did not have to stay overnight in bivouac. On Friday afternoon we were back in the classroom listening to lectures presented by our comrades. In the evening we had weapons inspection. Because we had again made "honor class," we did not have inspections on Saturday morning.

This Saturday was our monthly payday and everybody was waiting to get the $83.20 minus whatever we were saving and had sent someplace else. Payday was always an interesting event. There were always a few "money lenders" and a good number of men who had borrowed money from them. The first thing a "borrower" had to do was to pay off his debts plus a hefty amount for interest. Usually, these fellows liked to "shoot craps" or play poker. The craps shooters pulled the blanket on a bunk so tight that the dice would bounce. Then they had a good time losing their money to the same fellows who always seemed to win. The winners would then lend the losers more money until the next payday. Poker players were not much different. They only lost their money in a different game and in a different manner. The more cautious players played pinochle where the stakes were usually only pennies and the odds were more even. Playing pinochle was strictly for entertainment, while crap shooters and poker players were gamblers. We finally received our money and many of the non-gamblers took their weekend pass to leave

for Waynesville or Rolla, MO, or even to drive hundreds of miles home to visit their family or girlfriend. I rarely left the garrison during my Army career. I rather stayed on post and saved my money "for better things." I had no problem keeping busy with writing letters and working on my gear.

The sixth week of the Engineer Leaders Course was the last week of training. On Monday morning I participated in the barracks inspection as part of my training. The rest of the day I spent building bridges under the command of some of my classmates. During this week we also had another P.T. test and a variety of lectures.

The last two weeks were to be spent at a divisional unit. In the industry we would call this type of an arrangement an "internship." On Saturday, February 6th, I reported to the 3rd Detachment of the 506th Replacement Company in Fort Leonard Wood. When I reported to the commanding officer of this company, a lieutenant, he appeared to be happy about my military past and said, "Now I finally meet someone who had served in Germany." He was a very good officer.

This Replacement Company consisted of inductees who had failed to get the minimum required score in their general education test. These inductees had an educational level considered too low for basic training. Actually, the men in this company were a mixture of school dropouts and recent immigrants who had a very poor command of the English language. Among them were fellows who had their "Abitur" from German high schools. In order to "encourage" them to quickly improve their English or scholastic performance, they had to attend BEP (Basic Education Program) classes in subjects in which they had been found lacking. As an added "incentive" we had to keep them busy from 5 AM to 9 PM. The lights were turned off at 10 PM. The objective of this treatment was to make everybody want to pass the tests in order to be transferred to a training company, where life was a little more pleasant.

We were four men from the Leadership School, two from our class and two from the prior class. Although we had long days, life was fairly easy for us. While most of the inductees attended BEP classes, we only needed to keep those individuals busy who were being processed for a medical discharge. Some of these fellows should never have been drafted! Others were marginal and, perhaps, good actors. We had to look for things they could clean, like ducts and scraping dirt out of cracks between floorboards. It certainly was not productive work.

I did not see any happy faces among those who attended the BEP classes. Everybody, especially the Europeans, hated the place and felt like being imprisoned. Some Germans complained to me that they did not deserve this treatment, just because their English was not very good. They had a good education in Germany and felt that they could be as good a soldier as anybody else. Another fellow was born in Wisconsin, but grew up in Puerto Rico. He spoke no English at all and did not make much of an effort to learn the language. His vocabulary consisted of only a few words like *telephone, inspection,* and similar words. I have no idea how long he remained in this company.

It was our job not only to make sure that everybody attended classes, but we also had to teach them to follow basic commands, military courtesy, how to make their bunks, and how to properly dress in uniforms. We took them to the chapel on Sunday morning and even helped

some with writing letters home. We also gave them instructions on personal hygiene, on the M1 rifle, and other military subjects whenever there was time for this. On the Wednesday of my first week there, the General inspected the company area and he found everything in good order in the barracks I was in charge of. During the inspection, I was trying to teach the men how to march in formation. Overall, the men we supervised were still totally untrained and behaved like an undisciplined bunch of civilians. They did not like to be in this unit and saw no reason why they should cooperate. Actually, many would have liked to be sent back home. But we also were supposed to keep them disliking it, because we wanted them to try hard to pass their BEP tests so that they could be transferred to a training company where they hoped to be treated a little better.

Within three days, I completely lost my voice and learned the hard way, why we were supposed to use our diaphragm instead of our throat when we shouted orders. First Lieutenant Wellborn, the leader of this Detachment, told us that anybody able to control these people could also lead any trained unit in the U.S. Army! Losing my voice did not help this situation. Finally, during my second week I brought the worst four antagonists to First Lieutenant Wellborn, who gave them some punishment. After this, I no longer had problems and the discipline of the unit improved significantly. Overall, First Lieutenant Wellborn not only gave me very good support, but he also seemed to be very satisfied with my performance. He praised me repeatedly. I even remained with this unit after I graduated from the Engineer leaders Course until I left Fort Leonard Wood on Wednesday, February 24, 1954.

Class 123 graduated from the Engineer Leaders Course on Saturday, February 20, 1954. Again, I did better than I had expected and hoped for. I ranked #7 out of 43 graduates with a rating of "superior" and with 694 points. I was very happy with this result! I had learned much. This training helped me not only to become a better soldier, but also to make the best of my time in uniform! I had proven to myself that I was able to overcome the shortcomings of my inadequate school education by just trying a little harder than most of my comrades were willing to do. Although I never wanted to be a career soldier, I always wanted to do the best I was able to do. My superiors in the Army certainly recognized this and often rewarded me for this extra effort! I expressed this thought in my next letter to Edith to let her know that she, too, has opportunities in this great country! I again encouraged her to think about coming to this country. A new law was supposed to make immigration easier for German refugees.

Somehow, I misunderstood the instructions I received on Tuesday regarding my transfer orders. I was to report to a reassignment company in Fort Lewis, Washington. As far as I could tell, I was to be assigned to a unit on the West Coast. When I checked back with the transportation officer on Wednesday, February 24th, I found out that I had failed to get all my paperwork in order. But I was lucky! 1½ hours later I had all my papers checked out, had received my train and meal tickets, and had packed the duffel bag with my belongings. I took the next bus to the train station in Newburg, MO. There I cashed in a meal ticket for lunch, checked my duffel bag, and caught the 1 PM train to St. Louis, Mo. This was my first train ride in this country. Fortunately, I had a 4-hour layover in St. Louis. When I wanted to get my ticket for the Pullman car, I was told that my coupon was not signed by the transportation officer and, therefore, not valid. The local military personnel claimed to be unable to help me. Finally I went to a different ticket office at the station and received my Pullman car ticket. The train left as scheduled at 8 PM and when I woke up at 7 AM in the morning, we were only about one hour out of Omaha.

When we arrived there, I was well rested, washed and clean shaved. But outside it was raining and sleeting. After spending another coupon on a good breakfast, I called Dan Bredfeldt. But only Lilian was at home and she surprised me with the news that she now was a mother. Little Michael Heinrich had arrived 12 days earlier on February 13th, 1954.

But before I left for the Bredfeldt home at 4534 South 18th Street, I visited the Peter Pan bakery at 12th and Jackson Streets. I left my belongings in a locker at the train station and took only my overcoat, because it had started to snow. Since I wanted to purchase a few items in the bakery's thrift store and I could not greet my friends in the bakery wearing the coat, I decided to leave my coat with the sales ladies in the store. But I was surprised when I found only new faces in the store. The new salesladies were just as surprised, when I nonchalantly left my coat with them. One of these "new" salesladies was Bernice Deras, who lived at 4326 South 12th Street. Later during my furlough, Bernice invited me on several occasions and we spent some pleasant hours together.

At this time, I did not spend very much time at the bakery. Loaded up with bread and cake, I headed for the nearest bus stop to South Omaha. After waiting for 10 minutes in the snowstorm, the bus did not even stop for me. A large tanker truck probably prevented the bus driver from seeing me. As I contemplated to walk the 60 blocks to the Bredfeldt home, an elderly lady stopped and offered me a ride. I accepted and hitched a ride to within a couple of blocks from my destination. When I arrived there, Lilian admonished me for not having written since my last visit. Actually, during the past hectic weeks, I had totally forgotten to thank Lilian and Dan for their hospitality during my New Year's leave. Fortunately, they did not hold this against me.

I spent the remainder of the day with writing letters, talking to Lilian, and resting. In my letter to Edith I offered her encouragement for her approaching exam that concluded her apprenticeship in dressmaking. In the evening, Dan took me to the train station to pick up my duffel bag. The following day I spent shopping and visiting friends and acquaintances. In the evening I went to a local dance hall, where I enjoyed myself dancing.

On Saturday, February 27th, I wrote a long letter to Edith in which I outlined my plan for our future. I realized that it was very unlikely that the Army would reassign me to a unit stationed in Germany. I also expected to be released from the Army about 18 months later and to return to my job at the bakery in Omaha. I needed to gain more bakery experience before attending the resident course in *Baking Science and Technology* at the American Institute of Baking in Chicago. The "Korea GI Bill of Rights" would pay for the expenses of this education. After finding an appropriate position in the baking industry, I would like to visit Germany to enjoy a vacation with her. We could then "test our feelings" for each other. But I also encouraged her to think about coming to the United States to marry me after we convinced ourselves that our feelings towards each other were true and not just mere imagination. I had already talked to Mr. William Peter to explore the possibility of Edith immigrating here. There were two possibilities. One was to apply for immigration under the quota for German citizens. The other possibility was for her to come under a new special law for persons displaced at or after the end of WW II. To immigrate under the quota system usually took 2-3 years, while the special law took less time, but required more formalities. It also was questionable that I could sponsor for Edith while I still was a member of the Armed Forces. But since I now was a citizen of the United States, I

was legally able to sponsor her immigration. After explaining all the different options, I told Edith that I would pay for everything. I also suggested to her that she should visit the American Consulate in Hamburg for additional information on how to proceed.

My days in Omaha went by very quickly. Friends and German families invited me to spend most evenings with them. The Grosches invited me for the weekends. Mrs. Grosche was an excellent cook. Dan had provided me with a house key and I was able to leave and reenter his home at any time, day or night.

I was quite surprised and very happy when I received a letter from Edith on Saturday, March 6th. She had accepted my proposal to come to Omaha! On Monday morning I received another letter from her and I immediately went to see Mr. William Peter to discuss our options. Mr. Peter offered me his assistance and assured me that he would care for Edith in case she arrived while I was still in the Army. In fact, he offered to personally sponsor her immigration through the special law for East European refugees. He also wanted to handle all the paperwork required for this procedure. To simplify things, Mr. Peter would declare that Edith would become a member of his household (i.e., she would live in his home and do housework.) He also wanted to find a job as dressmaker for her. Mr. Peter already considered Edith as my fiancée. I asked Edith in my next letter if she agreed with this. Actually, I never had imagined that I would get engaged to marry in this manner! But I would never regret this! I also asked her for some detailed information and offered some suggestions. I advised Edith against buying anything unless she really needed it. I myself had brought with me a lot of things I never used and finally mailed back to my folks.

In Edith's second letter to Omaha, she responded to my original proposal and let me know that her plans and wishes corresponded to mine, except that she had not dared to express her thoughts so explicitly at an earlier time. Also, her parents were not exactly thrilled about her intentions. But Edith was determined to come to this country! I immediately sat down and wrote Edith what Mr. Peter had offered to do for us, and that I would do anything I could to make her parents feel better about our plan.

My two weeks of furlough in Omaha came quickly to an end. Bernice at the bakery's store invited me on several occasions and we spent some pleasant hours together. However, I always felt guilty towards Edith and made sure that these visits did not turn into an intimate relationship. This may have been disappointing for Bernice, but my feelings towards Edith were already too strong! Also, Bernice was a divorcee and a mother of three little daughters between 2½ and 7 years old. She was two years older than I was and, frankly, I was afraid of getting into something I would regret later on. But I did spend some nice hours with her. When I had nothing else to do during my furlough, I just went to the bakery's thrift store and helped Bernice and her colleague with putting baked goods on the shelves. I wrote Bernice one time from Fort Lewis; but she did not reply and I was glad to put this "affair" behind me and to be able to concentrate on the present and a future with Edith.

On Thursday, March 11, 1954, at 10 AM I left Omaha for Tacoma, WA, via Portland, OR. It was the Gold Coast train and I had a voucher for the Pullman car. On the following morning, our car was switched to the Portland Rose train. We arrived in Portland at 5:40 in the morning of

Saturday, March 13th. I had a Sergeant First Class (Sfc.) as a travel companion. He had already served 18 years in the Army and had been reassigned to Korea. His German wife was from Berlin. Later on, another sergeant joined us. We spent our time playing cards, eating, sleeping, and drinking a lot of beer. After arriving in Portland, we had to wait until 8 AM before our train left for Tacoma. I enjoyed this 3-hour trip the most, especially along the Puget Sound. After a good lunch, we took the 12:40 PM bus to the North Fort of Fort Lewis. Here I reported to the 6021st ASU.

CHAPTER 10:
U.S. Army: Fort Lewis
(1954-1955)

At 2:30 PM on Saturday, March 13, 1954, I reported to the Reassignment Company of Detachment 4, 6021st ASU in Fort Lewis, WA. This company was responsible for new arrivals until they were assigned as replacements to units stationed at the local fort and in Korea. We had no idea how long we would stay in this outfit. There was not much for us to do. But we made sure that we did not end up on too many meaningless work details. However, most of these assignments did not take much time to do. In the evenings, I usually went to see a movie on post. One week after my arrival, I joined a couple of my comrades from Fort Leonard Wood to "explore" nearby Tacoma, a city with a population of about 150,000. In every bar we entered, we were asked for our identification to prove that we were 21 years old or older. Finally, the other two fellows picked up a couple of girls and I returned to our cold barracks at 8 PM, tired of visiting bars and drinking beer. This was one of the few times that I visited this town while I was stationed at Fort Lewis.

Except for the uncertainty and the lack of mail, life in the Reassignment Company was not bad. We did little work and the food was good. While there, I ate my first fried oysters. I found them to be very delicious. They probably were the best oysters I ever ate! They definitely were very fresh. This is not always the case with oysters served in restaurants. Even K.P. was not like what we had experienced during basic training. No cook harassed us and we were done by 6:30 PM. There also was no guard duty for us. It was an easy life! But I also longed for a more predictable and a more regulated life in a regular Army unit. Most of all, I wanted a firm address for receiving my mail. While waiting for my assignment, I received only one letter from John Bredfeldt, who had sent his letter to Fort Lewis without knowing my complete address. Except for my weekly letters to Edith, I did not write any other letters. I was anxious to hear from her again, and to find out how she had done on her final exam as a dressmaker. This completed her apprenticeship. I also expressed my concern about her parents' position regarding her decision to emigrate. Again, I offered Edith that I would not mind to write to them if she thought that it would help them to feel better about her coming to America.

On Saturday, March 20th, we received our orders. I was to report with four other graduates from class 123 of the Engineer Leaders Course to the 231st Engineer Battalion. Our reporting day was Tuesday, March 23rd. This battalion was stationed nearby at North Fort Lewis and was directly attached to the 6th Army. I did not mind staying in Fort Lewis. It looked like a clean post with a temperate climate and without the extreme temperature conditions of the Midwest.

When we reported to the 231st Battalion on Tuesday morning, we were immediately reassigned to the 1438 Engineering Company stationed at the North Fort. This company was one of three in the U.S. Army equipped with the M-60 floating bridge. This bridge was the only one in the U.S. arsenal capable of supporting the "atomic gun," which was designed to fire nuclear munitions. The other two companies were stationed in Germany and in Korea. Our primary responsibility was to maintain and transport the bridge and to train other combat engineering companies in its construction.

Our life in this company was relatively easy and much different from what we had experienced during our training. We got up at 5:30 AM and had reveille 45 minutes later, followed by breakfast. At 7:30 AM we started to move to our assignments, primarily at the company motor pool. Our 1-hour lunch break was from 11:30-12:30 PM. We continued our work in the afternoons and returned to the company area at 4:30 PM. Unless we had K.P. or guard duty, we were off duty for the rest of the day and on weekends. Most of our work at the motor pool consisted of doing preventive maintenance on the trucks, washing, and spot-painting them. There was very little maintenance work to be done on the bridge.

Our company had two bridge platoons. Each 15-foot section of the M-60 bridge was loaded on one 5-ton truck. Each section consisted of an inflatable ponton with a saddle assembly, two tread-ways, a center panel, ropes and pulleys. The 3rd platoon carried on its 2½-ton trucks a footbridge on pontoons that looked like boats. The headquarter platoon was in charge of the powerboats, the company supplies, vehicle maintenance facilities, including the wrecker, the heavy equipment needed to construct the bridge, such as the crane, air compressor for inflating the pontons (we differentiated between inflatable pontons and rigid pontoons), and its own vehicles. When we arrived there, the company was severely understaffed. In fact, this condition did not change very much during the 15 months I was a member of this unit. We usually had more vehicles in the company than we had licensed drivers. Because of our chronic lack of manpower, we seldom were able to take along and assemble the footbridge.

Our company was actually an Army Reserve unit that had been activated during WW II. Our company commander and most of our sergeants were Afro-Americans. Discipline was very lax and most NCOs definitely showed a lack in leadership training. Although the value of the company equipment was one of the highest of any company in the U.S. Army, the educational level of the company personnel was one of the lowest. Most of the men came from Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas and were proud to be hillbillies. None of these men had finished high school; but they were nice to work with. They usually did their share of work and showed consideration for the rest of us. Rumors had it that the average educational level in our company was equivalent to the 5th grade.

We had a relatively good start at our new company. Although we had no formal training in driving the 5-ton trucks, we soon learned to drive them just by moving them around at the motor pool. The trucks had the regular five high gears for normal driving and the same number of low gears for difficult terrain. Most shifting of gears required “double-clutching” to keep the RPMs of the motor high enough to prevent stalling of the vehicle. Since the power steering and brakes depended on air pressure generated by the running motor, we lost all control over the truck once the motor had stalled or slowed to very low RPMs. Some drivers learned this the hard way!

I finally received my mail forwarded from Fort Leonard Wood. Besides two letters from Edith, I received one from my sister Astrid and one from my cousin Horst Wiehler. Later in the week I received another letter from Edith. She, too, expressed her hope for seeing me again, soon. I admired her courage and willingness to face the uncertainty of a potential life with a person she hardly knew personally. This impressed me very much! I was convinced that she would be the right person to help me build a career in this country and to start a family with. Her parents no

longer objected to her plans to emigrate. This proved to me that they, too, had much faith in her ability to act with prudence. In my letter of March 28, 1954, I suggested to Edith that we should consider ourselves as secretly engaged and that we could make this official at a later time when we were more sure of each other. She accepted this offer by return mail. I responded to this good news with the suggestion to consider Easter Sunday, April 18th, as the day of our engagement. I then asked her to buy herself a ring for the DM 150 I had sent her previously. I also wrote her that I would send her more money to pay for the visa.

On April 3rd I wrote a letter to Edith's parents and assured them that they do not need to worry about her emigration to America. Even if I was unable to meet her in Omaha, Mr. William A. Peter, Edith's sponsor, would take care of her. I did not write much about myself and what I wanted to do after I was released from the Army, since I was certain that Edith had sufficiently informed them about me. Other than that, I did not make any promises, even though I was sure that I had fallen in love with Edith and that we would not disappoint each other.

Edith had passed her oral exam as a dressmaker with a comprehensive grade of "good." She was rated as "good" in theory and as "very good" in the practical portion of the exam. This was far above the average of the approximately 200 apprentices who were tested. I congratulated her for her good performance.

In a letter from my sister Gundula I learned that my parents wanted to invite Edith for a visit to their new apartment in Uelzen. In a letter to them, I had mentioned that Edith would try to emigrate to America. My stepmother Mamuschka then wrote to Edith that she considered this decision as hasty. She pointed out all the problems of coming here while I was still in uniform. But despite all the negative comments, Edith was not deterred. The joy to be with me was too great for her. While Mamuschka and Gundula were very critical about Edith's intention to come to Omaha, my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse were very supportive.

The regular garrison life and 8 hour workdays left us with much more free time than we ever had during training. We had plenty to eat and were no longer deprived of sleep. It did not take long for us to settle down and to get used to this new life. Our company area was conveniently located near the movie-theater, PX, and Service Club. The movies at the theater were mostly new releases and changed frequently. When I had nothing else to do, I just went to see a movie. Many of them were interesting and educational documentaries. The entrance fee was only 50 cents.

My first assignment outside of the motor pool was to retrieve a steel cable from a previous bridge construction site. This cable was strung across a river for anchoring the pontons that carried the M 60 bridge sections. The site was not too far from the North Fort. The dirt road was rough, but I enjoyed the ride through the semi-dark old-growth forest of fir trees. It reminded me of one of the forests near Lauenburg in Pomerania. Some of the trees in this forest were giants and taller than any tree I had ever seen before. Now and then I saw one of these giants rotting on the damp ground to make room for others, while some smaller trees had given up their struggle to catch up with others around them. They now stood like skeletons and bare of their needles as a reminder that nature seems to only allow the strongest and fittest to "reach the top." But then one cannot help but think that plain "luck" of being at the right time in the right

place is a basic ingredient of success. This was the way I felt about my own life and my position as a soldier. I was determined to make the best of it and "try for the top" no matter how much of a struggle it would be! I was convinced that I was in the right place at the right time as long as I tried a little harder than those around me!

On Wednesday, April 7th, I was assigned to a work detail that was responsible for cleaning offices on post. This was to last for 8 weeks and took 1½-2 hours every evening. As compensation for this evening work, we were off-duty between reveille and the noon meal. We also did not have to pull guard duty or K.P., and did not have to go on bivouac. This sounded like a good deal for me and I looked forward to some easy weeks.

On this day I also took the pre-test for the regular GED test. The GED test would give me the equivalency of a 12-year high school education. In this pre-test I correctly answered 354 of the 385 questions and was told that I was adequately prepared for the main test. The 12-year high school GED test consisted of a battery of 5 tests. I took the first two tests (mathematics, and natural sciences) on the following two days. I had no problem with mathematics, but had to concentrate hard on the tricky questions in the science test. I completed the tests for history, literature, and English in the following week. I did not find these tests to be very difficult, as long as I took enough time to thoroughly think through all the questions. I had prepared myself by only studying a little English grammar. I was very pleased with the test results. I had scored an average of 88 points for each test and a total of 439 out of a maximum of 500 points for all 5 tests. This was good enough for my high school equivalency!

We had very nice weather on the Sunday before Easter. It was ideal for taking pictures with my Agfa Isolette camera. Just outside of our company area on the parade field we had the *Marne Rock*, a monument donated by a French community to commemorate the Battle at the Marne River where the American troops had helped to defeat the German army during WW I. The monument was landscaped with daffodils and these flowers were in full bloom. It was an ideal setting for a picture and I had a friend take a picture of me standing next to this monument and also kneeling between the flowers. The pictures looked very nice and I sent prints of them to Edith and my parents. Well, my father took offence to this and when I inquired as to the reason why he no longer wrote to me, I was informed that he was not going to write to me as long as I wore the U.S. Army uniform. The picture of me standing next to the Marne Rock was the reason for his decision.

On Tuesday, April 13th, everybody in our company who did not have a valid Army driver's license attended lectures on "rules of the road" and how to drive safely. Then we all took the written test, which I passed with 34 correct answers to 40 questions. The most difficult test was the eye test. I passed it, but had to guess at some of the smaller letters on the chart, even though I wore my glasses. The majority of our group passed all these tests. Of those who failed, some already had a civilian license. In the afternoon of the same day, our motor pool sergeant took us out for a driving test. He put all but one of us in the back of a 2½-ton truck with an automatic transmission. The first one of us to be tested drove us from the motor pool into the woods behind it. The sergeant gave him the directions and some advice, when needed. After about 10 minutes of driving, the sergeant changed drivers and the next fellow drove us through the woods. The dirt roads in the woods were narrow, in poor shape, and full of holes. But we just inched our

way through these and without running into trees or losing anybody from the back of the truck, we all passed the driving test. A couple of days later we received our Army driver's license that qualified us to drive ¼, ¾, 2½, and 5-ton trucks.

Wulf Doerry in front of the "Rock of the Marne"
Fort Lewis, Washington
April 11, 1954

My weekly letters to Edith turned into semi-weekly letters. As Easter, 18th of April, approached, my thoughts started to stray more often to Germany. Easter was our official day of engagement and I wished that we could have celebrated this day by being together. But since this was not possible, I just sent my thoughts to her and expressed them in a letter I wrote her on that day. Edith had caught a cold and thought that she would not be able to visit my folks in Uelzen, as she had originally planned.

On Easter morning I attended the protestant services at the nearby chapel. Much of my free time I now spent on correspondence courses in high school algebra and inorganic chemistry. Although I no longer needed these subjects for my high school education, I felt a need to train my logical thinking and to expand my knowledge of the natural sciences. Since the Army paid for these studies, I had no financial investment in them.

Although I was to be attached to the headquarters of a unit overseeing the maneuvers of an Army division at the Yakima Firing Center, this did not take place for another two weeks. Our company had orders to make available a number of drivers for the official observers of the maneuvers. We were supposed to drive Jeeps and received instructions for the operation of radios mounted on these vehicles.

I was on guard duty on Sunday, April 25th. Actually, I was the driver and responsible for the proper relief of the guards. I had to make sure that the guards at our motor pool rotated every two hours. This would keep me awake all night. But it did not turn out to be this way. The guards had decided to pull all their 6 hours of guard duty in one stretch. This allowed me to get

some rest from midnight until 5 AM. I also found out that nobody took this duty very serious. As soon as I dropped off the new guard, he retreated to the boiler room of the main building in our motor pool and stayed there until the fire in the furnace needed to be stoked. After putting more coal on the fire, the guard usually walked once along the well lighted perimeter of the motor pool to check if everything was in good order before he sat down next to the warm furnace for another short nap. There was no officer or NCO who checked on the guards. Anyway, the guard always had the excuse that stoking the furnace was one of his duties.

On April 29th, I received a letter from Mr. Peter that he had changed his mind. Instead of requesting that the National Lutheran Council arrange for Edith's immigration through the new law, he wanted the Catholic Welfare Conference to make these arrangements. Mr. Peter felt that the CWC was a stronger organization. There were no other changes. I immediately wrote Edith about this change and asked her to contact the Hamburg Committee of the CWC. She would not have to worry about possible obligations to the CWC and that it did not matter that she was a member of the Mennonite church.

I received a letter from John Bredfeldt. He was stationed in France and was kept busy with carpentry and making cabinets for his unit. He worked so hard and he was so tired in the evenings that he considered requesting a transfer to another unit. He also found that the French people did not like Americans. During the approaching summer he wanted to use some of his accrued leave time for a visit to his parents in Flensburg.

During the last two weeks in April, I spent only two days with my company. The rest of the time I was kept busy on work details. In anticipation of being attached to another unit for a month of maneuvers at the Yakima Firing Center, I turned in my truck and tools at the motor pool on April 28th. I also did my laundry and packed everything I wanted to take along.

On Friday, April 30th, 1954, we were issued jeeps. These ¼-ton utility vehicles were of the new model, but very similar to the older models used during WW II and in Korea. After a few instructions on driving in convoys, we drove to the gas station and filled up our tanks. We then parked the vehicles at the motor pool and returned to our company area.

On Saturday morning, May 1st, we checked out our jeeps and assembled in a long convoy of about 100 vehicles. A lieutenant was in the lead vehicle showing the way. A wrecker and a truck with 5-gallon gas cans brought up the rear. Since none of us drivers knew the route or had any idea of where we were driving, it was important for everybody to keep up with the vehicle in front of him. Should anyone get separated from the convoy while we were driving through towns and take a wrong turn, then the rest of the convoy would follow this new "lead vehicle." Fortunately, nobody got lost even though civilian vehicles sometimes stopped in front of us for a red light and temporarily separated us from the convoy. Legally, a convoy always has the "right of way" and is allowed to proceed through red lights in a very tight formation.

Initially we drove through forests of fir trees. When we crossed the Cascade Mountain ridge, we saw a lot of snow still piled up high at the side of the road. Once we were on the eastside of the mountains, the landscape changed. The forest gave way to groves of trees and as we approached Yakima, WA, we found ourselves driving through a desert-like area dominated by sagebrush.

It is not an easy task to drive in a long convoy. The length of the convoy caused our speed to vary constantly between 25-50 MPH. Our inexperience as drivers and our fear of becoming separated probably contributed to this. We left Fort Lewis at 9 AM and I arrived at our destination at 4:45 PM. We stopped for a one-hour break at about noon. My arrival at our destination was slightly delayed, because I was one of a handful of drivers who ran out of gas and had to wait for the truck that followed our convoy carrying the gas cans. I knew that I was short in gas and was worried about running out of it while I was driving along a narrow and curvy stretch of road through the mountains. When I finally found a nice turnout, I pulled off the highway and waited for the gas truck. A little later, another driver joined me for the same reason. After the gas truck caught up with us and we had enough fuel in our tanks, we enjoyed driving the remaining 25 miles to the Yakima Firing Center at our own convenience and speed. The total distance from Fort Lewis was 189 miles.

We had no problem finding the Firing Center (now known as the *Yakima Training Center*) on our own. At all critical intersections we had military police giving us the proper directions. We found our cinder block barracks near the entrance of the military complex. The buildings were well equipped, but not very well maintained. They were awful dusty. But we were tired and really did not care as long as we got some rest. We were now attached to the 95th Engineering Battalion (Eng. Bn.).

I spent my first day at Yakima sitting in my jeep in front of the headquarter building for ***Exercise Hill Top*** waiting for something to do. But I was prepared. I had brought along a pocket edition of *Gone with the Wind* and was able to finish reading this book before I returned to Fort Lewis. I later gave this tattered book to my sister Astrid, who had it rebound by a bookbinder before she read it. When I returned to my barracks at noon, I was told to move to a different barracks. In the evening I made myself comfortable at my new "home" in the new barracks.

On my second day in Yakima, on Monday, I made two trips to the maneuver area with senior officers. During the first trip I had a colonel sitting beside me. A lieutenant sat in the back of the jeep. I just followed the directions from the colonel. At one time, he asked me to follow the tracks made by another vehicle. But all of a sudden, these tracks disappeared in a ravine. The colonel got out of the jeep and looked down into the ravine. He then told me that there should be no problem for me to follow the tracks through the ravine. The colonel also told the lieutenant to stay in the jeep, while he himself chose to walk through the ravine and to "guide" me. From my experience with small farm tractors, I knew that I had to avoid stalling the vehicle and had to drive straight down to prevent rolling the narrow jeep with its relatively high center of gravity. As I got to the rim of the ravine, I saw that its slopes were at an angle of at least 40°. I also noticed no evidence of an accident by the vehicle whose tracks I was following. This encouraged me. I put in the four-wheel drive and shifted into the lowest gear before I inched my way down into the ravine, carefully avoiding protruding rocks. Driving up the other side of the ravine was now reduced to a mere challenge. After this "experience" I had full confidence in the capability of my jeep and during the following weeks I had no problem with driving up and down even steeper slopes.

On Tuesday and Wednesday I made several trips to the town of Yakima. It seemed that I was one of the few drivers who had the permission to leave the Firing Center; but I never learned the reason for this. On Wednesday afternoon I was driving a couple representatives from the press to the bivouac area of the troops preparing for the maneuvers. I felt sorry for the fellows who had to sleep in the dust that covered and permeated everything they touched and wore. Fortunately, it was dry and not very warm. Rain would convert the dust to a slimy mess. I was grateful for the fact that every evening I could return to our dusty barracks and have a warm shower. But this interesting assignment did not last very long. When I returned to the motor pool in the evening, I was given a new jeep (Hq 135) and was told that I was now one of nine drivers on standby to drive one of the generals. The captain and a lieutenant had recommended me for this job; but I had no idea why they had picked me. Although I felt honored, I was not too pleased with this new assignment. This new job required me to be constantly "ready for inspection." But as it turned out, I spent the rest of the week driving for the PIO (Press Information Officer).

I was off-duty from Saturday noon till Sunday evening. The washing machine was out of order and I had to wash all my laundry by hand. The dry climate helped to dry everything very quickly, even though clouds in the sky threatened us with potential rain showers. I was glad that I had brought along my electric iron. For recreation, the troops were invited to attend a rodeo in Yakima on Sunday. I joined some of my comrades and attended the rodeo with them. This was the first rodeo that I had seen in my life and I found it to be quite interesting.

When the second week began, the generals either had not yet arrived in Yakima or they did not need us for their support. I still drove for the PIO. On Wednesday morning I took a lieutenant from the PIO and two reporters to the site of a simulated atomic bomb explosion. This explosion was a little disappointing for me, but the rest of the action was quite exciting. The divisional units responded to this "explosion" with artillery, tanks, and an infantry attack. We were right in the middle of all this action. But we had to leave early, because one of the reporters wanted to file his story for the afternoon paper. I had 45 minutes to bring him back to the headquarters building. The difficulty was not the distance I had to drive. There was no real road, just tracks winding through the sagebrush. To get back in time, I had to drive too fast for the conditions; but we made it in time. When we returned to the maneuver area after lunch, it took twice as long driving at a reasonably safe speed.

The combination of dust, perspiration, sunshine, and a strong wind had its effect on exposed skin. I constantly had to rub skin lotion on my face and hands to keep them from becoming raw. But I had fun driving and felt sorry for the troops confined to the fox holes they had scraped out of the hard and stony ground. Many of them had no protection from the burning sun.

On Wednesday, May 12th, I took a photographer to a divisional bivouac area. There were rumors that the troops had to share their sleeping quarters with rattlesnakes. Some of these stories told of soldiers waking up in the morning and finding a snake next to them in the hole or tent. This photographer wanted to take a picture of a live snake as a background for his story about "life in the field." At the bivouac area we were given 10 men to help us with our search for a snake, but with no success. The men looked into every place they could think of as a hiding place for a snake and turned over every rock they saw. They found everything but snakes. There were

plenty of rabbits, hares, prairie dogs, and all kinds of lizards. One company reported a couple of young coyotes and later on I also saw a couple of small herds of wild mustangs. The sagebrush desert was definitely not a lifeless area. But our photographer had to think of another subject for this day's newspaper story. During one of the other trips we visited a "water purification" installation that provided drinking water for the troops. When I looked at the untreated water, I was glad that I did not have to drink it, raw or treated.

On Monday, May 17, 1954, I received my promotion to PFC (private first class). This not only gave me a "stripe" on my sleeve, but it also raised my monthly pay from $85.80 to $99.37.

Nothing lasts forever! On the weekend I was given a new jeep (Hq 143) with a radio mounted on it. Since I had been "trained" in the operation of a radio, I was again on standby to drive a general. But there seemed to be no general in need of a jeep and I sat all day in my vehicle reading *Gone with the Wind*. The maneuvers were now at the regimental level. The divisional maneuvers were to start on Sunday, May 23rd. The objective of the divisional maneuvers was to push the "enemy" back about 30 miles to the Columbia River. The opponent consisted of units not belonging to the division. While I was waiting for a general to show up, I made a few trips with other officers, such as a major and a lieutenant colonel. Since I was on standby and driving on Sunday, I was given Monday off. I used this day to clean my new jeep and to check it out for loose screws and other potential problems. The rest of the day I worked on my algebra correspondence course. When I was off-duty in the evenings, I usually watched a movie projected on the barracks wall. One of these movies was "Hans Christian Anderson." There was much effort made to keep everybody happy! There also were scheduled buses to take us to the town of Yakima, a town with a population of approximately 50,000. Yakima was, and still is, the center of Washington's apple orchards.

On Saturday, May 22nd, the day before the start of the divisional maneuvers, I was given a new assignment. I now was driving two members of a research team from the University of Michigan. They were studying the effects of various methods to jam the transmission of radio messages. I was told to be prepared to stay out in the field during the following nights. Fortunately, this was not the case for every night. But on Sunday evening we attached ourselves to the headquarters of the division artillery and participated in its move closer to the combat line. We drove over the difficult terrain under blackout conditions. Our headlights only illuminated the ground for about 30-40 feet in front of the vehicle with a very dim light. Since we did not drive on a regular road, we had to follow the weak taillights of the vehicle in front of us. This was a challenging task and some units suffered some severe accidents with casualties. Among others, we were told of a tank that had rolled into a ravine. It was shortly before midnight when we arrived at our destination and I laid down next to my jeep to get some rest. But then it started to rain and I got very little rest. But as it turned out, this was the only night I had to spend out in the field.

During the following days I gained much respect for the capability of my jeep. We never found a slope that was too steep for this vehicle, as long as I used the 4-wheel drive and the low gear. I even enjoyed driving over the difficult terrain and did not mind the long days. But I was very tired in the evenings. We had to change oil every day. The oil in the air filter was mixing with the dust in the air and created a cement-like cake that we had to chip out every evening. We

folded down the windshields to prevent a vacuum forming behind them during driving and drawing in dust that would clog our lungs. The weather was relatively cold for this time of the year. We also had some rain and hail, but not enough to keep the dust down. In the distance we could see the mountaintops covered with new snow.

The division made good progress towards the river, although the "enemy" employed artillery and tanks as well. Finally, even fighter planes entered the picture and flew low over the hill tops to strafe the "enemy" in the valleys behind them, until one of them was just a little too low and hit the crest of the mountain. It crashed into the river valley and killed its pilot. We often were close to the action and I enjoyed watching the troop movements. Finally, everything came to a successful end. On Thursday morning I took the fellows from the University of Michigan one more time to the backcountry, so that they could take some pictures. In the afternoon they turned in their gear and I thoroughly cleaned my jeep.

During these days I received good news from Mr. Peter in Omaha. The immigration authorities in Nebraska had accepted and approved the documents filed by him for Edith's immigration. The documents had now been forwarded to Washington, D.C. and, according to Mr. Peter, if everything goes well, Edith could be in this country within 3-4 months. I looked forward to this and Edith prepared to spend the last months with her parents in the Westerwald. Fortunately, it appeared that I would spend the rest of my service time stationed in Fort Lewis. Edith wrote me that she bought herself a ring with the money I had sent her and that she was happy wearing it.

May 30th was Whitsunday, a major holiday in Germany. My grandfather Heinrich Penner visited my parents in Uelzen to celebrate his birthday with them. He was 85 years old on May 27th. As a senior citizen in the former DDR (Russian controlled East Germany) he was allowed to make one visit per year to relatives in West Germany. But in order to retain the "privilege" to live in the DDR, he was not allowed to stay longer than his permit indicated and to visit any places other than those marked on his travel papers. My parents, without knowing of our "engagement by letter," had invited Edith to come to Uelzen for this family reunion and to meet my grandfather and other members of my Penner relatives. Because of her name and background as a Westprussian Mennonite, everybody immediately accepted Edith as a member of our family. Although I was criticized for temporarily withholding the news of our engagement, Mamuschka, Ilse, and Jürgen later expressed their belief that Edith would be a good wife for me.

On Friday I had to make one more trip to the maneuver area and I spent Saturday in the motor pool preparing my jeep and other vehicles for inspection. I finished this job on Sunday morning. Because I was done early, I received a pass to leave the Firing Center for the afternoon. I took the bus to Yakima and went to see my first and only stock car race. It fascinated me to see old banged up cars without windows and windshields trying to out-race each other at high speed. Even though one of the cars rolled 9½ times, its driver walked away from it. The bodies of all cars were reinforced with heavy steel pipes and the seats were welded to the car frames. The cars were covered with logos of businesses sponsoring them. Although these cars were banged up and looked like they were ready for the junkyard, many of them probably had cost their drivers more money to modify them for these races than a fully equipped new car. Since I still had time after the racing event, I went to see the movie "War of the Worlds." This movie was about the invasion of the planet Earth by creatures from Mars. Nothing would stop the Martians,

not even atomic bombs and the newest weapons. But they finally succumbed to microorganisms they had no immunity to. This was, and still is, a powerful message: nature has more power than man's intellect! As long as we protect nature, it will protect us!

We left Yakima at 8 AM on Monday, May 31st. It was Memorial Day. Despite rain showers on the way, it was a beautiful drive through the mountains. Ragged clouds touched the forests around us and even occasionally enveloped the street we were driving on. We had no major accidents during this trip and arrived at our company motor pool at 3 PM. We immediately noticed a change in the general company atmosphere. Several of our comrades had volunteered for transfer to our sister companies in Germany and Korea. We were to be trained in the construction of our bridge. We also were supposed to re-qualify at the rifle range two weeks later. Otherwise, we quickly returned to our old routines with guard duty and KP. During one night I helped to paint the mess hall.

On Saturday, June 5th, a friend of mine since our training in Missouri and I took the bus to Tacoma. We wanted to buy a few things we could not find in the PX. Afterwards we went to see four movies. One of them was titled "Prisoner of War." It was about an American Army captain disguised as a corporal who parachuted into North Korea to investigate the treatment of American prisoners of war during a death march. He finally ended up in a camp where he remained until the prisoner exchange after the hostilities in Korea had ended. The cruel treatment of the prisoners and the methods used for extracting "confessions" from them reminded me of what I had read about the treatment of prisoners in Russian camps and prisons.

On Monday and Tuesday I qualified at the rifle range and I was satisfied with the result. In the evenings I cleaned my rifle. On Wednesday and Thursday I worked in the rifle pit pulling the targets and calling the shots. These were long days and we were glad when this week came to an end. On Friday of this week we received replacements to fill a few of the many vacancies in our company. These men were sent to our company by a fortunate mistake. Most men in our company, like myself, were classified as *Bridge Specialists* with an MOS of 1817. These new men, among them Clarence Oster, had been trained as *Chemical Warfare Specialists* with an MOS of 1870. Somehow, the person who reassigned these men confused their 1870 MOS with the 1817 MOS of our specialty. Anyway, this mistake was an upgrade for our company. The new arrivals were quickly assigned to responsible positions in the headquarters platoon and worked either in the company supply room or were trained as heavy equipment operators.

On Thursday evening I took time out to see the movie "From here to Eternity" filmed after the novel of the same name by James Jones. It was about a former professional boxer who refused to participate in bouts for the championship because he had accidentally blinded a friend during one boxing match. The story played in Hawaii during the weeks prior to WW II and ended on December 7, 1941, when a guard killed the boxer in Pearl Harbor.

On Friday we had an inspection of our company facilities, which resulted in a thorough cleanup of them on Saturday afternoon. Apparently, a prankster had placed a detonator without explosives in such a position that someone could set it off and thus cause it to explode. Well, this happened during this inspection and the person who happened to step on it was a major from

the battalion headquarters. It scared the wits out of him and he did not take this incident very kindly! Well, we had to make sure that it would not happen again.

Life was not very hard for us. There was very little to do in the motor pool. We kept our trucks washed, lubricated, and spot painted even though we never drove them farther than to the wash rack. Before we left for the motor pool in the morning, we had 30 minutes drill and 20 minutes PT. Our NCOs even lectured us on various subjects. But it was obvious that none of them had any leadership training. Soon, we graduates from the Fort Leonard Wood Leadership School assumed some of these functions and some NCOs finally learned from us how to properly give marching orders and to conduct PT training.

On Saturday, June 19th, we had a major inspection that lasted 6 hours. It was in anticipation of another inspection by our commanding general during the following week. On Sunday I had 6 hours of guard duty at the motor pool. We had agreed on pulling this duty as a block of 6 hours, rather than being on duty for 2 hours and off for 4 hours to rest. The driver brought my evening meal. But the fellow who was supposed to relieve me had not returned from town in time and somebody else had to take his place. Since it was very seldom that anybody checked on the guards, we usually sat in one of the trucks reading a magazine while watching the road approaching the gate. This was especially true on rainy days, which was almost every day during the month of June.

The rain finally stopped on Sunday, June 20th. On Tuesday afternoon we built a 100-meter section of our pontoon footbridge across a nearby lake. Without hurrying, we built this bridge with 20 men in about 30 minutes. If we would have hurried, we could have done this in 20 minutes. Taking down this bridge and loading it back on the 2½-ton trucks took another 20 minutes. Of course, it is easier to build such a bridge across a lake than across a whitewater river. The rest of the week and the following week we spent on the rifle range servicing the targets used by an ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) unit during its summer training.

I received more letters from Germany to let me know how impressed everybody was by Edith when they met her in Uelzen during the Whitsunday weekend. My sister-in-law Ilse expressed her opinion that I could not find a better wife than Edith. She and my brother wanted Edith to visit them during the summer. My stepmother Mamuschka, too, counted on a longer visit from Edith after she quit her job in Hamburg. Mamuschka had her gallstones removed on June 23rd and her mother took care of the household while she recuperated from the surgery. I also heard from my grandaunt Augusta Lang, the youngest of six sisters of my grandfather Penner. She urged me to consider moving to the Los Angeles area to be near her in Van Nuys, CA. She definitely wanted Edith and me to visit her.

The inspection by the commanding general went very well. In fact, our company commander now promised us an extra day off during the 4th July holiday weekend. We all appreciated this gesture of recognition for a job well done. But rumors started to circulate in our company that another captain with the reputation of a tough R.A. officer (regular army) would soon replace our company commander.

As promised, the entire company was given the day off on Friday, July 2nd. I went to the main post to apply for the comprehensive test for the algebra correspondence course I had almost finished. I had completed and submitted 14 tests with 350 individual problems. Their difficulty ranged from very short and easy to long, complex, and difficult. I also checked out the study material for a course in inorganic chemistry. My counselor was surprised about the good results of all the tests I had taken and suggested that I consider a college education. He was disappointed when I told him that I had other plans. I wanted to attend the American Institute of Baking in Chicago and to settle down with Edith in our own home. I definitely wanted to take advantage of the educational benefits available to me as a Korean War veteran.

On Monday evening I went to a variety show at the local Service Club. It was organized by the USO (United Service Organization) and offered several very good performances. A boy and a girl, both about 5 or 6 years old, step danced. The girl also sang with a very good voice while the boy played the glockenspiel and their mother accompanied them on the piano. A dancer performed oriental dances and her acrobatic movements showed that she had complete control over her body. Another lady performer played three instruments at the same time. She played the violin with her hands, the piano with her feet, and a mouth organ that was supported by a frame around her neck. There also were various other entertaining performances.

Edith had given notice to her employer, Mrs. Gebauer, that she was quitting her job on July 15th to spend the remaining time until her emigration with her parents in Strunkeich near Puderbach in the Westerwald. But before she left Hamburg to be with her folks, Edith visited my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse in Lüneburg on Sunday, July 11th. Both gave Edith a silver cake server with the Hildesheimer rose pattern at the end of the handle. This was their present for both of us.

After Edith had quit her job, she visited my parents in Uelzen, where everybody did his or her best to make Edith feel comfortable in our family. While in Uelzen, Edith spent part of her time sewing a dress for Mamuschka's mother. Edith then returned to Hamburg to pick up her belongings and to start sewing the wedding dress for her friend Hannelore Strich. She finished sewing this dress in Strunkeich. At that time, we still expected that Edith would receive her immigration documents within a few weeks. I even asked Mr. Peter for his estimate of the expenses for Edith's journey to the United States, so that I could send him the necessary money in time. I did not want to take a chance of delaying her coming to this country.

From my sister Reingard I heard that she had passed her written and oral teaching qualification exams and was now able to teach at the grade school level. My sister Astrid took a bicycle tour to the shores of the Baltic Sea in Holstein.

During the week after the 4th of July weekend, we trained two engineering companies in the construction of our bridge. Except for driving the trucks with the bridge sections and making sure that the bridge was properly constructed and anchored, we did little physical work during these training exercises. As usual, it was raining and I was glad that we had good rain gear to keep us dry. It seemed to rain every day. On Saturday, July 10th, we had our usual company inspection during pouring rain. The water ran through the rifles so that the entire inspection was meaningless. But it was my luck, again, that I was barracks orderly and stayed inside and dry during the entire episode.

On Monday, June 12th, I had taken over leading four of the exercises we did during PT. I demonstrated the exercises and counted the moves at the same time. The sergeant watched to make sure that everybody moved in the rhythm of my loud counts. Most exercises consisted of four moves and I counted each move. A friend of mine from the Leadership School, Donald F. Gilmore from St. Louis, MO, and I did such a good job that we were given the responsibility to lead all 12 exercises with 12 repetitions each for an indefinite time period. Each of us chose 6 of the 12 exercises. Consequently, I had very sore muscles during the following days.

On Thursday, July 15th, Captain Lawrence T. Dooley took over as our company commander. He was a strict, but also a very good and fair officer who knew his business. Before he signed on, he had a complete inventory taken of all company property. It did not take long before we all knew that we were missing thousands of dollars worth of equipment issued to the company. Some of it was expendable, like pins and ropes, but much of it was non-expendable, like tools and gear issued to the troops. Our former company commander was held responsible for reimbursing the Army for this missing inventory. Captain Dooley was a real professional officer from the *Regular Army*, while our previous company commander came from the *Army Reserves*. We immediately noticed several changes in our company. Within a month, most of our senior NCOs, primarily Afro-American sergeants, transferred to other units on post or to our sister companies stationed in Korea and Germany. They soon were replaced with Caucasian NCOs. Captain Dooley stopped all promotions until he himself was able to evaluate the performance of the eligible individuals. Since I would not be up for promotion for another 3 months, I was not affected by this decision. But as we found out, the captain liked what Don and I were doing during PT.

On Monday, July 19th, I attended a 4-day school for film projectionists. We were trained in the use of a variety of projection devices and audio equipment, including record players, microphones, and loudspeakers. We received some instructions on the first day and spent most of the remaining time familiarizing ourselves with the equipment, primarily the 16-millimeter film projectors. After passing the written tests on the last day of the course, we were given a license that qualified us to check out equipment and movies at the film library on post.

While Omaha, NE, was plagued by a heat wave with temperatures above 100°F at the end of July, it was cold enough in Fort Lewis that the barracks had to be heated. Although we had a few dry and sunny days, it was raining most of the time. We made good use of our water proof rain gear.

Captain Dooley slowly put the pressure on us and started to make soldiers out of us. He made us polish everything, even our mess kits. The problem was that our kits had been designed to tarnish within a few hours to keep them from acting like a mirror during combat conditions. A shiny mess kit can easily give away your position to the enemy, just like a white T-shirt. The redesigned mess kits reflected these hard-learned lessons from WW II. Unfortunately, Captain Dooley was not aware of these changes and we were polishing our aluminum mess kits for hours without lasting effect. But this, too, came finally to an end and the captain accepted our good effort.

August arrived with a beautiful sunny day. One of my friends asked me to come along with him to Mount Rainier. This mountain is the fourth highest in the United States (14408 feet). On clear days, we could see its snow capped peak from Fort Lewis. With 48 glaciers, Mount Rainier has more glaciers than any other mountain in the United States. Our Service Club had arranged this bus trip. Actually, I was amazed about how much these Service Clubs did for service men like us. But unfortunately, we did not take full advantage of everything they offered us. Our bus arrived at the Paradise Lodge in the Mount Rainier National Park at about 2:30 PM. The driver stopped several times on the way to allow us to leave the bus for a better view of the scenery and to take pictures. As we entered the National Park (established in 1899), we saw deer crossing the road right next to our bus. In fact, all wildlife in the park was rather tame and accustomed to the presence of people. Perhaps, they also were used to handouts from visitors. After our arrival at the lodge, we started with a good lunch and walked the trails in the beautiful forest surrounding the lodge. There was still a lot of snow in the higher elevations and in protected areas. We soon noticed all the facilities that made this a popular skiing area during the winter season. Although a little later than our planned return at 7 PM, we were back in our company area in time for me to finish my letter to Edith and telling her about this memorable trip.

During the first two weeks of August we were kept busy with getting our neglected gear into the proper shape for our planned company bivouac. Our vehicles and other heavy equipment showed spots of rust that needed to be sanded and painted. Fortunately, the bridge sections were made from an aluminum alloy and required only minimum care. But we had to make sure that every truck carried all the accessories for its bridge section, such as pins, ropes, and pulleys. Our training also included watching instructional films. It was my job as the company projectionist to put our classroom into proper shape. After a few days of intensive work, I had the room thoroughly cleaned, the walls painted, and everything looking presentable.

Edith was now in Strunkeich, Westerwald. We still hoped that she would receive her visa within a few weeks, although we suspected that her move from Hamburg would cause a slight delay in the necessary paperwork. Before Edith left Hamburg, she had "going away parties" with her friends. Everybody gave her little presents as a remembrance. My family gave her a set of silver-plated tableware as a wedding present for us. While Edith was still in Hamburg, I had written a couple of letters to her parents to thank them for their understanding of Edith's intent to leave the country to be with me, a total stranger to them. Edith's parents had replied to my letters without expressing any concern or holding me responsible for Edith's future happiness. I appreciated their understanding!

Among other changes in our company routine, we now had our weekly parades on Thursday afternoons instead of on Saturday mornings. We never found out the real reason for this. Perhaps, the officers wanted to be off-duty on Saturday mornings. But in order to offer something to tourists and visitors, we were told that there would be occasional parades on Sundays.

On Saturday, August 14th, we had the first major inspection of our vehicles and tools. It was a surprise inspection and created a lot of excitement. It was in preparation for a company bivouac. Our new company commander wanted to make sure that we were fully prepared for this event. Under Captain Dooley's leadership, we all started to feel and act like soldiers, again. I liked it

and appreciated the discipline he demanded from us. Discipline makes life for men in uniform much easier and more pleasant. It required us to work together and to have respect for each other. Soldiers without discipline are nothing but a group of individuals who follow their own pleasures and instincts and cannot be depended on to act in a predictable manner and as a coordinated unit during a critical situation.

As the month of August progressed to the second half, the "rainy season" started again. It seemed that the rainy season in Fort Lewis lasted for 11 months. In anticipation of the company bivouac and as a result of the vehicle and tool inspections, we were busy at the motor pool with making sure that every truck carried all the parts for its bridge section. We marked every part of the bridge, no matter how large or small, with the company and platoon number.

On Tuesday, August 24th, our company moved out for the tactical bivouac to build a bridge across the Nisqually River. It started to rain as soon as we reached our motor pool and it did not stop until the bridge was built on Wednesday. We reached our bivouac area at about noon. After we had eaten, we put up our tents in the rain, camouflaged our vehicles, and prepared the site by digging trenches for the latrine and disposal pits for the field kitchen. Since it was a tactical bivouac, we immediately had to walk guard around the camp perimeter. Our site was a mature forest with a lot of long grass and brush growing between the trees. It did not take long before our feet were soaking wet. Fortunately, our impermeable rain gear kept our bodies fairly dry, although we were perspiring profusely in it. I was glad when in the evening I was able to take off my rain gear and the wet boots to dry my feet. I soon wrapped myself in my three blankets and got used, again, to sleeping on the cold and wet ground.

Fort Lewis, Washington
Wulf Doerry in front of 5 ton truck (FB 41) (with bridge section)
August 24, 1954

Early on Wednesday morning we left for the river to build the bridge. Since we were training another engineering company, we had plenty of help for this job. But it took us all day. It was already dark when we were finished and the bridge was securely anchored on both sides of the

river. I had taken on the responsibility to make sure that all the pontons were properly connected with the heavy steel anchor cable. This job kept me busy and from being ordered around by others. Since this was a tactical operation, we had to drive back to our bivouac area with blacked-out (dimmed) lights. This was not an easy task, since the curvy dirt roads in the forest were not in very good shape and full of deep holes. But we were lucky and suffered no serious accident.

On Thursday morning, our company played the role of an aggressor and raided bivouac areas of other units. The rain was pouring down and I was glad that my platoon had been selected to remain behind as a security force for our own bivouac area. When the rest of the company returned to the bivouac area, the decision was made to take down the bridge immediately. This time we had two cranes and two air compressors and were able to dismantle the bridge from both sides of the river. We were done with this task while there was still some light. This made our return to our bivouac area much easier than on the previous day. When I arrived there, the motor sergeant pointed to one of my inner rear tires. It was flat! On the following morning, while the company prepared to return to our garrison in Fort Lewis, I worked on replacing the flat tire with my spare tire. The size and weight of these tires and the lack of proper tools made this a major job. This was aggravated by the fact that the flat tire was on the inside of dual tires and required the removal of the outside tire, too. But with some help from my comrades, I managed to get the tire changed in time to leave with the remainder of the company as scheduled at 9:15 AM.

The trip back to our motor pool was rather uneventful. The rain finally stopped. We spent the rest of the day with cleaning our field gear and weapons. I also did my laundry and ironed some of my uniforms. On Saturday morning, I washed my truck and at noon Captain Dooley had the company donate two casks of beer for a "job well done." As the result of this kind gesture we had a few "disabled" soldiers in our barracks needing the rest of the day to recover from the effect of too much alcohol. In the evening I enjoyed another variety show at the Service Club.

On Monday morning, one of my comrades and I needed all morning to remove the tube from my flat tire. We had only primitive tire irons to work with. In the afternoon we took the tube to the lake and inflated it. We looked and looked, but were unable to find a hole in the tube. Apparently, the air had leaked through a dirty extension valve and all I had to do was to remove and clean this valve before I inflated the tire, again. Instead, I had spent several hours of hard work to remove and replace the flat tire and to remove its tube. It was a good lesson for trying the easy things first! A flat tire does not necessarily mean a defective tire!

On Wednesday, September 1st, the entire company went to the swimming pool. We all were reluctant to enter the rather cool water. But once I was wet, I enjoyed swimming. I swam laps that totaled about 400 yards and was happy that I was able to do this. I noted that I had not been in such good physical condition since my early teen years. So far, Army life had been good for me!

The following weekend was the Labor Day weekend. On Saturday we had a major inspection of our field gear and vehicles. But the parade scheduled for Sunday was postponed for a week in order not to break up the long holiday weekend. We also were told that we would be off-duty on

the following Saturday, the day before the parade. The weather was pleasant and we all enjoyed the sunshine.

A full year had passed since I started my basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, MO. If I was not sent to Korea or Germany within the next month, I would have too little time left for such an assignment. But our company had transferred a good number of volunteers to our overseas sister units so that their demand for trained men was filled. I liked where I was and felt no desire to get transferred. Captain Dooley treated us all well and we respected him as a very good officer. Every 16-18 days we pulled our special duties, such as guard duty and KP. Unlike during basic training, the mess sergeant and cooks did not abuse anybody. We usually were off duty less than 2 hours after the evening meal was served. During my free time, I kept busy with studying for my "Inorganic Chemistry" correspondence course. I had completed my algebra course "with distinction." I also received and wrote letters to my relatives and friends. Mamuschka was still suffering from some effects resulting from her gall bladder surgery. She had enjoyed Edith's visit and reiterated that she derived more pleasure from being with her daughter-in-laws Ilse and Edith than from visits from my sisters Reingard and Gundula. Reingard had found a teaching position in the district of Harburg. My sister Astrid started to send me letters written in English. She claimed that this practice helped her a lot in school.

Edith was still waiting to be interviewed for her visa. This interview was to be done by the Raphaels Society. But now we heard through Mr. William Peter in Omaha that the NCWC (National Catholic Welfare Conference) had taken over this function. The NCWC was trying to reduce the cost of travel for the emigrants by arranging for mass transportation rather than for individual transportation. This change brought with it advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage was that someone would meet Edith in New York and help her with the transfer to the proper surface transportation to Omaha. The disadvantage was the potential delay of Edith's departure from Germany.

On Thursday, September 9th, we were supposed to build a ferry in record time. This ferry was to consist of four bridge sections with a ramp on each end. This ferry could be moved by motorboats and could ferry vehicles across wide bodies of water. The bridge sections could finally be incorporated into a floating bridge. Despite a shortage in manpower, we made good progress until the crane tried to lift the first ponton into the lake. The crane broke down and it took a whole hour before it was fixed. A short time later we noticed that one of the four pontons leaked air and therefore needed repair. This kept us from finishing the job on the same day. On Friday morning we returned to the ferry and just when we were busy with adding the first ramp to it, we received orders to dismantle the ferry. Of course, we did not get done before lunch. In the afternoon we all went to the main fort to practice for the big parade scheduled to take place on Sunday afternoon. This practice was primarily for the officers and color guards, so that they knew what orders to give and how and where to move. When at 3:30 PM we finally returned to the lake to dismantle the last two sections of the ferry, it started to rain. By the time we were done 1½ hours later, we were soaking wet. This was a good reason for me to do my laundry right after our evening meal. Before I went to bed that evening, my uniforms were ironed and hung up, while the rest of my laundry was neatly folded and put away in my footlocker.

The big parade on Sunday went quite well. Except for a little drizzle, the weather cooperated. Our company marched with the first battalion, and within two hours we were back at our company area. According to a rumor, we had another parade scheduled for the following Saturday. Captain Dooley considered these parades a waste of our time. He believed that our time was better spent on keeping our gear and the vehicles in good shape. From then on, the captain even decided to send only one platoon to train other engineering companies in the construction of our bridge. This platoon and the supporting equipment with operators would be attached to the other company and would return to our company area as soon as the bridge was constructed and dismantled again. This meant for us that we would spend only one night out in the field.

Barracks Interior
Fort Lewis, Washington

Thursday, September 16th started like every other day in the week. We had our PT and marching drill, while the second platoon prepared to leave for our bridge construction site at the river. As I got back to the company area to leave for a regular day at the motor pool, I was told to be ready in 10 minutes to leave with the other platoon. I quickly packed everything needed for a night out at the river, about 20 miles from our motor pool. We made very good progress with the bridge construction. At about 5 PM we prepared to add the ramps to the bridge. Since another comrade and I carried extra bridge sections on our trucks and were not needed, we were allowed to return to our company area. We did not mind this, because it started to rain again.

On Saturday, September 18th, we had a brief inspection in our woolen winter uniforms. As of October 1st we had to wear this woolen uniform, rather than the khaki cotton trousers and shirts. The parade scheduled for this day had been postponed for a week. In the evening I went to see another variety show at the Service Club. This was probably the best show I had ever seen at the Service Club. Except for the piano player, all actors, dancers, and singers were children between 8-13 years. Even the announcer was a boy, and he did an excellent job.

On Tuesday, September 21st, it was our platoon's turn to provide the bridge for training another company. It was a foggy day, but it did not rain. Everything went well and we were done relatively early and before it turned dark. When we were done, we built a huge campfire and sent someone to the next town to pick up a few bottles of wine. We all had a good time and I myself drank about half of a bottle. We had to drink fast, because if one did not, one would be handed only an empty bottle. When all the bottles were empty, we were ready to sleep. Since this was not a tactical bivouac, we did not need to take the top off our truck cabs and I chose to sleep in the cab of my truck. The bench in the cab, however, was too short to stretch out on it and it was not the most comfortable place for sleeping. But we slept well enough that our breakfast was already waiting for us at the bridge site when we arrived there in the morning. Dismantling the bridge presented us with no problems and we were back in our motor pool in the early afternoon.

Fort Lewis, Washington
M-60 Floating Bridge
September 21, 1954

Because we started to use the bridge construction site on a regular basis and the erection of anchor towers on both sides of the river took too much time, our company decided to install permanent anchor towers and to secure them in concrete. This not only speeded up the construction process, but it also reduced chances for a severe accident. Although Captain Dooley insisted on good training for us, he also saw no purpose in wasting time on activities that contributed very little or nothing to our skill development. Rumors circulated in our company that before our time a partially constructed bridge had broken loose from its anchoring and was swept downstream. There had been some casualties and an inquiry by the Inspector General. Captain Dooley had no intention to take any chances which would destroy his army career. He kept us very busy with general maintenance work. It seemed that we were trying to make up for all the time we had wasted before the captain's arrival. We also received replacements for the men who had been transferred to our sister companies in Germany and Korea. At one time we

were about 35% below our authorized company strength. Among our replacements was a group of fellows from Puerto Rico, who showed very little intention to learn the English language. They equated knowing English with work. They spent a lot of time on their personal equipment and did not mind to pull guard duty or working in the kitchen; but they were totally useless in the motor pool or working at the bridge site. With the exception of very few individuals, they seemed to intensely dislike physical work. Finally, the company sent them to school to learn English. This exempted them from doing any work during the week, and they had to pull all the special duties on weekends. All this did not change anything in their behavior. They still spoke Spanish to each other and pretended not to understand any English. But their uniforms were always neatly ironed and their boots were spit-shined.

On Saturday, October 2nd, two of my comrades and I took the bus to Tacoma to see the movie *Gone with the Wind.* I found the movie not to be as good as the book I had read while I was in Yakima. For my taste, the movie was just too long. We arrived in time to watch the last third of the movie and then we watched the entire film again. We spent 5½ hours at the theater. Afterwards we ate at a restaurant and at 10:30 PM we were back in our barracks at the North Fort.

Starting on Monday, October 4th, our company was on standby for an immediate deployment. A part of our company could be ordered to move out at any time, day or night. This would be a tactical exercise that required camouflaging our vehicles and carrying our rifles, steel helmets, and gas masks. The steel helmets fit over our lightweight helmet liners and their weight made working with them on the bridge difficult. They could easily fall off and into the river.

My platoon received the order to move out immediately while we were eating our noon meal. We took down the canvas tops of our truck cabs and used them to cover the folded down windshields to prevent glare and light reflection. Since we had a few dry days, the dirt roads we drove on enveloped us with a dust cloud as we had experienced before only in Yakima. We could hardly see the road and swallowed a lot of dust. At the bridge site, we encountered some problem with the heavy steel anchor cable and thus had a late start. This was actually a training exercise for another engineering company. As it turned dark, we used the headlights of our trucks to illuminate the site. As usual, I had taken over the job of attaching the individual pontons to the anchor cable. The cable was high up in the air at the riverbank and difficult to reach without a ladder. To reach the cable, we usually climbed up on the anchor tower when we needed to attach a new pulley for another anchor rope. Because of its heavy weight, the cable sagged to only a few feet above the water at mid-river. But this time we wanted to save time. To place the pulley with the rope on the cable, I stood on a log next to the river. But I was still a few inches short from reaching the cable and asked one of my smaller helpers to climb on my shoulder and place the pulley on the cable. Since my helmet was in the way, I took it off. While the fellow on my shoulder was fumbling around with the pulley, he dropped it on my head. I felt the blood running down my neck. After retrieving the pulley, I told the fellow to hurry up or I would dump him into the river. He finally succeeded and we attached the rope to the ponton. But the blood kept running down my neck. Since we had no medic at the site to give me first aid, a jeep driver from the other company drove me the 15 miles back to the main fort dispensary where I received the necessary medical attention, including a tetanus shot. The area around the

wound was shaved and the wound itself was sterilized and covered with a bandage. We then returned to the bridge site where I continued my job.

The bridge was finished at midnight; but it took another hour to have it properly anchored and secured. We did some more work in the morning after breakfast and in the afternoon we started to disassemble the bridge. But this time we were on our own until our company sent the other platoons to help us. The other engineering company had its own agenda and training objectives. At 7:30 PM we were back at our motor pool.

During the week of October 11th, we were busy preparing for a major inspection scheduled for the following week. Captain Dooley wanted every piece of aluminum and brass to shine like a mirror. He was looking for a top rating for our company.

On Thursday, October 14th, we built a 275-foot long bridge across a bay in the American Lake and dismantled this bridge on the following day. This was again a training exercise for another engineering company and we did not have to camp out that night. This probably was the longest bridge we ever built. Building a floating bridge on a lake also presents problems different from building a bridge across a river. Although we did not have to fight the river current, the eddy currents in the large lake caused the bridge to constantly twist and shift its position until it was securely anchored with the ramps in place on both ends.

The weather in our area became dry and real nice with the arrival of fall. Since we were not issued sleeping bags, I invested in a good one for the approaching cold weather. The combination of this sleeping bag and three blankets would keep me warm in any weather.

The end of the hostilities in Korea more than a year earlier had its effect on many Army units. Reserve and National Guard units were deactivated and their colors (flags) returned to their original garrisons. We, too, expected to change the number of our company when we ceased to be a National Guard unit. We also received new replacements to fill some of the many vacancies in our company. Most of these men came from units that had been reassigned to other garrisons or were just deactivated. These were men who generally had only a few months left to serve in the Army. But there were also reassignments within our own company. On Saturday, October 16th, I was transferred from the first bridge platoon to the second platoon. Six other men were transferred, too. The reason for these changes was unknown to us. Sergeant Watson tried in vain to keep me in his 1st platoon. He went all the way up to Captain Dooley, but to no avail. I now reported to Sfc. Cooper and moved upstairs in our barracks. I did not mind this, since there was much less noise upstairs than downstairs. The only regret I had was that I had to give up my old truck and that I was assigned truck (FB 55) which required a lot of work before it was ready for a major inspection. This truck was one of the oldest vehicles in our company.

The frequency of our bridge construction training exercises increased. I immediately took over the responsibility for anchoring the 2nd platoon's bridge section. I taught myself how to splice the heavy ropes and soon had a good supply of anchor ropes. I also maintained the anchor towers and the heavy steel anchor cables. I liked this job because I was working by myself and nobody bothered me. The major advantage was that I did not need to worry about an accident

caused by the carelessness of one of my comrades. At the motor pool I did most of my work in a large storage building, where I was protected from rain and wind.

On Thursday, October 21st, we again moved out to build our bridge. Because it was raining hard all morning, we did not get the order to move out until 10:00 AM. We finished the bridge in the late evening with the site illuminated by a large searchlight. We were done just before midnight. But the 539th Ponton Bridge Company was already waiting for us to vacate the site. This company wanted to use this site for building its own bridge as soon as we had left the area. Therefore, after we had finished constructing our bridge, we immediately started to remove it again. We were done at 3:30 AM and returned to our garrison. We got only 2 hours of sleep that morning and were very tired. As compensation, Captain Dooley gave us off all day Saturday to recuperate from this long day of work. Originally, we had prepared for a major command inspection on this weekend. But this event was now postponed for at least two weeks.

On this Saturday, two of my friends returned from their 3-week furlough in Missouri. Eldor Ostrenga and Don Gilmore had left with two other fellows and had driven back by themselves in Eldor's new car. Now we heard that their other two comrades had an accident in Idaho and one of them was fatally injured. We all were deeply affected by the loss of one of our comrades. But we had no details of the cause of this tragic accident.

At the end of October I received encouraging news from Omaha. The NCWC finally got going. This organization had now approved all the paperwork submitted by Mr. Peter and requested money to pay for Edith's trip to Omaha. This included the fare by Navy transport to New York and the train trip from there to Omaha. I immediately made the necessary arrangements for having this money sent to Mr. Peter's travel agency. The urgency of this request for money gave us hope that Edith may still come to Omaha before the end of that year. I immediately wrote to Edith and asked her if she had enough money to pay for her visa.

On Monday, October 25th, I went to see the movie *The Best Years of our Life*. This film portrayed the return of three WW II veterans (a captain in the Army Air Corps, a sergeant in the Army, and a sailor who had lost both hands) to civilian life. It was an excellent movie, even though it was still in black and white. The sergeant adapted quickly and became vice president of a bank. The captain's wife had a difficult time accepting her husband as a laborer with a reduced income. They finally divorced and the captain married the sergeant's daughter. The sailor overcame his inhibitions and married his high school sweetheart. All three veterans finally adjusted to their new positions in life and became productive members of our post war society. This movie portrayed these personal adjustment problems very much like I had seen them in post war Germany.

On Thursday, October 28th, we had another parade in the morning. We had to be in our staging area at 7:15 AM. It was still foggy and quite chilly at this time in the morning and gloves were not yet part of our prescribed uniform. We had a hard time keeping the blood flowing through our cold hands while we were waiting for the parade to proceed. We were always glad when we finally could "pass in review" before the commanding officer. It seemed that we now spent most of our time with building our bridge, with parades, and with preparing for inspections. There was really very little time left for maintaining the bridge components and our trucks.

On Thursday, November 4th, 1954, we started on a major project, *Operation Surf Port*. Our company and the 761st Engineering Light Equipment Company were ordered to build a pier at Solo Point in Puget Sound, about 4½ miles from our company area. This pier was to be used for loading and unloading equipment, including heavy armor, from a Navy LST (Landing Ship, Tank), regardless of the tidal condition at that particular time. This experiment was to take place during the high tide on Sunday, November 7th. Earth moving equipment had already started with the construction of a dirt ramp. Our platoon was responsible for fortifying this ramp with sandbags. Without fortifying the walls of the ramp, the changing tides would wash this ramp away. The difference in the water level between the high (3:18 PM) and low (10:31 PM) tides on November 10th was estimated to be about 15 feet. Our first platoon was to build two trestles at the head of the ramp. The transoms of these trestles could be lowered or raised with the changing tide. A floating ramp was to be attached to the trestle section. This ramp was to consist of a reinforced raft constructed from 5 pontons and 4 tread ways (bridge sections.) This floating raft would enable the LST to approach the pier close enough for unloading (or loading) the heavy equipment without beaching itself.

Our platoon was charged with laying the sandbags to protect the dirt ramp. None of us knew how many sandbags we had or how much time was available. There also was no real plan for us to follow. We definitely could not waste any bags. Once I was aware of this, I developed my own plan and used my best judgement for laying the bags. We had no solid foundation for the walls we were building and had to start by laying the first bags in mud formed from the dirt moved there and the water that flooded this area during the high tide. To keep the walls from sliding away during subsequent high tides, we later added an apron of bags to fortify the footings of our protective walls. These walls finally grew to a height of over 10 feet. Despite the shortage of sandbags, I was surprised that the ramp and its approach held up during the high tides when the water reached the top layer of the bags. By the time we were finished with this job, I had laid most of the over 16,000 sandbags we had used for this project.

On Saturday, the company was looking for volunteers to work on this project during the weekend. We were to be given 1½ days off at a later time. I was one of the volunteers. On Sunday morning we built an apron of sandbags at the front end of the ramp and fortified the front wall. In the afternoon we prepared for putting the two trestles in front of the ramp; but the water was already too high and we had to wait for the low tide in the evening to finish this job. Since there was nothing to do but to wait and we had a lot of high-ranking officers who wanted to witness this event, we were ordered “to pull motor stable and to clean the trucks.” We were not too happy about this order, especially since it was raining. We soon retreated into our truck cabs and waited for something to happen. We finally returned to the company area to eat our evening meal.

When we returned to the pier at 6:30 PM, it was too late. The raft was on dry ground and even our heavy crane with help from a tank retriever was unable to move the raft back into the deeper water. We finally removed one ponton so that we could put up the first trestle. We were just done with this, when the tide returned and we were able to move the raft into deeper water. Now we were able to complete the anchoring of the trestle. We drove the last anchor stakes into the ground when the water was already a foot deep. We then replaced the ponton we had removed

earlier from the raft and placed another bridge section between the floating raft and the stationary trestles to better overcome their height differential. The entire pier was now 125 feet long and a pulley and tackle system was able to raise or lower the transoms as needed. It was 3:30 in the morning when finally we were done with our work.

The experiment of loading and offloading the tank with the help of this floating pier was to start at 6 AM in the presence of a large group of officers from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. We, who had worked during the night, were not present. But as I was told later, it did not take long for everybody to realize that the front ramp of the LST 1077 was not only too wide for our floating ramp section, but that our pier was unable to support the vessel's ramp with a heavy load on it. Consequently, all our work during the past four days had been for naught.

The flat-bottomed LST with a draft of 5-7 feet completed its experiment by moving as close to the shore as possible about 100 yards from our pier. A bulldozer quickly pushed some dirt together to form an approach ramp and the tank drove into the ship. After turning around inside of the LST (2500 tons displacement), the tank left again and the experiment was complete! Still on the same afternoon, our first platoon started to dismantle the rafts while we, who had worked all night, were given the day off to rest. But I visited the site one more time on Monday afternoon while the LST was still at the beach so that I could take some pictures. The ship had the misfortune of missing the outgoing high tide on that afternoon and was literally stranded until noon of the next day. While we removed the sandbags, the bulldozers and carryalls returned the dirt of the ramp to where it had come from originally. *Operation Surf Port* came to an end for us on Wednesday noon, when the work was done and we all could return to our respective company areas. The following day was Armistice Day (November 11th) and the company was off-duty. I, however, was on guard duty until noon.

In the meantime I heard from Mr. Peter in Omaha that all papers for Edith's immigration had been approved by the various authorities and that he had forwarded my $240.00 check to the NCWC. The only thing left to wait for was the visa. We still hoped for a reunion in Omaha before the end of 1954! We looked forward to this and I considered marrying Edith before I had to return to Fort Lewis after a short furlough. My siblings anticipated our intent and sent to Edith additional sets of silverware as wedding presents for us. But I did not receive any letters from them.

My father's last letter had arrived in March. After inquiring about this, I was informed that he would not write to me as long as I wore the uniform of his former enemy. Although I regretted his unrelenting attitude, I was neither surprised nor much bothered by it. However, I was concerned about not hearing from my stepmother for the past 3 months. She had visited my grandaunt Milchen in East Germany (DDR) in October. My sister Gundula had not written since spring. She had her gallbladder removed during the summer. During Gundula's convalescence, her daughter Christine was taken care of by Ilse (Jürgen's wife) and my stepmother. The last letters from my sister Astrid and from my sister-in-law Ilse were already two months old. The only mail I had lately received from my family was from my oldest sister Reingard. She now taught in a small rural school in Dibbersen, near Harburg, Germany. She appeared to be quite lonesome in this village and used her fall vacation for a very enjoyable visit of friends and acquaintances in London, England.

On Monday, November 15th, 1954, our company moved out for another week in bivouac. There was a new rule that every unit in Fort Lewis had to spend at least 4 nights per month out in the field. But since we did not build the bridge during this bivouac week and needed time to work on our vehicles and bridge equipment, we camped in the forest behind our motor pool. On Tuesday the company returned to Solo Point on Puget Sound to retrieve the last sandbags we had placed earlier that month to stabilize the dirt ramp for *Operation Surf Port*. This was not as easy as it may sound. The dirt behind the bags tended to cave in on the bags and we had to pull each bag out from under this dirt. Then we dumped the sand back on the beach and a bulldozer removed the remains of the ramp by pushing the dirt back to higher grounds.

As usual, it was raining most of the time. But this time I was well prepared. I had invested in a pair of rubber overshoes and together with my rain gear issued by the company, I kept my body and feet dry. At the motor pool I spent most of my time during the day inside one of our large storage buildings, splicing new anchor ropes. My new sleeping bag and three blankets kept me comfortable during the night. Since we only had flashlights, we went to sleep quite early in the evening. The sound of rain falling on our tents and the wind rustling in the large trees around us made us sleepy. Thus we got more sleep during the night in this bivouac than we normally got in the barracks. But not everybody was as well prepared as I was. Most of my comrades had soaking wet feet during the entire week.

During this bivouac, on Wednesday November 17th, 1954, six of my comrades and I received our promotions to corporal (E-4). With this promotion, my monthly pay increased from $99.37 to $122.30. At that time, corporal was the lowest rank of noncommissioned officers (NCO). The main advantage of being a NCO was that our company duties changed. We no longer had KP duty and our guard duty changed from walking or standing guard to supervising the guards. The problem with this was that some companies had a disproportionate number of NCOs in their units and too few privates to perform the company duties. The Army's answer to this was the introduction of a new category of rank. Anybody who did not have the duty of a NCO, such as squad leader or platoon sergeant, became a *specialist* with an "E" (*enlisted man*) ranking (E-4 to E-7). Thus, corporals became "specialist E-4" and were no longer a NCO and had to resume walking guard. Although this change was gradually introduced in the spring of 1955, I myself retained my "corporal" rank until I was discharged from active duty in June 1955.

Since it was raining all the time during this week, our company returned to its barracks on Thursday, one day early. Apparently, our officers did not want to risk a major "sick call" that could incapacitate our company. We also needed some time to prepare for a general inspection on the following Monday that included all our personal field gear, tools, and vehicles with bridge equipment. On the Friday after our bivouac, I was issued a new truck that was not in a very good shape. I had only 2 hours to get it ready and all I could do was hope for the best! Fortunately, the clouds had parted and the sun was shining, again.

On Monday we had a major inspection by a committee of officers appointed by the Inspector General. After they were finished, our own company commander together with a lieutenant did his detailed inspection of all our equipment and the barracks. But everything was in best order.

We then were told that officers from other units would make another major inspection on Saturday.

On Tuesday, November 23rd, we had to be at our training site for bridge construction at 8:00 AM to train another engineering company. I was in charge of the anchor tower and was proud of having been able to install it and the heavy steel cable within one hour after arriving at the site. This was a record time for us and about half of the time we normally needed for this job. But this time we assembled only three 15-foot bridge sections and attached a ramp to them. After a lecture to the training company after lunch, we disassembled the bridge sections again and loaded them back onto our trucks. We repeated this training exercise on the following day with another engineering company. Again, the anchor tower was erected in a record time and dismantling of it in the afternoon took only 15 minutes.

We were off-duty on Thanksgiving Day, November 25th, and enjoyed the feast prepared by our mess sergeant and his staff. The tables had been rearranged into long rows and every seating place had a menu. There were plenty of snacks. Some officers and enlisted men had brought their wives and children. Again, one could not have had a better meal of roasted turkey in any fancy restaurant. It was served with all the customary trimmings. Captain Dooley offered a brief prayer. We all were in a very festive mood and enjoyed the meal.

In the morning I quickly filled up the gas tank of my truck and added some water to its radiator. I was ready to leave the motor pool at 7 AM on the following morning while it was still dark outside. The remainder of the Thanksgiving Day I spent with writing letters and reflecting on my past three years in the USA and on my future with Edith.

On the day before Thanksgiving I had received another nice letter from my cousin Horst Wiehler. He worked hard at the Technical College in Hamburg and seemed to keep up with his studies. Since he and his sister Erika had not heard from Edith for quite a few weeks, they were wondering how Edith's emigration progressed. Well, we were wondering, too! We gradually came to realize that it was very unlikely that we would see each other before this year had ended.

On the Friday after Thanksgiving we had another training exercise for an engineering company. Everything went as well as earlier that week. But on my way back to the motor pool, I somehow turned off the main road too early and got lost. Rush hour traffic and approaching darkness aggravated my situation. I had to turn around my heavy truck several times. This made me lose my sense of direction and finally I had to ask for help. I had bypassed the main fort on the eastside. After a ten-mile detour and being a few minutes late, I finally found our motor pool. Fortunately, I had enough gas in my tank.

Tuesday, November 30th, was payday. The Army was reintroducing the old custom of paying us before lunch and giving us the rest of the day off. Our day started in the morning with PT and marching drill. This was followed by an hour of review of the political situation in the world. Red China, officially known as *People's Republic of China*, was agitating against the *Republic of China*, which had been geographically limited to the island of Taiwan. Chiang Kai-shek had found there refuge after his army had been ousted from the Chinese mainland by the communist Chinese forces led by Mao Tse-tung in 1949. Chiang Kai-shek's troops also occupied the

offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, which now were shelled by mainland artillery on alternate days. Red China also threatened to invade Taiwan at any time. The U.S. supported Chiang Kai-shek politically and militarily and did not recognize the communist regime of main land China as the legitimate government until 1971, when Taiwan was forced to surrender its permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Only the constant presence of the U.S. Navy in the Taiwan Strait kept the communist forces from invading Taiwan and the islands under its control. Since most of us had little or no regular access to newspapers or news broadcasts, the Army wanted to keep us informed and prepared for a potential military action in this hot spot of the political scene.

We were off-duty after our noon meal. Whoever was interested in a pass to leave the post for the afternoon received one to spend his money in Tacoma. The city had made all kinds of arrangements for anybody interested in sightseeing and visiting other interesting places. Of course, all this was motivated by our payday. Some of us, however, remained on post and spent money on 3.2 beer at the Service Clubs. But many just tightened the blanket on a bunk and shot craps (rolled dice) until the money was concentrated in a few pockets, leaving the other pockets empty. These games generally started with bets of a few cents and finally ended with bets that moved five and ten dollar bills. This type of gambling was not allowed in the armed forces. But as long as there were no complaints, nothing was done about it. I myself used the free afternoon to write a letter to Edith and to take care of my laundry.

On Friday, December 3, 1954, our company became a *Regular Army* unit and we changed our unit designation to "554 Engineering Company (Floating Bridge)." In the afternoon, our company was ordered to dress in "Class A" uniform and to assemble in our mess hall. After a copious cold buffet with some delicacies, we celebrated this occasion with plenty of free beer. Although this produced a few drunken soldiers, others went out to buy additional whiskey. Those of us who preferred quiet barracks, however, did not appreciate this. It seemed that those who had the least tolerance for alcohol always consumed the most of it. Then these fellows totally lost control over their actions and either became destructive or violent.

Except for reveille, we had no other duties on Saturday morning. I used this time to write letters and in the afternoon I went to the movies. On Sunday afternoon we had another big parade at the main fort for the benefit of the general public.

On Monday, December 6th, 1954, our company moved into bivouac near the rifle ranges. Everybody in the US Army was required to fire his weapon at least once every year and to meet minimum requirements regarding marksmanship. After we had received our basic instructions in range safety and firing positions, we fired some practice rounds in the afternoon. On Tuesday we fired our M-1 rifles for our qualification on the 200, 300, and 500 yard ranges. Like in basic training, we used standing, kneeling, sitting, and prone firing positions for single rounds and rapid firing (9 rounds in 50 seconds). Every round hitting the target was entered on a chart that became part of our permanent service record. I did quite well and easily achieved the minimum score. On Wednesday I worked in the rifle pit servicing the targets for those who had to fire their carbines. On Thursday I did some practice shooting with a carbine. These were relatively short days at the rifle range and we were able to clean our weapons during duty hours. Army regulations required thorough cleaning of the weapons for three consecutive days after they had

been fired. In addition to this, we had a weapon inspection scheduled for Saturday to make sure that everybody adhered to this rule.

The year was coming to an end and we were still waiting for Edith's visa. Apparently, some of the documents needed for processing her application had been forwarded from the St. Raphaels Society in Hamburg to their office in Frankfurt on July 20th. Edith found out about this when she visited the Society's office in Frankfurt in an attempt to locate these papers. She then visited the office of the St. Raphaels Society in Köln (Cologne) and arranged for the transfer of the application documents. After all the necessary documents were found and assembled, the NCWC would give Edith the interview to determine her eligibility for emigration to the U.S. In the meantime, I remained in constant touch with Mr. William Peter in Omaha. On December 10th I received a letter from him in which he expressed his belief that Edith would receive her visa in January.

Edith also informed me that she had sent me a package for Christmas and I started to look forward to receiving and opening it on Christmas Day. I had already received a parcel from my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse, who had sent me an assortment of delicacies, such as marzipan, honey-spice cake (Lebkuchen), and a smoked sausage. The package took 25 days to reach me and was in excellent condition. I also started to receive Christmas cards and letters. In one case, it took me three days before I finally determined that one of the senders was a former neighbor of mine in Omaha. I also received several cards from my fellow workers at the bakery. Among them was also a very nice letter from Harry McGrew, with whom I had worked in the mixing room.

I finally received a package and a long letter from Uelzen. The package contained marzipan from Astrid, a pocket calendar from Uwe, spice cake and a Christstollen from Mamuschka. She had to remove the smoked sausage at customs, as she wrote me in her next letter. In all, I received four packages with all kinds of sweets and delicatessen.

Mamuschka's letter did not mention anything of my father, which disappointed me. But she explained her own long silence. She had visited my grandaunt Emilie Beckmann in October. Tante Milchen was now 80 years old and lived in the town of Forst in communist East Germany (DDR). She had always been very frail. We also knew her to be very conservative and in constant fear of hunger. This caused her to gradually accumulate stores of food for even harder times looming in the future. But she did finally open and consume the cans of pork she had saved since 1917 in WW I. This definitely indicated how difficult the times were for her. She also suffered from the worst fears afflicting older persons: getting old and being lonesome. Mamuschka also wrote about the general conditions in the DDR. She described how the city of East Berlin removed the asphalt pavement from one street to repair the streets in another part of the city.

On the political scene, the French National Assembly voted for rearmament of West Germany by ratifying the agreements of Paris and London. The French Prime Minister Mendes-France had opposed the ratification and threatened to resign, which would have produced a major crisis in France. But the USA and England let everybody know that they would proceed with the rearmament of West Germany whether France ratified the agreements or not. England also

threatened to withdraw her troops from the European mainland. Apparently, the French National Assembly was sufficiently intimidated by these threats that it ratified the agreements. The Soviet Union (now Russia), however, considered this development as a threat to its interests and goals, and also as an escalation of the Cold War between East and West.

Dan and Lilian Bredfeldt had bought a new home and I finally received their new address. I also heard that Dan was drafted and was scheduled to report for induction into the Army on December 10th, 1954. But Mr. Peter was able to arrange for a 60-day deferment. Dan's brother Joern (John), in meantime, enjoyed his life as a soldier in Europe. He was still stationed in Verdun, France, and had spent 5 weeks at an Army school in southern Germany. He had used his furlough to visit Scandinavia and had traveled all over West Europe with his car. He finally was promoted to corporal at the end of the year.

The change in our company designation required us to paint the new number on all our equipment. Since I was working on the equipment used for anchoring the bridge, I was not directly involved in most of this work. It included the unloading, painting, and reloading of the bridge sections. This was a lot of hard work that was not made any easier by the constant rain. I also had the special assignment to build a rack for us to do chin-ups. Since I did not have the proper tools, this job took much longer than it should have. We needed this equipment, however, for the mandatory periodic PT tests.

Fort Lewis, Washington, January 16, 1955
Wulf Doerry in front of new company designation sign

The weather turned very unpleasant. Most of the time we had a cold rain; but on some mornings we had frost. We all were glad when our bivouac for the week of December 13th was cancelled. Our company was the only one in the engineering group that remained on post. Apparently, Captain Dooley justified this with all the work we had left to do to get our equipment into the proper condition. But our barracks was not much warmer than the outside air. The flue for the furnace was clogged and the smoke backed up into the barracks. Our entire heating system needed a thorough cleaning job. It was so cold in our barracks that I "escaped" to the movies on

Tuesday evening and watched the new movie *White Christmas*. I very much enjoyed watching this film. The furnace in our barracks was clean and working again on Thursday evening.

During the last two weeks of the year we were on duty only in the mornings and had the afternoons free. The Christmas weekend was extended from Thursday, December 23rd, noon to Monday morning. I used much of this extra time to sew my new corporal chevrons on my 13 sets of uniforms. While I was doing this, I reflected on the last 7 years when I myself had taken care of all my things. But since I came to the United States, I had gradually reduced the amount of sewing and darning I was doing. I was grateful that I now was able to buy new socks and underwear whenever the old clothing was wearing out.

The great majority of our company left Fort Lewis with the arrival of the Christmas holidays. Those of us who stayed either had company duty, were too far from home, or had no money or leave time left. One of these fellows was a short and good-natured redhead. Corporal Brown and several other fellows took the bus to Tacoma and did not return until shortly before midnight. Brown was drunk and it was a sheer miracle that his inebriated companions were able to get him back to our barracks. He became violent and smashed a couple of windows with his bare fists. The cuts on his hands and arms bled profusely and blood was all over. He then turned several bunks upside down before we were able to subdue him. It finally took six of us to immobilize him by sitting or kneeling on him until he passed out and we could wrap makeshift bandages around his wounds. We did not want to call the military police since this certainly would have cost Brown his corporal chevrons. When he woke up on the following morning, Brown was unable to remember even how he got back to our barracks, including how he had injured himself. Our barracks looked like a battlefield. But everybody helped to clean up the mess and somehow we managed to get the broken windows replaced.

I had duty as *driver of the guard* for 24 hours starting on Christmas Day. I did not mind this. I was assured that I would be off-duty during the New Year weekend. But I regretted that I was unable to spend the holidays with Edith. I had a real longing for her and often looked at her picture and had a silent talk with her. I had never thought that I ever could develop such a close relationship with a person I only knew through letters. On Christmas Eve I opened the package from her and found it filled with homemade cookies, marzipan, and chocolates. It all had arrived in good shape. While I was unpacking the goodies and reading my Christmas mail, I listened to a radio playing Christmas songs in English as well as in German. All this put me into the proper festive mood for the holidays. I shared some of the cookies with others in my barracks. They all especially liked the hazelnut macaroons and wanted me to tell this to Edith, which I did in my next letter.

When we woke up on Christmas morning we found a light blanket of snow outside to give us a real *White Christmas*. But the snow did not last very long. After breakfast I attended church service at the nearby chapel. Upon my return to our barracks I prepared for guard duty. Fortunately, the weather had cleared up and I had no problem driving the relief guards to their posts. As expected, the mess sergeant again served us an outstanding dinner of roasted turkey with all the trimmings and traditional sweet snacks.

Since I only had to make sure that the individual guards were relieved on time, I had plenty of time for writing letters and working on my chemistry correspondence course. I could sit at a desk in the orderly room. This made it easier for me to write. Normally, I wrote my letters sitting on my bunk and writing on the thigh of my leg and under very poor lighting conditions. Sometimes I was lucky to get a table in our dayroom when nobody watched television. At other times I went to the Service Club. Since there was little activity going on during Christmas, my guard duty passed without any major distraction.

Right after Christmas I also received a small package from Hinrichs in Westerweyhe. I finally opened it on Wednesday, January 5th. It contained cookies, a box of chocolates, and a book. The novel *Die Purpurwolke* was about the lives of a young couple in Germany before, during, and after WW II. I enjoyed reading it, since the story portrayed this era quite well. I was especially happy about receiving this parcel, since Mrs. Hinrichs had made an extra effort to obtain my address from Mamuschka and already 6 years had passed since I had left Westerweyhe. This was for me the best recognition they could give me for all the extra effort I had put into helping to manage their farm during the first three post-war years.

Our company commander, Captain Lawrence T. Dooley, had arranged that everybody in his company was off-duty on his birthday. He even sent me a memorandum in which he congratulated me on my birthday and "on a job well done." Since the furnace in our barracks was not working and did not get fixed until the afternoon, I spent most of this day at the Service Club drinking coffee with some comrades and watching television. In the evening I went to see a good movie.

In the letter I received before my birthday, Edith told me that her interview in Frankfurt on December 22nd went well and that she had no problems with answering all the questions. All the important documents were now together and submitted for further processing by the Consulate. The Raphaels Society was now out of the picture and all further contact would be only with the NCWC and the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt. I also received good news from my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse that they expected the birth of their first child in June 1955. Ilse was convinced that this child would be a boy. But there was still no word from my father and no explanation for his silence. Since I had ample time and rest during the holidays, I spent much of my time daydreaming about the time when I would be united with Edith. When I was writing letters, I always had her picture next to me.

On Sunday, January 2nd, 1955, we had very nice weather and I took the bus to Mount Rainier to see this mountain during the winter. But I was disappointed when I was unable to walk the trails I had used 5 months earlier. I had never seen this much snow anywhere, not even in Iowa after a blizzard! Most of the trails were buried under 10-15 feet of snow. Even the deer and other wildlife had left the area for a more hospitable environment. But it was a skier's paradise! There were two slopes with lifts, one for beginners and one for advanced skiers. All age groups between 3 and 60 years were represented on these slopes. Many of them fell several times on the way down. Three of my comrades tried it, too. They were glad to get down the slope without breaking a leg. One skier was not as lucky and had to be rescued by a patrol that brought the injured person down on a sled.

Right after New Years, I received another letter from Mamuschka. This letter also contained a note from my father that explained his long silence. He merely stated that he was not interested in writing letters to an American soldier who had exchanged his homeland for the uniform of a former enemy. Instead of following my induction orders, I should have returned to Germany. His ideals were more important to him than the happiness of his family! It appeared to me that he still adhered to his old prejudices and that he was unwilling to change these. He closed his letter with the remark that he hoped that I would soon be discharged so that he could write me again. He also had expressed this attitude to Edith when he lamented that he was willing to accept Ilse as a child of a Jewish mother and as his daughter-in-law. But he hoped that she would not give birth to "mixed-breed" children, even if these children could at a later time give him much joy. It was difficult for me to understand how my father continued to retain attitudes that had brought so much suffering to all of Europe, including his own family. My response to all this was not very kind. I wrote him that I regretted that he was ashamed of me, but that this did not change my opinion. I also told him that if he did not want to write to me while I wore a U.S. Army uniform, I did not care to ever hear from him again!

At this time we also heard about a proposal before Congress that could lead to the early release from active service of all those who had served 22 months of their 2 year obligation. There was a serious push to significantly reduce the manpower in the Army before June 30th, 1955. This pending legislation would also affect me and I hoped that it would become law.

On Saturday, January 8th, I joined Eldor Ostrenga, Don Gilmore, and another friend and we drove to Seattle, WA, to see a "Ballet on Ice" billed under the name *Ice Cycle*. The main theme was "Snow-white and the seven Dwarfs." Eldor drove us and we enjoyed the show very much. We had excellent seats in the first row, but paid for this with cold feet. The ballet consisted of 16 female and 16 male skaters. Their first number was in recognition of the 75th anniversary of the light bulb. Each skater carried battery-powered lights that were later combined to form a large chandelier. All the costumes were covered with rhinestones that glittered when light fell on them, especially when the little light bulbs among them were turned on. Other numbers were a "Fox Hunt", a Spanish dance, and "Orange Time" portraying a wedding. There also were solo performances by some more famous skaters. But the main feature was *Snow-white and the seven Dwarfs*. We had no regrets that we had made this trip to Seattle.

I received another letter from Dan Bredfeldt. There was still a question whether he had to report for induction into the Army. His two-month deferment did not mention anything about reporting at any time. He was quite busy. Dan had sold his house and had bought another one at 1325 South 32nd Street in Omaha, NE. This house had three apartments and Dan was in the process of building a fourth apartment in it. His mother was visiting him, but was scheduled to return to Germany on January 13th. His youngest brother, who had accompanied his mother, would stay with Dan in Omaha. Still, Dan invited me again to stay with him whenever I needed a place to live for a short period of time.

On Wednesday, January 12th, 1955, Lieutenant Dowling, my platoon leader, offered me the position of squad leader for the 2nd squad. I was to replace another corporal who was unable to manage his men. I had never been ambitious enough to want this position. It increased my responsibilities and most men in my squad had only a few months left to serve. They did not

care and often refused to cooperate or to support their leaders. I reluctantly agreed to give it a try under the condition that I continued to be in charge of anchoring the bridge. Although I no longer was directly in charge of a truck, I now had the responsibility for 8 trucks with their loads. I had no illusions about this new job, but wanted to give it my best effort. The only advantage I gained from this position was that I could move into a smaller room, which I shared with the other two squad leaders in our platoon.

On Monday morning, January 17th, our first bridge platoon was put on alert for training a combat engineer company. Since this was not a tactical exercise, we neither had to set up tents to stay over night, nor did we have to carry our weapons. Our second platoon came into action only to dismantle the bridge across the Nisqually River. We started to dismantle the ramp and 5 pontons from one side of the river and the first platoon did the same from the other side of the river. Since we were to be off-duty after our return to the motor pool, it took us only 6 hours to get back to our company area. I had to hurry to get all the ropes properly coiled and loaded.

My first effort as squad leader was directed towards making the eight trucks safe for the road and for their drivers. Some of the drivers had neglected their trucks because they did not like to do dirty work. I, again, applied my old rule of not asking anybody to do what I myself was unwilling to do! I just helped them with oil changes and lubricating the trucks. I also made sure that the oil level in the transmission was checked and adjusted, if necessary. Even though some of the fellows did not like to be "pushed" to do this, they seemed to be glad when everything was done and they could depend on their vehicle.

On Tuesday, January 25th, after showing two short training films, we moved out to build a 75-foot dry-span with our bridge. Dry-spans were used to bridge ravines and gullies. Since they used trestles and transoms instead of self-leveling pontons floating on water, dry-spans were much more difficult to assemble. Despite all the unwanted "good advice" from our inexperienced lieutenant, we had the dry-span bridge erected without any major difficulty.

On Wednesday we built another dry-span. When we were trying to add another 15-foot treadway section, we had a problem with inserting the pins. These pins are supposed to secure the connection between two treadway sections. I soon realized the cause for this problem and made my suggestion to our new lieutenant, but he would not accept any advice from a lowly corporal and we continued trying to force the holding pin into position with crowbars and sledge hammers. While I was still working, I suddenly felt something sliding down my back. Upon turning around I saw the treadway dangling from the crane and one end resting on the ground right next to my heel. At first I turned pale; but then I turned red of anger. I crawled out from under the dry-span and walked over to the lieutenant who, without warning anybody at the work site, had given the order to remove the safety chain and to raise the boom of the crane instead of raising the load. By raising the boom, the 2-ton bridge section was pulled away from the stop pin and was dropped onto the ground. I was more than angry and I let the fresh graduate from officer candidate school know what I was thinking about him. He, of course, realized his mistake and told me to go to my truck. I did this and never again worked near the bridge when he was in charge of the construction site. I was extremely lucky that I did not stand a few inches farther back. I could have been badly maimed or even killed. Actually, I am still amazed about the scarcity of injuries suffered by us at that time in an environment that seemed to have no

respect for the safety of individuals! It seemed that less than ten years after WW II, individual soldiers were still considered "expendable."

I received another letter from my brother Jürgen and Ilse. My parents had visited them for Ilse's birthday on January 15th and had brought them a good supply of baby clothes. My father even offered Ilse to stay with them in Uelzen while Jürgen worked at the state court in Celle. I was happy to hear this and hoped that my father's opinion about this "interracial marriage" had changed. My brother also wrote that my father was just as unhappy about my response to his letter as I had been. Mamuschka rebuked me for my letter. But Jürgen hoped that with time all this animosity caused by our father's prejudices would just fade away.

On Thursday, January 27th, we had a tactical exercise. We had to wear our steel helmets and had to carry our rifles and gas masks. Our objective was to build a 300-foot bridge across a lake. We left early but were told "the enemy was still holding the future bridge site and first had to be expelled from this territory." Finally, at 9 AM the site was under control of friendly forces and we were ready to move in and start to construct the bridge. A little later, the engineering company that was supposed to build the bridge arrived. Initially, the bridge construction progressed only slowly; but later on and with increasing experience by the combat engineers, progress became more rapid. At about noon I checked out the anchor tower on the other side of the lake and found everything in good order. But when I returned to the construction site, I found that my company had just left for dinner at our company area. Apparently, our fellows had left in a hurry, because the engine in one of our trucks was still running. Instead of following my company, I accepted the offer from the combat engineers to share the meal with them.

The work progressed quite well in the afternoon; but at 4 PM the combat engineers decided that they had enough training for the day and left for their company area. Our new lieutenant, however, offered to the battalion commander that we would finish the work by ourselves. We had four more pontons and one ramp to go. The total bridge consisted of 18 pontons and two ramps. It was quite late when we were done and we were not very happy. After all, it was not us who needed the training in bridge construction! We disassembled the bridge on Friday morning and took it easy for the rest of the day. In the evening I went to see the movie *Iwo Jima*. It was about the battle for control of this island in February 1945. A photograph of the erection of the American flag on a hill of this Japanese island contributed to the fame of this battle and was finally memorialized as a monument right outside of the National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

We had our usual Saturday morning inspection in Class A uniform. After the inspection we were told to prepare our vehicles for inspection. Since we were gone all week, our trucks were anything but ready for inspection. Here we were working on our dirty trucks with our clean uniforms and in dress shoes. We soon were dirty, had wet feet, and were angry with our officers who gave us the impression that they had come from an insane asylum, rather than from an officer training school. This certainly was an opportunity for us to use a lot of bad language!

Our routine life in the Army changed gradually and in many different ways. It seemed that there was now emphasis to not only train us for the "normal duties" of soldiers, but also to "enrich"

our lives and to make life in uniform more pleasant. To be off-duty for the rest of the day after being paid was one of these new amenities. Another one was the "chaplain's hour" on Wednesday mornings. During this time, the chaplain tried to instill in us a more positive outlook on life. However, what we liked best about these weekly meetings was that we were out of the almost constant rain. I personally remember only one of these presentations by our chaplain. He had been stationed for three years in South Germany and during this time he had taken a lot of color slides of "life in Germany." Like any tourist and soldier stationed overseas, he primarily took pictures of unusual things, like regional architecture, a pretty landscape, and of interesting daily and festive activities of the native people. The chaplain now tried to present these things as representative of all Germany. Among these pictures was a farmer who used a cow and a horse together as a team to pull a wagon full of hay. I had seen this custom in the area of Peine, Germany, where there were very small farms that could not support a team of two horses. But this certainly was not "typical" for all of West Germany, as the chaplain tried to make us believe.

A few times, when the weather was nice, we also had "physical recreation." This usually consisted of some team sport, like baseball. I had never played baseball or football in this country and knew absolutely nothing about the rules for these ball games. As our platoon was divided into two teams, I mentioned that I was not familiar with baseball. The reply was unanimous: "That is fine! You can be our umpire." Since I did not know the meaning of the word *umpire*, I asked what I was supposed to do. I was told to simply stand there and watch what everybody was doing. I still did not know the purpose for this, but I watched my comrades playing ball while I just stood there. Fortunately, there was no serious dispute between the two teams.

On Saturday, February 5th, we again were off-duty as a reward for 100% participation in donating money for a project benefiting the children in Fort Lewis. The scheduled inspection of our weapons and field gear was postponed. We did not mind this, but I did not appreciate the pressure put on us to donate money. I much rather would have done this without any pressure from our superiors.

Edith had made another trip to Frankfurt to learn what was delaying the issuance of her visa, but was unable to find out anything. This trip was not very nice for her because she failed to make the connection between two trains. Still, the trip was a good try! In her letter Edith also asked me for my opinion about the cosmetic makeup used by women. I wrote her that most women in the U.S. use makeup and that it was not unusual to see little girls using lipsticks and fingernail polish. I personally, however, preferred the natural look of skin, lips, and fingernails. In my opinion, make-up should only be used sparingly and only to enhance the natural looks, but not to change it!

Starting February 1st, 1955, only sergeants and corporals in leadership positions and their assistants were eligible for special duties, like *NCO of the Day* and *Corporal of the Guard*. All other corporals had to pull regular guard duty and KP. Since I was now a squad leader, I pulled my first *NCO of the Day* on Tuesday, February 8th, 1955. This duty included logging in all telephone calls, checking on various activities in the company area, waking up the kitchen personnel and KP, waking the troops in the morning and making the report at reveille. Most of

my time on duty was spent sitting at a desk in the company orderly room, which I very much preferred over walking guard in the rain and sloshing through the mud in the motor pool.

I was very busy during these days. Besides my regular duties, I had to show a lot of training films. Some of these training films I had to show in the evenings. Checking out the equipment and setting it up, as well as turning it back in again at the post film library took a lot of my time. I did not mind this when it was raining outside, but I hated to lose time when we had good weather for working on our equipment at the motor pool. On February 10th I substituted as *driver of the guard* for my friend Don Gilmore, who played basketball for a team in a small neighborhood community. It was a busy evening for me. After I had dropped off the guards at the motor pool, I brought home our mess sergeant and towed a car of a soldier who was unable to start it. I was so busy that I wished I could divide myself into two persons.

As squad leader, I had difficulties with only one of my men who was very antagonistic towards any authority and who had a deep resentment towards serving in the Army. He not only made life difficult for me, but also for everybody else in our unit, including himself. Every week now, our company lost a few men through discharge and we hoped to soon receive replacements for them. I, too, received the good news that I was one of those who could count on an early release from the Army in June.

At this time were two major changes in the world leadership. Georgi Malenkow, who had replaced Stalin after his death in 1953, resigned and it seemed that his successor Nikolai Bulganin was going to reverse the trend for a more relaxed regime in the Soviet Union. In France, the very unstable *Fourth Republic* lost its very capable leader Mendes-France. But things seemed to quiet down in the Taiwan (Formosa) region after the US committed itself in writing to the defense of the main island and of Quemoy and Matsu in the contested Pescadores island group about 25 miles off the Chinese mainland coast.

On Friday, February 18th, we had our major vehicle inspection by officers from our 6th Army Engineering Group stationed in North Fort Lewis. I had done all I was able to do to prepare the 7 vehicles under my command for this inspection. I felt that these trucks were in as good a shape as any other vehicle in our company. After working hard all morning, everything was ready at 1:30 PM. Our trucks were lined up and our tools were displayed in front of them. As expected, the inspectors were more interested in the general appearance of our equipment than in details. Our 2nd platoon made the best impression on the officers. We had the best vehicle and the best tool room and we all were very happy with the results.

In the evening we organized a G.I. party to prepare our barracks for inspection on the following morning. Everybody participated in scrubbing the floor and cleaning ducts and windows. We were done in little over an hour and then turned to preparing our personal gear for the inspection. We were woken up at 5:00 AM on Saturday morning and had ample time to get everything cleaned and laid out for inspection. Our personal things were in our footlockers, the uniforms were nicely hung up on the rack, and our field gear was laid out on our bunks. Everything was lined up with the help of a taut string. Everything looked good. At 8:00 AM we had our personal and weapon inspection in ranks outside. There was more attention paid to our haircuts and our polished boots than to the weapons. I myself did not participate in this inspection. I was

checking our barracks and saw to it that all displays were in perfect order. The inspection of the barracks started at 9:30 AM. Everybody stood next to his bunk and came to attention when the officers were looking at his gear and displays. Since the officers checked only a few representative items, the actual inspection did not take very long and Lieutenant Colonel Fry rated us as the best company in the 116th Engineering Group. The only problem the officers found in our company was with the company records. In the afternoon I relaxed by going to the movies where I saw the very delightful film *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. On Tuesday, February 22nd, we were off-duty to celebrate George Washington's Birthday.

Edith wrote that she had to submit additional copies of her birth certificate and letters from the local police certifying that she was a reputable person and had not committed any unlawful acts. Finally, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) interviewed her neighbors on March 3rd to verify that she was of "good character." This gentleman also asked Edith a few questions and took her fingerprints. Among other things, Edith told him that we planned to marry and gave him my name and address. Anyway, we were happy that there was at least some activity in her effort to immigrate into the United States.

I also received a letter from my cousin Horst Wiehler. He gave me the sad news that a drunken driver had killed his father, my Uncle Hans Wiehler, on February 6th. This driver was a member of the East German paramilitary Volkspolizei. He and his companion had been on duty at the time and they had hit my uncle from behind. It was hard for me to understand that a member of the "police" was driving an official vehicle while "under the influence of alcohol." Horst was now in his last semester at the technical college and his financial aid from the West-German government had been increased from DM 120.00 per month to DM 180.00 per month until he graduated. He no longer needed any financial support from me.

On Friday, February 25th, 1955, I was asked to represent our company as the *Soldier of the Week* and to compete with four others for this title in our provisional battalion comprised of five independent companies. After 40 minutes of a detailed inspection and answering a variety of questions, I was picked to compete with three others for *Soldier of the Week* in the entire 116th Engineering Group C. This time we were interviewed by a lieutenant colonel. While the other contestants spent about 20 minutes each with the officer, I was done in little over 8 minutes. I was then asked to represent the entire Engineering Group on the following morning in the competition for *Soldier of the Week* for all units stationed at North Fort Lewis. But this time I was not picked for this "honor." As we were told, all five contestants had been exceptionally good and had earned a similar number of points. In fact, the lieutenant colonel told me later that I had been one of the three finalists. Although I did my best, I really was not that anxious to earn this "great honor." I had gone farther than anybody in my company before me. The winner of this biweekly contest had to accompany our commanding general at all official functions. During the past week, this honor had belonged to an immigrant from Austria. Anyway, I was glad that this stressful competition had come to an end. It took a lot of effort and time to prepare my uniform for these events. Everything had to be in perfect shape! Ironically, this event took place exactly 10 years after my induction into the paramilitary R.A.D. (Reichsarbeitsdienst) at the end of WW II where I was never recognized for anything. At that time we were strictly "cannon fodder."

March arrived like a lion. During the last days of February, snow and strong winds caused a lot of damage and disrupted the power supply in some of our neighboring communities. Although the snow did not remain on the ground for very long, more of it fell on March 1st. Fortunately, we were off-duty on payday, February 28th, and there was enough work to be done inside of the large buildings at the motor pool where we had stored our freshly painted trucks. I also checked out training films at the film library on the main post and showed them to our company. It was nice to be inside of a building and to be protected from the bad weather!

Our company was shrinking. Almost every week we lost some men who had served their obligation and were released from active service. Half of our vehicles were without drivers and in most cases we needed both bridge platoons for constructing a bridge across the lake or river. Almost every week, everybody pulled extra duties, such as guard duty and K.P. As squad leader I was fortunate to pull only *corporal of the guard* duty. Despite our personnel shortage, there were rumors that some of us would be sent to Yakima in April to assist other units during the annual maneuver. Hoping to be released from active service two months early, I started to count my remaining time in uniform. There were 3½ months left for me! I worked on the remaining lessons for my correspondence course in chemistry. I also dreamed about how I would start life together with Edith. I was thinking about buying a small home and a nice used car for us and how I could take advantage of all the privileges I had earned under the Korean G.I. Bill. I also was wondering about how I could get all my accumulated belongings with me to Omaha. I had joined the *Literary Guild* and had already bought several books offered under this program at the price of $2.00 per book.

During this time I also received another letter from my father. He accused me of preferring to serve in the U.S. Army rather than returning to Germany. He also blamed me for abrogating my "duties to my German Fatherland." He still called the Americans the "former enemies." My father seemed to be ashamed of me. But at the end of this letter he let me know that he was waiting for my release from the U.S. Army so that he could write to me again. My response to this accusing letter was not very polite. I wrote to him that wearing the Army uniform had little effect on my thinking and my attitudes. If he cannot write to me now, then I do not expect to hear from him after my discharge either. I regretted that differences in our political thinking had impaired our family unity. But he should not blame my uniform and me for this! There was no response from my father. Only my stepmother, Mamuschka, reproached me for this letter.

During this time the U.S. Army changed many of its operating rules. In order not to discourage young men from seeking a career as a soldier by overburdening them with extra duties, formerly exempt ranks were now required to share the extra duties. This also included squad leaders like me. Since I still experienced a lot of antagonism from one of my men and I did not receive much support from my platoon leader, Lieutenant Dowling, I resigned my position and volunteered for duty with the 9th Engineering Battalion stationed at the Yakima Firing Center. I could not see why I should take on the responsibility for other men, when I received no benefits from this position and had to pull the same extra duties as everybody else in the platoon.

Our company was ordered to supply ten 2½-ton trucks with qualified drivers to support one of the companies in the 9th Engineering Battalion. Nobody knew where we would be quartered and for how long we would remain in Yakima. We did not even know what we were supposed to do

there. On Wednesday, March 10, 1955, our group of ten men checked out our trucks and loaded 750-gallon water tanks on them. These tanks were only lashed down and secured with wooden blocks and wedges. We were to leave for Yakima on Tuesday, March 15th, at 6:00 AM. We also were told to take along all our field gear, except our rifle, and to be prepared for a 60-day assignment in Yakima. During the weekend I packed everything I did not want to take along to Yakima into a suitcase I had bought for this purpose and put it into storage.

Our departure to Yakima was delayed and rescheduled for Friday, March 18th. The Snoqualmie Pass was covered with snow and we did not have snow chains for our trucks. We had to wait until the highway through the pass was cleared by snowplows. We also did not leave before 10:00 AM, because we needed a military police escort through parts of Tacoma and to Highway 10. Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Baardson was our convoy leader. A ¾-ton truck with a 2-way radio supported us; but its antenna soon broke off and the vehicle returned to Fort Lewis to get a replacement antenna. The weather was nice, the streets were free of snow, and we enjoyed the trip. As I was the ranking man in our group and responsible for our men, I drove right behind Mr. Baardson. Occasionally I took the leading position while he checked on the other drivers to make sure that everybody was still with us and nobody had a problem with his vehicle. Our trucks had automatic transmissions and labored hard on the way up to the pass. But on the way down, the trucks rolled at speeds of 50-60 miles per hour. We had one longer break to eat our sandwiches and a few shorter relief breaks. We arrived at the Yakima Firing Center at 4:00 PM.

Since nobody really knew what to do with us, we stayed in the barracks at the Center and spent most of our time with looking busy and performing maintenance on our trucks. Although we still had frost in the mornings, most of the days were very nice and sunny. Once the sun was up, the temperature rose quickly. As we got used to doing nothing productive all day, it became increasingly difficult to motivate the men to volunteer to do any minor jobs that needed to be done. We enjoyed living in the barracks and taking warm showers in the evening. We were in no hurry to have this changed by moving out into the dusty backcountry.

But everything comes to an end! After a few days, we finally were split into two groups and on Monday, March 28th, our small groups were attached to two different engineering companies out in the field, about 25 miles east of the barracks area in the Firing Center. I was now a member of Company C, 9th Engineering Battalion C., normally garrisoned near our company in North Fort Lewis.

On the day before we reported to our new companies, it was a Sunday afternoon, we were ordered to fill up our 750-gallon water tanks and to prepare to leave early on the following morning. We soon found out that filling up the tanks was not a smart idea. The extra weight on our truck beds raised the truck's center of gravity. This made the truck very vulnerable to turning over, especially when the load shifted to one side. Also, the tanks were not bolted down and the wooden blocks and wedges could easily move and allow the tanks to slide to one side on the smooth truck bed. Three of our ten water tanks were already loose when we parked our trucks that evening. Four of the tanks were completely lost on the way to our new assignments and some tanks were slightly damaged.

It was a cold morning on Monday and our trucks were not equipped with heaters. But I knew about a small vent in the floor of the cab through which I could draw in some warm air heated by the hot exhaust system. For some reason, my departure from the motor pool was delayed and I was traveling by myself on the gravel road to the small valley where my new company was camped. As I was traveling at 20-30 miles per hour, I got cold and decided to open that little vent to the right of my feet. As I stooped down, I inadvertently turned my steering wheel to the right and as I straightened up again, I saw my right front wheel sliding into the shallow drainage ditch next to the road. It was too late for steering away from the ditch and I noticed that my full water tank broke loose and was sliding to the right. I instinctively turned my steering wheel to the right to keep my front wheels fairly level and to prevent the truck from turning over. But this did not prevent the water tank from turning over when the right rear wheel went through the ditch. After I had used the truck's inertia to get both of my rear wheels out of the ditch, I stopped and allowed the water to drain from the water tank. I had no problem getting back onto the gravel road and without further delay I proceeded to my destination with a slightly bent truck bed and an empty water tank.

Company "C" of the 9th Engineering Battalion was involved in a road construction project and had set up camp in a long and narrow valley next to a little creek. This place was officially called the Becht Ranch. Company "B" was situated at the Coffin Ranch. We were charged with extending an existing gravel road at the Firing Center to Camp Hanford, one of the places that processed nuclear material for the Defense Department. When I arrived there, the company was moving sand and gravel from the side of a large hill to straighten and level the roadbed. We were living with 8 men in squad tents with wooden floors. We slept on folding cots and I had three blankets and a sleeping bag to keep me warm during the cold and windy nights. We also had a stove heated with diesel oil and two electric light bulbs to provide some comfort for us in the evenings. The two electric bulbs provided enough light for reading when it was dark outside.

During the first week after our arrival, we had almost nothing to do. I used this time to build some "furniture," like a table, benches, and a footlocker for my friend Reinhold Baumann, an ethnic German from Romania. I myself had brought along my own footlocker from Fort Lewis. Our company soon added a prefabricated building as a dayroom and a tent where we could take hot showers. After this "camp improvement" we no longer needed to drive the 25 miles to the barracks at the Firing Center to get a hot shower. It did not take long and I used the new dayroom to show movies in the evenings. This was quite popular and I was the only one in the company licensed to check out equipment and films. Even though this activity took much of my free time, I did not mind doing it.

It was a very dry and hilly area. But wheat stubble indicated that there was some dry farming done in this area. A herd of about 30 wild horses claimed the range. Later we also saw sheep herded by a Basque shepherd and a couple of his dogs. The shepherd lived by himself in a covered cart and seemed to be supplied by somebody on a regular basis. There were plenty of rabbits and rodents around us. Our mess sergeant killed two large rats when these creatures insisted that we share our food with them.

On April 2nd, almost a week after our arrival, they finally found something for us to do. We started to haul water from a place, where the creek had been dammed to form a pond. We used

the water to wet down the roadbed under construction until it was covered with gravel. As soon as the bulldozers or graders had disturbed the surface vegetation or removed the sagebrush, the slightest air movement would cause the fine loamy soil to form huge dust clouds. It was now our job to wet down the soil and to keep it from blowing away. With enough water and compaction with heavy construction equipment, we gradually converted the fine soil and dust to a semisolid smooth surface, which was then topped with a protective layer of gravel. We worked in two shifts and my shift was from noon until about 6:30 PM. I soon developed a very bad headache from the glare of the fine sand. I finally took care of this problem by buying myself a pair of sunglasses with polarized lenses.

Progress was slow, but steady. There were rocks to be blasted and removed, and culverts to be installed for drainage after heavy rain showers. At one time a piece of rock, as big as my fist, fell onto the hood of my truck and left a deep dent in it. But I liked the work and time went by quickly. The weather improved considerably during the first week of April. The sun was shining from sunrise until sunset and the nights were no longer as frigid.

On the Saturday before Easter, April 9, 1955, John Rowley and I hitchhiked to Yakima. We checked in at a hotel, went shopping, and watched a movie. After that we separated. I finally relaxed drinking some beer in a small bar. A little later John and another friend arrived and joined me for more beer. I left after a couple more glasses of beer knowing that the other two fellows would not quit drinking beer until they had too much of it. Like many G.I.s, John found his greatest pleasure in being thoroughly drunk. Sure enough, shortly after midnight he showed up in our room in pretty bad shape. This, of course, did not please me a bit! On Sunday morning we went together to a church where we heard a very good Easter sermon. After walking around in the town and watching a couple more movies, we returned to our camp.

Edith needed a change in scenery and I suggested that she should visit my folks in Uelzen for a few weeks. She arrived there before Easter and wanted to stay for three weeks. Everybody in my family loved to have her there, especially since they also wanted to take advantage of her skills as a dressmaker. To help her with the expenses, I had DM 150.00 sent to her. All the documents necessary for her immigration in the United States had been submitted before the deadline of March 31st. All she could now do was to wait for the arrival of the visa. It started to look like I would be back in Omaha before she arrived there. Actually, this would make everything easier for both of us. I trusted our fate that at the end everything would turn out for the best for both of us. But I longed for being with her and counted the days to my discharge from active service, which I assumed to be about June 20th.

As time went on, I started to get offers for reenlistment. One officer wanted me as his supply sergeant and promised me a promotion to the rank of sergeant (E-5). But I declined and told him that I wanted to get married and that I wanted to build a new career in civilian life. Rank no longer had privileges in the Army and I wanted to get out! Furthermore, Edith let me know that she would not like to be married to a soldier.

On Sunday, April 17th, my friend Reinhold Baumann, another friend, and I went for a hike. It was a beautiful morning. We wanted to see the Columbia River valley. As we walked in the general direction of the river, we always expected to see the river from the next ridge ahead of

us. But when we arrived at the top of that ridge, we only saw another valley and ridge ahead of us. Finally, we saw the river. But to get to its bank would have required a couple more hours of difficult walking down and back up a very steep hill. Listening to our stomachs, we decided against this and headed back to our company area. After 3½ hours of hiking up and down ridges, we were glad to see our mess tent and devour a big meal. The next day I started to work the morning shift from 6:00 AM until noon. Our company commander from Fort Lewis, Captain Dooley, came to visit us and gave us permission to drill holes into our truck beds so that we could bolt the water tanks directly to the truck beds. This lowered the center of gravity of our trucks by about 4 inches and significantly lowered the potential of rolling over the trucks.

There used to be a custom that personnel attached to another company were not assigned special duties, such as guard duty and K.P. But because of a shortage in personnel, the First Sergeant of Company "C", Master Sergeant Black, had asked our First Sergeant in Fort Lewis for permission to use us for these duties. Of course, our sergeant did not care and he agreed to our pulling extra duties. On Tuesday, April 19th, I found my name on the guard roster. I was to be *Corporal of the Guard*. Since I spent a lot of my free time on checking out movies, maintaining the projection equipment, and showing the movies, I did not feel that I should also pull all the extra duties. I let the First Sergeant know how I felt and told him that from now on I would either pull guard duty or show movies in the evening. I also spread the word that there would be no movie in the evening and that I would return the projector to the library on the following day, unless my name was removed from the guard roster. This had its desired effect! While we were eating our evening meal, my name was removed from the guard roster and I showed a movie at the regular time. As I was told later, my position on this issue was supported by one of our lieutenants. This arrangement remained in force as long as I was attached to this company.

On April 21st I was ordered to be a witness in the trial of a member of our company. He was accused of having been AWOL during the night after Easter Sunday. He claimed to have missed the truck that took others back to our camp on that Sunday evening and was forced to stay at the Center until he was able to hitch a ride back with me on the following morning. This fellow was lucky and got off easy. He forfeited some of his pay and received 3 months probation.

The maneuvers, *Operation Applejack*, started on April 30th and were to last until May 10th. There were to be no passes or leave for us during this time period and the speed limit at the Firing Center was lowered to 10 miles per hour. This meant that I now needed 2½ hours for a trip to the center and the same amount of time to return to our camp. We also were unable to attend the rodeo in Yakima on April 30th and May 1st. To avoid any conflicts with the maneuver, we had an early payday. On Tuesday, April 26th, I drove to the Center in the morning to pick up my pay. My old company was temporarily stationed at the Center while it provided support for the staff that observed the troops during the maneuvers, just as we had done in the previous year. While Monday had been warm and beautiful, Tuesday was not a very nice day. The temperature had dropped during the night and in the morning we found everything covered with wet snow. I felt sorry for the troops in the field, whose only shelter was the foxhole they had dug in the evening. After performing maintenance on my truck at the Center's motor pool, I exchanged movie films and picked up my pay before I returned to our camp in the afternoon. Here I found little to do. The snow had transformed the dry dust into a viscous mud that did not need any additional water.

On Monday evening, our generator broke down and we were without electricity until Saturday evening. We finally got a new generator. But it needed some major "adjustments" before it produced a consistent voltage. When all this was done, I was able to again show movies. During the absence of electricity, I used the candles I had received in my Christmas packages. Some of my comrades tried to use flashlights for reading. But most of us went to bed early. Reinhold Baumann and I constructed the German board game *Mühle* (mill) and we played it during these evenings. Unfortunately, I was a much better player than he was. It took a while before I had taught him enough tricks to make the games last longer than just a few minutes.

The construction of our section of road was almost complete and we prepared for moving our camp to the vicinity of a new section of road farther west. We also were told that during the maneuvers we had to work even on weekends. Because of an increasing shortage in manpower, our shifts gradually grew from 6 hours to 9 hours per day with one hour for noon break.

I finally heard from Edith that she had received the DM 150.00 I had sent her and that she enjoyed her visit with my parents in Uelzen. She also had visited my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse in Lüneburg, who expected their first child in June. Ilse was very impressed with Edith and her next letter was filled with compliments. Edith decided to extend her time in Uelzen for another week to make it a full month. This visit made it easier for her to wait for the visa, which we hoped would arrive in late May.

During the first week in May our Company "C" connected with the section of road built by Company "B". We now started to cover our road section with crushed rock to stabilize the road surface. The weather gradually became warmer, but also windier. The dust traveled in huge clouds through the air and we could never get enough water onto the roadbed. As soon as the soil had dried completely, it reverted back to fine dust. Although we expected to move in the near future, we were issued wooden floors for our tents. They arrived in the evening of May 3rd and their installation took a lot of work. These platforms were very heavy and we had to move everything out of the cramped tents. After 5 weeks without a floor in the tent, we would have gladly waited another week for it. On Thursday evening we, again, were without electricity. The generator was not functioning properly. But this was no great loss for us. Company "B" hosted a variety show and Reinhold and I joined others from our company and went to see it. The show was outside and started late. By the time the performances started, it was getting quite chilly for us. We enjoyed the evening, even though we saw no outstanding or unusual performance.

All restrictions for the weekend were cancelled. Some of the men received weekend passes on Friday evening and did not have to return until Monday. In the afternoon of Saturday, May 7th, we had vehicle and tent inspection. Even though we did not do anything special for this event, we passed the inspection without any problem. I guess, the inspecting officer's expectations were not very high, either. In the evening I set up my projector to show a movie. But our new generator blew all the fuses I had for the projector. I had to wait until Monday before I could replace them.

The maneuvers ended Tuesday, May 10, 1955. Every day, more convoys left with troops returning to Fort Lewis. Spring moved into the area and former pastures started to turn green. Suddenly, we also became aware of the many trees, mostly birches, growing along the meandering creek. We had hardly noticed them until they grew foliage and turned into a pleasing green. The sagebrush around us gave the air an aromatic and spicy odor. All the changes in nature made me restless and increased my wish to return to civilian life and to start a new life together with Edith. I had only 5-6 weeks left in uniform! Edith was still waiting for the visa. My cousin Horst wrote me that his sister Erika and Edith's former employer, Mrs. Gebauer, had recently been interviewed, probably by someone from the F.B.I., for what they knew about Edith's character, political orientation, and habits.

On Monday, May 16, 1955, I finally received my orders. I was to report to the processing center in Fort Lewis on Monday, June 20th. The day of my discharge from active duty was Thursday, June 23rd, one day short of 10 years after my official release as prisoner of war in 1945. I was one of 13 men from our company who would be released on this day. I had heard that my Floating Bridge Company in Fort Lewis had received some new replacements. Some of these new men were to be sent to take our place here in Yakima as soon as they received their driver's license.

On Wednesday, May 18th, we were ordered to remove the wooden floors from our tents and to prepare for the move to the new camp farther west. We finished constructing the old road section and were to start on a new section as soon as we had established our new camp on Monday, May 23rd. We also were to receive new and better tents. Our old tents started to tear when hit by strong winds, which happened quite often at this time of the year. On our moving day we were to have reveille at 4:30 in the morning and at 6:00 AM we were to start working on our new road section. This was the beginning of our new work schedule. We were woken up at 4:15 in the morning and started to work at 5:30 AM. We had one hour for lunch and quitting time was at 6:00 PM. I personally thought that these long working days were counterproductive. I counted the days until my return to civilian life. I had lost my "taste for the Army" and even the most lucrative offer could not induce me to seek a career in uniform.

Our new camp was situated near the end of a paved road. The road we were building was to connect this paved road with the Yakima Firing Center. The camp was now about 35 miles east from the entrance to the Center and the barracks. The new camp was an improvement over the first one and it also was better equipped. But I did not care, because my days were numbered. The soil was so dry in this area, that we could hardly haul enough water from the artesian well, our new and only source of water in this area. The slightest wind produced huge dust clouds in the work area and we had to use the truck's headlights to see each other in the dust. One time I got too close to the edge of the new roadbed and Reinhold Baumann had to pull my truck back up onto the road with his bulldozer. In some areas, even the bulldozers had a hard time moving in the loose soil and needed help to get back to more solid ground. Our work days not only had become longer, but they now also included Saturday mornings. We started to wonder when our lieutenant colonel would even take away our free Saturday afternoon. He was not very popular with us, even though he gave us Memorial Day off.

My Aunt Augusta Lang, 5456 Columbus Avenue in Van Nuys, California, the youngest sister of my maternal grandfather Heinrich Penner, invited me to visit her on the trip back to Omaha. I considered doing this, but then I needed to ship part of my belongings by train directly to Omaha. But the news I was most anxious to see was that Edith had received her visa. There still was no sign of it. May 29th was Whitsunday, a holiday in Germany. My thoughts traveled back to Germany and I imagined going for a walk with Edith and with her enjoying looking at the doorways decorated with greening branches from birch trees. In Germany, this holiday was usually the beginning of the warm season and invited people to leave their homes to enjoy the greening of trees, the blooming of lilac, and the many flowers everywhere. But I did not miss Germany and its customs, I only longed for the presence of Edith and to share with her my thoughts! I had grown tired of listening to my comrades discussing trivial events and issues.

Tuesday, May 31st, was my last payday before my release from active duty. Since, on paper, our Floating Bridge people were attached to yet another company stationed at the Firing Center, we had to drive 35 miles of dirt and gravel roads to draw our pay. The first 6 miles of the road were only ruts with 1-foot deep loose sand and many deep holes. It took us over 1½ hours to drive the 35 miles to the Center. But we did not get the permission to leave our work area until 3:45 PM in the afternoon. It was already 8:30 PM when we finally arrived back at our camp, tired and dirty. Since the generator was out of order, again, the camp was dark and quiet and I did not write my usual letter to Edith.

On June 2nd, the Army received permission to use gravel from a private gravel pit not very far from our road section. We now could haul the gravel to cover the surface of the finished road segments. This helped a lot to keep the dust down and to stabilize the road. Our Floating Bridge Company also sent more drivers and trucks to support the road construction effort, but there were no replacements for us who were soon to be released from the Army. On Saturday, June 4th, we only worked a few hours in the morning to service our trucks. There was no roadwork done during this weekend. We never knew ahead of the time when we would work and when we were off duty on weekends.

On Thursday, June 9th, I finally was notified to return to Fort Lewis on Monday, June 13th. But I was not told whether I should take the truck back, too. I therefore sent my tools back with another comrade who returned to our company on this day. On Friday I returned my projector and the last films to the film library at the Firing Center. I also had some necessary repairs made on my truck. When I returned to the camp, I found out that one of the seals on the driveshaft was broken and that the truck was losing oil. I arranged that the truck would not be driven before the necessary repairs were made. On Sunday I was told that I had to leave my truck with Company "C" and I would return to Fort Lewis by courier vehicle from the Firing Center. I was glad that I had already sent back all my tools.

I spent my last day at the camp lying outside and soaking up a lot of sunshine. The temperature approached 100°F and I did not mind getting "roasted" on all sides. It was time for me to get back to Fort Lewis and out of the Army. My fatigues were falling apart and needed to be replaced if I stayed in any longer. I had a big pile of dirty laundry that needed to be washed and I also needed to pack my suitcase and buy some civilian clothes for the trip to California. I

planned to carry with me only the suitcase and a handbag. Everything else I wanted to ship to Omaha by train.

On Monday morning I was brought to the Firing Center, where the daily courier picked me up. There were also several other comrades returning to Fort Lewis for various reasons. When I arrived at my company, I was told that my return had been requested for the previous Friday. I saw many new faces in my old company. I recognized only four men in my 2nd platoon. Most of the new men were fresh out of basic training. But most of them were R.A. (Regular Army) and seemed to have a good attitude. On Tuesday I prepared my company issued field gear for inspection and turning in. Since it was Flag Day and the 180th birthday of the Army, the company participated in another parade in the afternoon. This gave me an opportunity to take a few last pictures of my company. On Wednesday I bought my train ticket. I was going to leave Tacoma on Friday morning at 1:35 AM and was scheduled to arrive in Los Angeles at noon of the following day. I immediately sent this information to my Aunt Augusta in Van Nuys. I also tried to take the final test for the chemistry course I had completed. But the necessary papers had already been returned to the central office in Madison, Wisconsin, and I was told that I could take this test at a later time in Omaha.

On Thursday, June 16th I received a letter from Edith with the news that she finally was able to pick up the visa in Frankfurt. I was overjoyed and felt like screaming out this news. The long wait was finally coming to an end! It should not take more than 6-8 weeks before Edith would arrive in Omaha. Edith was now visiting some of her relatives to say "good bye" to them. I myself had only one week left in uniform. I had all my things taken care of and was waiting for my departure from Fort Lewis. To pass time, I read the book *Die Purpur Wolke*, which Mrs. Hinrichs had sent me for Christmas and went to see movies in the evenings.

On Monday, June 20th, twelve of my comrades and I moved to the processing camp (6021 ASU) to be released from active duty. This was the same unit that had assigned me to the Floating Bridge Company 15 months earlier. The barracks were not very far from our old company, but they were still very crowded and noisy. On our first afternoon at the Reassignment Company, we were kept busy with various work details, like mowing lawns and cleaning offices. I felt again like a fresh recruit. When I was done with all these duties, I returned to my old company to pick up my mail and to find a quiet place to write letters. In the mail was the good news that Edith had picked up her visa. She also was told by the NCWC, her sponsoring organization, that she probably would be leaving Germany by ship on July 28th, 1955.

Our processing started on Tuesday morning with an orientation. There were a total of 11 stations we had to pass through. In the afternoon we had an interview, a dental check, and an inspection of our *government issued* belongings. Since we had 6 years of reserve duty (3 years of standby reserve and 3 years of ready reserve) ahead of us, the Army wanted to make sure that all our issued uniforms were in good shape. On Wednesday we had our physical checkup. Then they checked all our papers and documents. On Thursday morning we received additional information about our rights and future obligations. Finally, a chaplain gave us some useful advice for our return to civilian life. We also received our last pay, including compensation for any leave time we had not taken. It all ended with a handshake by an officer who handed us an envelope with documents. A photographer took a picture of this "last act." By the time we left

the building, we had already spent some of our money for the picture and various other mementos. Nobody seemed to waste much time on saying "good bye" to those he had spent so much time with in uniform. Most of my cash I immediately converted to *traveler cheques.* In the afternoon I brought my duffel bag and another small travel bag to the train station and shipped these items by express to Omaha. Most of my books I had already sent by mail to Dan Bredfeldt's address. After I had taken care of my baggage, I bought myself more civilian clothes, including a leather jacket, and added some more costume jewelry for Edith to what I had already bought for her earlier. I was anxious to make her happy when she arrived in Omaha.

As we walked through North Fort Lewis, I met a couple of fellows who had left the Army a few months earlier. They were in the process of re-enlisting for another 3-year "hitch". These fellows had enjoyed civilian life until their money ran out. They now realized that it was not that easy to find good jobs, and their unemployment compensation was soon running out. I started to wonder how many of the fellows who had received their discharge papers with me would return to Army life within the next few months.

I arrived in Tacoma at 5:30 PM. As I had done many times before to pass time, I spent the next 4 hours in a movie theater. Then I had a good meal and proceeded to the train station. There I wrote one more letter to Edith who used some of her remaining time in Germany to visit relatives. My discharge from the Army became effective at midnight and my train left the Tacoma train station on schedule at 1:15 AM.

CHAPTER 11:
RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE: OMAHA & AIB
(1955-1956)

I was tired and physically exhausted from the events of the day when I boarded the train to Portland, Oregon. I felt like I was developing a cold. The train to Portland left on time at 1:15 AM and I immediately tried to sleep. Since it was very dark outside, there was very little I could see of the landscape anyway. I changed trains in Portland, OR. My new train was the *Shasta Daylight.* This was a new and modern train and as its name implied, it took us past Mount Shasta (14,182 feet) in northern California during broad daylight. This was the most scenic part of this trip. But the altitude of about 6,000 feet above sea level seemed to bother me and made me tired. Perhaps, it was the cold I was battling, since I never again was bothered by this elevation. In Martinez, California, a small town north of Oakland, CA, I again changed to another train which took me to my destination, Los Angeles, CA.

Since the *Shasta Daylight* train traveled during the daytime, it had no sleeping facilities. But the reclining seats were very comfortable. The toilets and washrooms had running warm water. Food and drinks were available in the dining car and in the lounge car at the rear of the train, albeit at much inflated prices. Although I repeatedly closed my eyes for brief periods, I did not get very much sleep during this trip. I finally arrived at my destination on Saturday, June 25th, at about noon. We were about 40 minutes late. The entire trip from Tacoma to Los Angeles took almost 1½ days.

According to my Aunt Augusta, I was to be picked up by the grandson of her sister Katharina, Bruce Hemmings. But I was unable to locate him. However, when I was trying to call my aunt, an elderly gentleman asked me for my name. It was Bruce's father who had come from Des Moines, Iowa, to visit his son. Since the arrival of my train had been delayed, he and Bruce had been reading a newspaper and failed to notice when my train finally did arrive. Of course, father and son were searching for me and when Bruce was looking for a telephone to call Aunt Augusta, his father noticed me in another telephone booth getting ready to do the same thing. Fortunately, I was still wearing my Army uniform and was easily recognized. As it turned out, I would have had a hard time traveling on my own to my aunt's home in Van Nuys, CA, since a strike had shut down most public transportation. After we introduced ourselves, we soon left in Bruce's car and arrived at Aunt Augusta's home without any further delay.

As mentioned earlier, Aunt Augusta Lang was the youngest sister of my grandfather (Opapa) Heinrich Penner. She was 10 years younger than my grandfather and was born in 1879. Like her six sisters and her only brother, she was born on her father's farm in Thiergart, Westprussia. Three of her sisters had, like her, left Germany for the United States in the late 1800s to "escape" from their domineering father. Aunt Augusta followed her three sisters (Katharina Claaßen, Lisette Braun, and Helene Bock) who already had settled in the United States. Her sister Katharina was the maternal grandmother of Bruce Hemmings. Thus, Bruce's mother and my mother were first cousins. Aunt Augusta's sister Helene Bock lived in Alaska, where she spent the rest of her life. However, I know no details about the lives of these sisters and their families.

Aunt Augusta married twice. As I vaguely remember, her first husband's name was Jäger and he had been a German officer. He apparently treated my aunt not much better than her domineering father had. After his death shortly after the turn of the century, Augusta returned to Germany for an extended visit. After her return to the United States before WW I, she lived in Chicago, where she married another German immigrant with the name of Lang. She had one son from this marriage and named him Erwin. He was about 35 years old when I met him first in 1955. Erwin's wife's name was June. She was Jewish and a very nice person. Erwin and June were nudists and for several years they published magazines for nudists. They also operated a nudist camp in California and seemed to be quite successful with this venture. Aunt Augusta was definitely very proud of her son's business success and Erwin took good care of her.

Aunt Augusta's second marriage was not a very happy one either. Her husband finally died in the late 1930s or early 1940s. After the outbreak of WW II, she moved from Chicago to the Los Angeles area. In 1945 she bought her home in Van Nuys, where she still lived when we visited her in 1964. She earned her living as a seamstress for movie producers. After working part-time for a few years, she fully retired only a couple of years before my visit in 1955.

Aunt Augusta was a spry old lady of 76 years when I visited her, even though she had broken her leg only a week earlier. The heavy plaster cast kept her off her feet for much of the time, but she was in good spirits and did not lament about her misfortune. She had broken her leg below her knee when she fell off a stepladder. She had tried to hang up pictures on the wall after a painter had finished decorating her living room. By the time I arrived, she already moved about the house and in her little flower garden on a set of crutches. But my presence was a great relief for her and also for Bruce and his wife Marge, who had helped to care for her since the accident. A few days after my arrival, Aunt Augusta even got out her electric motorized tricycle to go shopping with me at the neighborhood grocery store. This tricycle was her main means of transportation on the sparsely traveled streets in her neighborhood.

I quickly assumed the responsibilities of a housekeeper. Much of the day I spent with preparing meals, washing dishes, and watering the many flowers in Aunt Augusta's backyard. But during my stay in Van Nuys I also had the opportunity to see many interesting sites of Greater Los Angeles. Bruce was a salesman for Carnation dairy products. In the evenings, he took me on trips through parts of the City of Los Angeles and Hollywood. He pointed out many interesting places.

Aunt Augusta also had very nice neighbors and many friends who helped her whenever she needed assistance. On Sunday evening I was invited over by one of her neighbors. He was single and a 30-year Navy veteran. We started out watching television, but soon were deeply involved in a mostly one-way conversation and talked about all kinds of things. He definitely was happy to have found a willing listener for his endless stories. It was already 3 AM when we finally parted.

On Monday evening I had the opportunity to meet Aunt Augusta's son and his wife June. It was a very nice visit, even though I did not talk to them very much. But I did learn that a niece of Aunt Augusta was coming from Iowa to take my place as caretaker of my aunt until she no longer needed assistance. I also had received a letter from Edith in which she informed me that

she had received her visa on June 16th and that she was scheduled to depart from Germany on Thursday, July 28th, 1955. This new information caused me to get restless and wanting to return to Omaha, NE, to prepare for her arrival in about 6 weeks.

On Tuesday evening, Bruce's parents invited me to see *This is Cinerama*. This was a new motion picture technology. It was to bring to the audience a sense of "in time reality". The "Cinerama" had been filmed with three cameras and was now projected with three projectors onto a slightly curved screen designed to cover the audience's entire field of vision and to give a 3-dimensional impression. The stereo sound came from nine strategically positioned speakers. The film had no plot, but was composed of a series of visual and audio impressions. The first part had been recorded and filmed at the *Scala* in Milan, Italy (from the opera *Aida*), the Vienna Boys Choir, a church choir, a parade in Scotland, and a gondola trip through Venice, Italy. The second part showed life and scenes in the United States and an airplane ride across this continent. The trip in a roller coaster was so real that it had its effect on some people in the audience. But I enjoyed most the flight over the Grand Canyon and through the Rocky Mountains. Their view was breathtaking and left me with the desire to visit these beautiful places together with Edith.

On Wednesday, Bruce was able to get me a reservation for a seat on the train to Omaha. This train was scheduled to leave on Sunday, July 3rd, in the afternoon. I was lucky. Most trains scheduled to leave on this holiday weekend were already fully booked. My aunt's niece Martha was already in San Diego and was to arrive in Van Nuys on Saturday evening.

Saturday evening I spent again with the Navy veteran. He grilled some huge steaks on his charcoal grill and continued with his many Navy stories, while his three beautiful Siamese cats and I listened. It was almost midnight when these steaks were finally done. They were delicious, but did not make me sleep better.

Sunday morning came and I was busy with all the usual housework. Martha had called to announce she would arrive on Monday. My aunt's fractured leg continued to improve and she was now able to take care of herself and required very little help from others. She even was able to "master" the three steps leading to and from her home. I had all my things packed and was anxious to return to Omaha. Aunt Augusta insisted on my preparing a fried chicken for lunch so that I could take some of it along for the trip. I managed to cut up the chicken and to fry the breaded pieces by closely following her directions. I actually received a good "basic training" in preparing meat dishes during my visit in Van Nuys. Among other tips, I learned to add oat flakes to hamburgers. I also found time to quickly write another letter to Edith on this my last morning in California.

Bruce and Marge brought me to the train station on Sunday, July 3, 1955 in the afternoon. I did not arrive in Omaha until the following day shortly before midnight. The trip was uneventful and I do not remember much of it. My thoughts were preoccupied with Edith's arrival in Omaha about 5 weeks later and with what I needed to do before then. Dan and his brother John (Joern) Bredfeldt picked me up at the train station in Omaha. When I finally lay down to get some rest, I realized that I now was a "free man" and in control of my own destiny. This feeling made me very happy!

The first days after my return to Omaha were very busy. I first went to see Mr. William Peter to bring him and myself up-to-date on Edith's status. Mr. Peter had just returned from a trip to Germany. As far as he knew, everything was in best order and the visa had been paid for by the NCWC, the catholic organization that made all the arrangements for Edith's coming to the U.S. Mr. Peter also advised me that Edith could bring with her the silverware given to us as wedding presents without paying custom fees, as long as she claims it as her personal property. But gifts for others must be declared and custom duties must be paid for these presents. Edith will also be able to exchange German money for dollars. Representatives of the NCWC would meet her in New York and would provide her with the train tickets to Omaha. Somebody would also assist her with finding the proper train to Chicago, where she would change to a train to Omaha, NE. I explained all this in my next letter to Edith and also gave her some tips for traveling by train. I also explained to her some local customs and laws she may not have been familiar with. Among these tips was the advice to cross streets only at intersections and with a green light! Much of this advice originated from my own ignorance when I moved from a rural environment to Omaha. However, Edith's life in Hamburg had her well prepared for life in Omaha.

My next order of business was to report back to the bakery. Everybody, including my boss, seemed to be happy to see me again. It took me several hours before I had seen everybody at the bakery. Since I had so many things to take care of, I did not want to start working before Sunday. I was told to return on Thursday or Friday for more detailed information on when to start working and what job I would be doing. The law required that I must be given a job equivalent in pay and skill level to the job I had at the time of my induction. I also told my boss of my plan to attend the American Institute of Baking (AIB) as soon as possible, probably during the first half of 1956.

After all this was taken care of, I decided to increase my mobility. I went looking for a used car. I soon found one, but Dan's father-in-law advised me against buying this car. It was already evening when I finally found a 1950 4-door, 6-cylinder Chevrolet. It was in good condition and had previously been owned by a minister. Mr. Göritz agreed that it was a good buy and after the salesman had reduced the price slightly, I paid cash for the car and drove it home. On the following morning I registered the car and applied for my civilian driver's license. When I showed the clerk my Army license qualifying me to operate military motor vehicles classified as ¼-ton (Jeep), ¾-ton, 2½-ton, and 5-ton trucks, I received my civilian license without further questioning. I did not even have to take a driving test, even though I had never driven a car before. The purchase of the car left quite a hole in my wallet, but I was determined to proceed with my next plan.

Every day, newspapers had long columns of advertisements of *homes for sale.* Their message: "Beautiful home for sale! No money down! Easy terms for veterans" was very tempting for me. It sounded almost too good to be true! But I decided to investigate these attractive offers. Why should I pay rent for a noisy apartment, when I could pay off a mortgage on my own property? Would it not be nice to start life together with Edith in our own home? On Tuesday I contacted a real estate agent about several of these advertisements, but found out that the offered homes were more expensive than I could afford to pay with my anticipated income. I was a few thousand dollars short! But the agent told me that he was going to watch for a home that was more

affordable for me. Well, this did not take long! When I returned to Dan's and Lilian's home after registering my new car, I was given the message to call the real estate agent.

The agent told me that he found a nice little bungalow in a good neighborhood for a price that I could afford. We immediately drove there to see it. The house was located at 2926 North 49th Avenue in Omaha. It had 4 rooms with a living space of 561 square feet, including the walk-through closet between the two bedrooms. The house was of an unknown age, but probably was built early in the 20th century. The 10 ½ x 7ft kitchen looked like it had been added at a later time when the original kitchen was added to the living room, which now was 25 x 10½ ft and occupied one half of the main building. The house was built over a basement with cinder block walls. The rooms had solid hardwood floors and the house was heated with a gas cabinet heater. Warm water was provided by a 30-gallon heater. The house stood on a corner lot with large trees, which kept the temperature in the house fairly comfortable, even during the warm summer season. At the front of the house was a screened-in porch and in the back was a detached one-car garage. The price of this property had been reduced from $11,000 to $9,000. The owners, Clarence and Rachel Avery were ready to move to Colorado and to vacate the house. All rooms looked clean and well maintained. I especially liked the fact that I could take possession of the house as soon as all the paperwork was done. The agent of *The Otis Company, Incorporated*, told me that I could buy this home for $9,000 with a down payment of $900. I still had this much money left in my savings account and accepted the offer. But as I found out later, there were some additional charges in the "closing costs" that I was not aware of. The interest rate for a Veterans Administration (V.A.) insured mortgage was 4.5%. I was happy and wrote Edith about my "investments" in my next letter.

Since the house was empty and I had no "extra" money left, I needed to borrow some furniture from friends. Dan immediately offered me all the extra furniture he had available from his rental properties. The remainder I hoped to buy later as I started to earn money, again. I hoped that Edith would agree with me, even if it would be a very humble beginning for our life together.

To reestablish my personal independence, I rented a furnished apartment until I was able to move into our own home. The apartment was in a large brick building and consisted of a bedroom and a small kitchen. It was awkward for me to live with another couple under crowded conditions and it was time for me to move on. I rented this place on a weekly basis and moved into it on Friday. On Sunday, July 10th, 1955, I started to work again at the bakery. The superintendent for the bread department at the Peter Pan bakery asked me if it was all right with me if he used me in various positions and as needed instead of in a single job position. I liked this, because this arrangement exposed me to different jobs and I hoped that this experience would be helpful to me later on. The disadvantage, however, was that I never knew what I would be doing on the next day. There were times when I was told during the middle of my shift to go home to get some rest and to return to work a few hours later. I did not mind this too much, since I was able to work a lot of overtime and I needed all the money I was able to earn!

My first working day was back in the mixing room and lasted 10½ hours without a break. It took me only about one hour before I had familiarized myself with my old job. But it was hard work and at the end of the shift every muscle in my body ached. Within a few days I was again used to this hard physical work and I started to feel better at the end of the shift. Although the

heat with temperatures in the 90's did not bother me very much, the high humidity common in the Midwest in July was a little harder to get used to. The concept of air conditioning in the work place was still a dream for most workers in this country. The first stores and new supermarkets finally started to draw customers in the mid-1950s by offering this comfort during shopping hours.

In a letter I received on Tuesday, July 12, 1955, Edith informed me that she had confirmation for her departure from Germany on Thursday, July 28, 1955. She was instructed to report on Monday, the 25th, for final processing in Bremen-Lesum. She also was informed that she would travel on the Navy transport *General Langfitt*. I was very happy about this information and my longing for Edith became almost unbearable. I counted the days until I would be able to take her into my arms. At the same time, I started to worry that something may go wrong and I was not able to care for her when she arrived at the railroad station in Omaha. Under no circumstances did I want to let her down or cause her to be unhappy! I wrote Edith the telephone numbers of Mr. Peter and of Dan Bredfeldt. I also wrote her that I would be wearing gray trousers and a blue shirt with short sleeves. This should make it easier for her to identify me.

Mamuschka, my stepmother, informed me in a letter that my brother Jürgen and his wife Ilse were the proud parents of a little boy. Martin Doerry was born on June 21st and he and his mother were in good health. Martin was the first boy in his generation to carry on our family name.

I worked as many hours as I could. On one day I worked 11 hours without feeling overly tired. In my free time, especially when I lay down to sleep, my mind was occupied with thoughts of Edith and how happy our life together would be. During the last two weeks, I started to send her almost daily letters. In these I expressed my love and desire for her. But I was also determined to make her happy and not to pressure her to do anything she did not want to do on her own! This included the decision to marry me and to live together. In case she was unhappy in Omaha, I would do anything I could to make it possible for her to return to Germany. I loved Edith and wanted her to be happy! I felt like I had total responsibility for her. I especially did not want her to worry about anything! In every letter I wrote to her, I tried to reassure her and her family that everything would be all right. Remembering the difficulties I had identifying food listed on menus posted in bus stations, I explained to Edith in my letter dated July 20th a number of popular foods she may want to order while she travels by train to Omaha. On the following day, one week before her departure, I wrote Edith the last letter to Germany.

The purchase of our own home was slightly delayed by the approval process for our mortgage. The mortgage was finally approved while I was in the hospital during the first week in August. But since the owners would not vacate the house before the end of this week, I could not take possession of the house before the following week anyway.

My father surprised me with a very nice letter. I had not expected to hear from him again personally. But he explained that since I no longer wore the uniform of his former enemy, he could resume writing letters to me. We continued to correspond as long as he lived. The fact that I had served in the U.S. Army was never brought up again.

Starting with the week of July 24, 1955, my weekly work schedule at the bakery changed to three days in the mixing room and two days in other bread production jobs, like loading and unloading ovens. My work was now spread over all three shifts. But I did not mind doing this, because the different jobs provided me with some extra experience and training I believed I needed for attending the AIB.

Sunday, July 31st, was a very warm summer day and I worked the day shift at the tunnel oven. It was my job to carefully take the straps of four pans with proofed (fully expanded) bread dough from the bread racks and place them onto the loading shelf of the oven, from where a loading bar pushed the pans onto the travelling oven hearth. I shared this job with another *oven man*. The heat emanating from the hot oven added to the warm temperature of the day and there was little ventilation in this crowded area. We perspired profusely. I was very tired when I was done and went to my apartment to get some rest. On Monday I was scheduled to start working in the afternoon and went to downtown Omaha to take care of some business. As I sometimes did, I stopped at the main post office to buy a bottle of cold cola from a vending machine in the lobby and drank it to still my thirst. As I walked back to my apartment, I noticed a slight pain developing in my kidney area. This pain was persistent and grew in intensity. When I reached my warm apartment, I immediately lay down to rest. Although my room was very warm, I was shivering and covered myself with all the blankets I had. Since the pain would not subside, I called the bakery and gave my supervisor a message that I was unable to come to work in the afternoon. I had no idea what the cause was for this very intense pain in my back. In the afternoon I called Lilian Bredfeldt and told her that I would like to see Dan when he returned from work.

Dan finally came in the late afternoon and took me to the VA hospital in Omaha. The admission process at the hospital took over two hours. The pain in my back persisted and nobody at the hospital could help me with the pain until a medical doctor had examined me. After I was admitted, I was taken to the ward for patients with kidney problems. While I was riding the elevator to the proper floor, I suddenly noticed that the pain in my back was mysteriously leaving me.

I shared the ward with about a dozen other patients. Most of them were WW I veterans. I was the only young person in the ward. Most of the men had prostate problems and were catheterized. They were ordered to drink enough water every day to fill a gallon jug with urine. The nurses checked each patient periodically to make sure that everybody drank enough water. I myself was given a container with a gauze screen on top to check whether I was passing a kidney stone with my urine. But I never found anything what looked like a stone.

I spent the days with doing very little. There was not much reading material available, either. Thus I spent much of my time being a “handy person” for the bed-ridden patients. This made me quite popular in our ward. I also spent some time with some more seriously ill patients in private rooms who were recovering from surgery. Everybody able to walk ate his meals in a large mess hall, just like I was used to from the Army. I was never bored and time went by quickly. In addition to the basic diagnostic blood and urine tests, the specialist had my kidneys x-rayed. The pictures showed no stones in my kidney. My main worry was that I would be released from the hospital in time to pick up Edith at the train station when she arrived on Sunday evening. I soon

found out that it was just as difficult to get discharged from a VA hospital as it was to get admitted as a patient. At the time of admittance, all patients had to turn in all their personal belongings, including identification papers and money. This measure kept everybody from leaving the facility. If, however, somebody went home without permission from his doctor, he was not allowed to return to a VA hospital for further treatment. This hospital was only a few years old and I was very impressed with the good care I received there.

Not knowing when I would be released from the hospital, I sent Edith a "special delivery" letter in care of the troop transport *General Langfitt* in New York City to explain to her my situation. But I was lucky! On Friday afternoon I was "furloughed" from the hospital for two weeks and I checked out my few belongings to return to my apartment. I now hoped that Edith did not receive the letter I had sent her to New York. I had orders to return to the hospital on Saturday, August 20th, for a quick check-up by my doctor. He provided me with a good supply of pills and I was to take these with a lot of water.

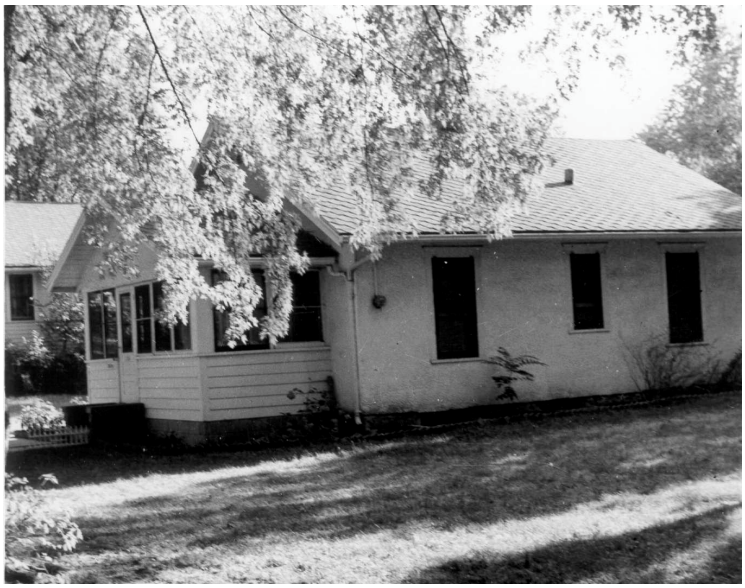
My bachelor life was now approaching its end. But I was happy about this and could hardly wait until I could embrace Edith. I had asked the Bredfeldts whether she could stay with them for the first days so that she was not all by herself during this time. They were happy to oblige, as they had always done for me. Also, I did not want to put any kind of pressure on Edith to move in with me in my small apartment. According to the local news, her ship had arrived in New York early in the morning of Saturday, August 6, 1955 and she was to arrive in Omaha on Sunday evening.

Edith's train was scheduled to arrive in Omaha at 9:00 PM in the evening. As I had written to her in one of my last letters, I dressed in gray slacks and a blue shirt and drove with my 1950 Chevrolet to the Burlington train station. When the train finally arrived, there was a big crowd leaving the train and I had looked everywhere without seeing Edith until she stood in front of me. Apparently, she had better eyes than I had! We were very happy, but also apprehensive and unsure of each other. But this did not keep us from "testing the waters" with a rather shy kiss.

Edith had traveled with a very young nun who was on her way to a convent in Norfolk, NE. Since the nun did not speak any English, I helped her with making the proper train connections. Edith and I then left for my apartment, where I informed Edith of all what had happened during the past 10 days. She had not received my special delivery letter I had sent her from the hospital. This letter was never returned to me either. I also told Edith that, if she agrees with me, we should get married as soon as possible. She accepted my proposal. I then brought her to the Bredfeldts, where she found shelter until the following Saturday. I myself drove to the bakery, where my shift started at midnight.

During the first week after Edith's arrival, we spent as much time together as possible. We not only needed to get "acquainted" with each other and to find out if we really loved each other, but there also were many things to be taken care of. Edith needed to register for Social Security. She also had to meet Mr. Peter and on Friday, August 12th, we finally closed on the purchase of our own home. Although I was aware of the major closing costs and had sufficient money to pay for these, there were also some other costs and fees I did not know about. Fortunately, Edith had, before she left Germany, exchanged all her German money into dollars and was able to pay

the balance of the closing costs. After this was done, we had just a few dollars left to buy a few groceries for the weekend.



Our First Home in Omaha, Nebraska

Edith in front our home

Saturday, August 13, 1955, was our moving day. On Friday evening, Dan brought us the first of his surplus furniture. It was not much, but very helpful. Edith felt awkward living with the Bredfeldts and was anxious to move into our own home. I had no money left to pay the rent of my little apartment and needed a new roof over my head. Before I moved out of my apartment on Saturday, Edith cooked the first meal for us. She made hamburgers with boiled potatoes, a brown gravy made from flour, and some vegetables. I enjoyed the meal and decided to always let her do the cooking! My own contribution to this meal was that I washed the dishes. It seems that this first meal together set the pattern we followed for much of our lives. Edith was always a good cook, while I did not mind to clean up afterwards. When one of us had too much work to do, then the other helped with preparing the food or with drying the dishes. We always worked together and neither of us sat down to rest before everything was done and we both could sit down to rest.

I bought an old refrigerator from a fellow I worked with and Dan helped me move it and other furniture we were given by my friends, the elderly Grosche couple. On Sunday, Dan brought us an old gas stove that had been "stored" outside and was full of sand and was coated with burnt food and grease. It took Edith many hours of scrubbing before this stove was clean enough for her to cook a meal on. Later on I bought a used dining room table with chairs for the large living room, and an old semiautomatic Bendix washing machine. But before we were able to use this machine, I had to fix its timing device.

Edith and I spent most of this weekend cleaning the house and furniture. The stove probably presented Edith with the greatest challenge. But she cheerfully tackled all these jobs and we both felt good about doing things for ourselves and for each other. We were happy to be together and looked with much confidence into our future! I was especially happy about the fact that Edith took charge of our lives together. I was happy about this, because I tried very hard not

to put any undue pressure on her. We quickly adjusted to living together and enjoyed each other's company. We shared the work to convert our newly acquired house into a home. We were very happy, even though our life together did not spoil us. It was a very rewarding time and we were proud of whatever we were able to accomplish with the few resources available to us.

Edith next to our '50 Chevy

Edith and I discussed our immediate options and decided to get married in the German church on Saturday, August 27th. By then I hoped to have saved enough money to pay all the fees, to pay the minister and to take the Bredfeldts out for dinner. Edith wanted to sew her own wedding dress and used Lilian's sewing machine for the long seams. Most of the sewing, however, Edith did by hand.

On Monday morning, Edith started her new job at the *Omaha Shade Company*. This business was owned by Willi Mackem. Mr. Mackem was German and had settled in Omaha before WW II. He paid Edith 80 cents per hour, but raised her wages to 90 cents after 3 weeks. Edith liked her job. Her lone coworker in the shop was deaf and communicated with her by writing notes, while Mr. Mackem spoke in German to her. They all respected each other and Edith appreciated the low-stress atmosphere in the shop. It also was easy for Edith to take a bus to her work. When after Labor Day Edith started to take classes every Tuesday and Thursday evening for what is now called "English as a second language", the Technical High School was right across the street from her work. Her teacher lived in our neighborhood and often offered to take Edith home after classes. All this made Edith feel good about coming to Omaha. The large shade trees in our yard kept the temperature in our home at a comfortable level and soon the warm weather yielded to cooler fall weather.

As planned, we had our wedding on Saturday, August 27th, 1955. Pastor Rohlfing of the Cross Lutheran Church in Omaha officiated and Joern and Lilian Bredfeldt were our witnesses. We already had our blood tested for the RH factor and had applied for our license, which the pastor now had to sign to make our marriage legal. Quite a few of our friends attended the ceremony;

but we were not financially able to have a reception for our friends after the wedding. We only invited Pastor Rohlfing, whom we gave $10 for his services, and of course, we also asked Dan and Lilian Bredfeldt, Joern, and Ekkehard Bredfeldt to join Edith and me for dinner at the nice Gorats Restaurant in Omaha. Joern also acted as our chauffeur and took us later to a party of young people. But Edith did not like the party and was worried about Joern's heavy drinking. I finally asked Joern to take us home, which he did after a while.

Our Wedding Day, Omaha, Nebraska
(in front of John Bredfeldt's car)
August 27, 1955

We received a number of nice wedding presents from our friends and also a lot of mail, including packages, from Germany. Some of these presents, like the red woolen blanket and some dishes from the Bredfeldts, we are still using on a regular basis 45 years later. As a special "thank you" to our best friends, we later invited them separately for dinner at our home. For all the extra help we had received from Dan and Lilian, we invited them with their little son Michael for dinner at our home on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. At this time we also presented them with a combination electric waffle iron and grill.

As time went on, we added additional "improvements" to our home in the form of furniture and curtains Edith had sewn. The windows and the porch needed a new coat of paint and the garden required attention as well. But Edith and I were happy and proud to have our own place to live in. Our neighbors were friendly and helpful.

After a few visits to the German church where we were married, we quit going to the German services on a regular basis. Somehow, I never enjoyed Pastor Rohlfing's sermons and I also could not get over what he had said during our wedding ceremony. He insinuated that young couples come to church to get married, but then they soon quit coming. I admit that this was true in our case, but I somehow took this statement as coercion and I resented that it was made as part of our wedding ceremony. I somehow was "turned off" by Pastor Rohlfing. My working on most Sundays did not help either!

I had another kidney stone attack in early October. It started on Thursday afternoon at work. Because the pain increased in intensity, I went home early. In the hope that the pain would subside with time, like it had done two months earlier, I went to bed. But the pain in my kidney never left and on Friday morning, October 7th, I drove myself to the VA hospital, where I stayed until my discharge on Wednesday, October 12th.

It did not take long before the days were significantly shorter and the temperature turned cooler. Soon, the old trees shed their dried-up leaves. Edith and I worked hard on disposing huge mountains of the leaves, which once helped to cool our home. In the 1950s, it was still the custom for homeowners to burn these leaves and, sometimes, also their trash. This was the time when practically all "mature communities" had huge clouds of smoke hanging over them and people with respiratory diseases had difficulty breathing the polluted air. On windy days, fire departments were busy with extinguishing fires that had gotten out of control.

Edith liked to dance and on a couple of occasions I took her to the German Club. Although I knew that I was not a good dance partner, I soon found out how bad a dancer I really was and lost interest in this social activity. This never changed, even though we had a few occasions to dance later on during weddings of our children and on Christmas parties given by my employers.

Edith liked her job and made good progress learning English during her evening classes. But there were many days when I hardly got to see her. Sometimes, when I came home from work in the morning, I met the bus she took to work. At other times, I drove to work when she came home. But this was the price I had to pay for working so many extra hours in a non-defined job. I also had noticed that the production shifts were not as long as they had been before I was inducted into the Army. Apparently, the bakery had lost some business during the almost two years of my absence. But nobody talked about this change!

As Christmas approached, we bought our first Christmas tree and all the trimmings and decorations to make this tree resemble a true German Christmas tree. During the mid-1950s, the Japanese industry was desperately trying to break into the US consumer market with cheap merchandise. The stamp *Made in Japan* had at that time no implication of "quality". In fact, most people equated it with the quality of disposable junk. Most of the decorations we bought for our first tree were *Made in Japan* and we still use them more than 45 years later. This bad reputation of consumer goods imported from Japan changed drastically a few years later, when this Asian country started to export cameras and optical instrumentation of the highest quality to all parts of the world. The good quality and the fuel efficiency of Japanese cars finally became the standard for all cars in the U.S.

Pastor Krog of the local Danish congregation and his wife invited us for Thanksgiving dinner. I had met Pastor Krog as a patient at the VA hospital. On several occasions, he invited us to small parties given by various groups at his church. This was Edith's first traditional Thanksgiving dinner, complete with all the trimmings. We both appreciated this invitation and enjoyed the dinner very much. A couple of weeks later, Mrs. Krog took Edith to a pre-Christmas party of the *Ladies' Club* at the Danish church.

Christmas turned out to be a very pleasant holiday for us. We did not have the money to give each other expensive presents and limited ourselves to a box of chocolate candies and to the nicely decorated tree. But we had a big surprise a few days before Christmas. As it was custom for many church congregations to bring food baskets to struggling couples and families before the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, Pastor Krog had arranged for us to be the recipients of one of these food baskets. It contained everything needed for a big family dinner. As happy as we were about this gift, we also were a little embarrassed and did not know how to thank Pastor Krog and his congregation for their generosity. As I look back on this time 45 years ago, I still feel bad about my ignorance about responding properly to all the nice gestures and the good will from our many friends in Omaha. I am sure that I made many unforgivable mistakes during these months and I am very sorry for this!

We had very nice weather for Christmas. Christmas Day was on Sunday and the bakery was closed for the holiday. Edith and I went to the German church service. Afterwards we enjoyed the nice weather by driving to North Omaha to wish our friends Gustav and Leonie Haug a merry Christmas. They promptly invited us to share the noon dinner with them and we invited them to come to our home for the evening meal. Edith and I thus enjoyed our first Christmas holiday together with friends.

I worked as many hours as I was able to. I needed every cent I could earn. To make it easier for Edith to sew curtains for our home and white uniforms for me, we bought a *Morse* portable sewing machine on a year-end inventory reduction sale. We bought it on time payments and soon found out that we had to make our payments to a financial institute, rather than to the store where we had bought the appliance. As soon as we received the coupon book for making the payments, I paid the balance for the sewing machine and considered this to be a valuable lesson for us. I never liked to deal with financial institutions unknown to me!

On New Year's Eve, Edith and I drove to the German Musikverein (music society) where we celebrated the arrival of the New Year with dancing. Since Edith had missed her period two times in a row, she went to see a gynecologist during the middle of January and was told that she was pregnant and our baby was due in August.

After 1955 came to an end, I prepared to attend the *Baking Science and Technology* course offered by the American Institute of Baking in Chicago, Illinois. I had been accepted for Class 69 with 53 registered students, which was considered to be maximum capacity for the AIB campus on 400 East Ontario Street in Chicago. No questions had been raised about my having less than the 2 years of prerequisite experience in a bakery and that I had only high school equivalency in the form of the GED tests I took while I was in the Army. But I did have an influential sponsor in Milton Petersen, the president of Petersen Baking company. Mr. Petersen had written a letter for me, even though I had never met this gentleman. Mr. Petersen was at that time, on the AIB board of directors.

The 20-week course was scheduled to start on Monday, January 30th, 1956 and graduation was to be on Friday, June 15th. The AIB admission office sent me a list of things I was to bring along. This list included 3 white uniforms we had to wear during bakery laboratory periods. During regular classes we were supposed to wear a dress shirt with a tie. Edith sewed the white shirts

for the uniforms to save us some money. The AIB also reserved a room for us at the Montrose Beach Hotel on Chicago's north side.

I gave notice at the bakery that I would be gone until the end of June. As our departure day from Omaha approached, Edith and I packed whatever we needed for Chicago into our suitcases and moved the furniture and remaining belongings into the basement. Dan rented out our house for the next four months to cover our house payments. I made as many of my insurance and other payments in advance as I could afford. I hoped that my GI Bill payments would cover most of our living expenses in Chicago. We also hoped that Edith could earn some additional money.

On Friday, January 27, 1956, we left Omaha early in the morning for Chicago, IL. Our 1950 Chevy was loaded with our belongings. Most of the snow had melted and the highways seemed to be clear. There were no Interstate Highways, yet. We crossed the Missouri River Bridge to Council Bluffs, IA, and took the state highway 92, which merged with US 34 halfway through Illinois. The US 34 highway took us all the way to Chicago, where it became the Ogden Avenue. I estimated our total driving distance to be about 525 miles. We left at 5 AM in total darkness and encountered some fog east of Council Bluffs. This slowed me down a little. But as we saw the first signs of daylight over the horizon and I was driving at about 30 MPH down a gentle hill, the car started to pull to the left and towards a steep downhill slope. As inexperienced as I was with driving under adverse weather conditions, my first thought was that I had a flat tire and started to step on the brakes. This was a mistake and I lost total control over the car. It slid sideways and threatened to roll down the steep slope on the left side of the highway. But we were lucky! As we reached the shoulder of the road, the car slowed down and came to a stop. The front wheels rested on the shoulder of the road, while the rear wheels were suspended off the road. The bottom of the car rested on the edge of the shoulder. We were safe, as long as no other car came sliding down the road and pushed us "down the cliff". As I stepped out on the pavement of the highway, I found out what the real problem had been. It was "black ice." The pavement was so covered with a thin layer of invisible ice, that I could barely walk on it. As other cars came along and noticed our predicament, they stopped and offered to help us. After one of the drivers offered to notify a wrecker to pull us back onto the road, I waved off all cars that slowed down to see what our problem was. I did not want them to hit us or to push our car all the way down. After we had waited for about an hour, the wrecker arrived and about 15 minutes later we continued our trip to Chicago. We both were shaken up and faced 40 more miles of icy roads, before the rising sun took care of the ice problem.

What we tried to avoid, happened! The delay caused us to arrive in Chicago right in the middle of the Friday evening rush hour. I not only was not used to the heavy traffic in this city, but we also had only a vague idea of where the Montrose Beach Hotel was located. We figured that the hotel was most likely near Lake Michigan on Montrose Avenue. As we drove into the city on Ogden Avenue, we headed for the Lake Shore Drive, an expressway with limited access near the lake. We then wanted to drive on this expressway north to the Montrose Avenue and hoped to find the hotel not very far west of the Lake Shore Drive. This worked out well for us. All of the sudden we found ourselves heading north on the Lake Shore drive and in bumper to bumper traffic. I noticed some emergency parking places on the side of the road and stopped there to take a good look at our map. We then continued driving in the right lane and suddenly saw a

large sign telling us that the *Montrose Beach Hotel* was right at the next exit from the expressway. We exited and soon found a parking spot near the hotel.

As we inquired about the room rates at the hotel, we found that we could not afford to stay there. The lady at the hotel registration desk suggested that we should look for a cheap apartment in the neighborhood. The area consisted mainly of 3-story apartment buildings. Originally, each floor consisted of one apartment with one kitchen and one bathroom. But during the rapid growth of Chicago during WW II, these "flats" were subdivided into single or double room apartments equipped with a gas stove and a lavatory with cold and warm water. A few blocks west, on Broadway Road, was a station for the "Elevated" (the "L"), which provided us with rapid transit to the "Loop" (the business center of the city). The only problem in that area was a severe shortage of parking spaces along the street curbs.

The lady at the hotel registration desk not only offered us good advice, but she also provided us with the name and address of an elderly German couple who offered to rent us a room at a reduced price. We paid the rent for a week and moved in. After a good night of sleep, we explored the neighborhood on the following morning and acquainted ourselves with the main streets and the traffic in Chicago. We also searched for a cheaper apartment in a neighborhood with better parking facilities. We then looked for a dressmaking job for Edith, but were unable to find one on a Saturday morning.

It was a busy weekend for us and on Monday morning I reported for classes at the AIB. The main classroom was filled to capacity with 53 students. We had three foreign students: Franz Cleven from Germany, Victor Milke from (Bimbo) Mexico, and one student from Sweden. There also was Klaus Buehring, who had worked in the Philadelphia, PA, area. Most students were sponsored by their employers and some of the self-sponsored students had come under the GI Bill, like I did.

While I was introduced to what AIB expected from us during the following 20 weeks, Edith took the "L" to the city and looked for a job in the manufacturing district. When I came home after school, she proudly told me that she had found a job and could start working on the following morning. The job was with the Florsheim Shoe Company and consisted of gluing reinforcing fabric strips to shoe vamps. Edith liked the job and the pay was not bad! She earned a little more than one dollar per hour. Many of her coworkers earned a little more money by doing piecework. They were paid for each unit of work they accomplished. The majority of Edith's coworkers were immigrants from Europe who formed ethnic cliques during lunchtime. Similarly, Edith made friends with some German women.

Our first week in Chicago went by very quickly. As Friday arrived, Edith and I moved to our "new" kitchenette apartment on Leland Avenue (4700 North). The building was located about a half block west of Clarendon Avenue, which was the north-south street closest to Lake Michigan in this area. The room was typical for a subdivided apartment flat. It was on the first floor and we needed to keep the windows closed. This, of course, was no problem for us during the winter months and during early spring. What was important for us was that our weekly rent payment was only 10 dollars. Parking was available east of Clarendon Avenue and the "L" station was only a few blocks away on Broadway.

Although everything seemed to work out for us, signs of a severe problem showed up on this weekend. Edith started to bleed! At first, she lost only a few drops of blood. But as the weekend wore on, the bleeding became heavier and we started to worry. On Monday, I inquired at the AIB about a doctor who could examine Edith. I immediately made an appointment with the recommended doctor for Tuesday afternoon. I picked up Edith at work on Tuesday and took her to the doctor's office. The doctor prescribed some medication and strict bed rest for Edith. Edith did what she was told to do, but developed a constant strong pain in her abdomen. We were scared and wondered what the cause for this was. Finally, late in the evening, the water broke and the heavy pain stopped. Now we knew what had caused the pain! I immediately contacted the landlady and called the doctor who advised me to bring Edith immediately to the nearest hospital. The hospital across Clarendon Avenue informed me that they had no department to handle cases related to the birth of children, including miscarriages. They advised me to inquire at the Cuneo Memorial Hospital a few blocks down the street. I walked to that hospital, where the administrative nun of the Catholic hospital asked me whether I had insurance for hospitalization. Since our insurance had a 10 month waiting period for maternity related cases, we were not eligible for compensation. The nun refused to admit Edith, unless I paid cash in advance. Of course, we did not have the funds to pay in advance and I returned to our apartment with the bad news for Edith. But then I learned a lesson! The landlady told us that under this circumstance only the police would be able to get Edith admitted to a hospital. I immediately called the police, and soon two burly police officers arrived, looked around, and listened as we explained our problem. They put Edith into their paddy wagon and drove her to the Frank Cuneo Memorial Hospital. I followed in our car. Edith was immediately admitted to a ward she shared with four other women. I assured the nun that I would eventually pay all my debts to the hospital, even though I had no money at the present time. I then asked her why I needed to call the police to get Edith admitted. She just replied that this was the only way to get a person admitted without an insurance company paying the bill. So much for charity!

It was midnight when all the paperwork was done. I then returned to our apartment to get some rest. On the following day, Wednesday, I informed Edith's boss at Florsheim that Edith was in a hospital and would not be able to work for a while. When I visited Edith later that day, she told me what had happened since I had seen her last. After her admission, she was given strict bed rest. She was not even allowed to go to the bathroom or to sit in her bed. But when I visited her again on Thursday afternoon, she told me that she had lost the baby. Edith had already felt better and was tired of lying down. She sat up in her bed for a short while, and within a few minutes she aborted the fetus. We did not regret this outcome! In order for Edith to keep the baby, she would have been required to be under constant care of a doctor with possible intermittent short stays at a hospital. This would have kept Edith from earning money and it would have drastically increased our expenses, especially if the baby would be born prematurely. We already had enough money worries!

At the AIB I was told that I had to pay the full $450 tuition during the first 10 weeks of the BST course I took. I also found out that I would receive the first $135 check from the VA at the end of February or in early March and not, as we had hoped, shortly after I started to attend AIB. I had already paid $100 with the registration. I paid another $100 on January 31, $191 in March and the remaining $64 from my April VA payment. I also owed the hospital $10 per day while

Edith was confined there and the doctor, too, had a claim to the very little money we had left. This was not a very good situation for us!

Edith was released from the hospital on Saturday, February 11, 1956. The doctor ordered her to rest for three more weeks and not to go to work during this time. In order to improve our financial situation, I looked for a weekend job. I found a job at the soda fountain of a Walgreens Drugstore in the Lincoln-Belmont business district of Chicago. I worked the late shift until 10 or 11 PM in the evening. My wages of $1.10 per hour earned me about $16 cash per weekend. This was enough to pay the rent and left us with about $6 per week for groceries and other expenses, until Edith was able to work again.

I had no problem at school (AIB). It did not take long for me to learn to be a good student. What helped me tremendously was a "C" I received for one of the early quizzes we had in arithmetic. This was the only "C" I had at AIB and it taught me to be more careful when I read the quiz or test questions. I had no problem keeping up with the material being taught to us. We spent a lot of time learning how to make calculations with a slide rule. Since affordable electronic calculators were not available until the late 1970s, what I learned from Mr. "Charlie" Ulie about the use of slide rules would later prove to be very valuable during my college years. But I enjoyed most learning about the chemistry of ingredients and how these interacted with each other during baking. The laboratory sessions during the first 10 weeks of the BST course were primarily dedicated to "Baking Science" aspects, while the last 10 weeks focused on "Baking Technology". We also learned about the basics of "Baking Management", where I learned a lot of good lessons from the Director of Education, Dr. English.

Having only a limited background in industrial baking helped me more than it disadvantaged me! I paid close attention to what the instructors talked about and I studied during every minute I had available. It did not take very long before I was one of the top students in the class. At the ten week marking period, I had a grade point average of 3.86 out of a possible 4.00 and shared first place in the class with Victor Milke from Bimbo in Mexico City. At the end of the 20 week course we, again, shared this position. But this time we were joined by Katz from Brooklyn, NY. I finished with a grade point average of 3.71.

It did not take long for Edith to recuperate from her miscarriage. After resting for a few days, she started to think about what she was able to do while she was by herself at home. This gave her ample time to look at the very dirty walls of our room. They were black from soot! Apparently, industry in the Chicago area used soft coal for heating and energy production. This source of energy produced so much soot that white snow falling on the streets in the evening, turned black during the night. Somehow, this soot had also covered the walls in our room. Perhaps, these walls had not been cleaned or painted since the flat had been subdivided during the early 1940s. Anyway, they were very dirty and looked black! Edith looked at these and finally decided to wash them. As I returned from school one afternoon, I found that Edith had washed a part of the wall as far as she was able to reach without stepping on anything. When the landlady found out about this project, she offered Edith some detergent and the use of a short stepladder to finish the job all the way up to the ceiling. But the ceiling remained black. We felt good about now living in a fairly clean room. A few days later, Edith returned to work at the shoe factory. With the help of her income, we soon managed to meet all our financial

obligations and to pay off the $40 we owed to the hospital. When Edith had her last check-up at the doctor's office, I asked him how much we owed him and that I was going to pay him as soon as I had the money. The doctor declined my offer and told us that he would not charge us anything! We were surprised and very grateful!

These first weeks were very difficult for us! I studied a lot and on the weekends I was working at the soda fountain of the drugstore to pay the immediate bills. At one time I badly needed some money. I had the choice to either use some of my silver dollars or to borrow $10 from a classmate. I am happy to have done the latter and I still own the silver dollars. I paid back my debt within a week! Edith and I lived very frugally and I remember bringing home some of the test layer cakes I had baked in the AIB baking laboratory. Edith would then top these layer cakes with a canned cherry pie filling and we had this cake for our main meal in the evening. It tasted good! But it was not a very balanced meal. I also brought home all the bread we could eat. But as our finances improved, so did our diet! After working ten weekends at Walgreens, I was able to quit this job. I felt that I needed to spend more time on my studies.

The soda fountain job was quite an experience for me. The emerging fast food chains, like McDonalds, White Castle, and Burger King soon put soda fountains out of business. This is somewhat regrettable, but deserved. Soda fountains were unique and almost every drugstore had one. Their counters and a few tables set up near the soda fountain were like public meeting places. Here people discussed politics, business, and their personal problems. People working behind the counter were ignored by the customers as if they were mere store fixtures. Thus one could inadvertently overhear many things not meant for "public ears."

Since I had never patronized soda fountains before, I knew little about the traditional food items sold at these places. But the person who interviewed me told me that my coworker, a 16-year old high school student, would train me on the job. I soon learned to make banana splits, sundaes, milk shakes, and other concoctions. But as it turned out, my tutor knew little more than I did about food preparation. Unfortunately, I did not learn this until after I had left this job. Boston coffee became a half-cup of coffee filled up to the top with cold milk. Chicken pieces were not deep fat fried for a given time, but were fried until the fat stopped bubbling, i.e. until the meat was totally dried out. The same criterion was used for French fries. Actually, I am amazed that we received very few complaints!

For Memorial Day, the AIB organized an outing for all the students and their spouses. We all went to see the Chicago Cubs play the Milwaukee team. The classmates sitting next to Edith and me were kind enough to explain some of the rules of baseball. Edith and I enjoyed not only the game, but also my classmates' company and the nice weather.

Since I was a self-sponsored student, I was given the opportunity to interview with representatives of companies looking for an AIB graduate. I received two offers. One was from the Continental Baking Company, who wanted to train me for baking management. The other offer was from Swift & Company. Although Swift offered slightly less money, $85 per week, I decided to take this job. Swift & Co. was one of the four largest meat packers in the U.S. with annual sales of about $2.5 billion during the 1950s. They needed a test baker for shortening development and evaluation in the Chicago Research Department. The main reason I took this

position was that I would work regular 40 hour weeks with no night shifts and weekend work. This allowed me to take classes under the GI Bill at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT).

Our BST Class #69 graduated on Friday, June 15, 1955. Our class had a graduation dinner and party at a good restaurant on the previous evening. But Edith and I did not attend this class function. We could not afford the $10 per person to pay for this event. Instead, we prepared for a short vacation trip to visit Edith's Aunt Anna Bartel, who lived in Ontario, Canada. I did not have to report for work at Swift until Monday, July 2, 1956.

It was a very nice graduation ceremony. The students were allowed to bring along their family members. Edith came, too. But as I had experienced at my discharge from active duty in Fort Lewis, once we had our papers in our hands, it did not take long for us to scatter into all directions. After everything was over, Edith and I joined my other two German classmates, Klaus Buehring and Franz Cleven, to see the Chancellor of the West German Government, Konrad Adenauer. He had come to visit several large cities in the U.S. and he happened to be in Chicago on this day. This 80-year old gentleman and politician amazed us with the energy level he exhibited. We hoped that Mr. Adenauer would be able to guide the political and economic recovery of West Germany for many more years.

We left for Canada on Saturday morning at 4 AM. Edith's Aunt "Annchen" Anna Bartel was the youngest sister of Edith's mother and was born in July 1917. Her first husband, Franz Goertzen, was killed in Russia during WW II. Her second husband, Helmut Bartel (born May 1920), grew up in the same area in West Prussia and he knew Anna since before the War. He was a trained cabinetmaker. Helmut was one of the unfortunate ones who surrendered to the Americans in 1945. The Americans turned him over to the Yugoslavians, who did not treat him very nicely as a prisoner of war. He had many stories to tell from this time, especially how the women mistreated the defenseless prisoners. After his release as prisoner of war, he settled down in West Germany. Here he reestablished contact with his family and friends. He also visited the widow Anna Goertzen with her two daughters. The poor economic conditions in Germany induced Helmut Bartel in early 1951 to leave Germany and to join his sister Ella in Timmins, Ontario. Because of better opportunities in the Niagara Falls area, he soon moved there and established himself as a self-employed cabinetmaker in Virgil, Ontario. Edith's Aunt Anna and her two daughters Marianne and Hannelore joined him in Virgil, where they married on October 12, 1952. Edith wanted to visit her aunt because they became very close during their time together in the post war years.

We had a very nice trip to Virgil, even though the temperature approached 100°F while we were driving through the lower part of Michigan. We stayed two days in Virgil, during which time Helmut Bartel showed us the sights, including the Niagara Falls from the Canadian side. At that time, the Falls were much more accessible to casual visitors like us. We could park our car wherever we found an open space. Unless one is willing to walk for quite a distance, today any visit to the waterfalls is connected with a significant parking fee.

Virgil is part of the township of Niagara-on-the-Lake. During the 1950s, many of Virgil's inhabitants were Mennonite immigrants, either from Germany (originally West Prussia) or from Russia, whose West Prussian ancestors had once settled in the great Russian river plains. Since

both groups had the same family names, one could distinguish between these two groups of immigrants only by their distinctly different German dialects. Within the community of Virgil, one was able to conduct all his business in German and without using or understanding a word of English. But this changed gradually and today only few sales personnel understand German, while the ranks of those who never learned to speak English well enough have thinned considerably.

Our return trip to Chicago presented us with a "minor problem" at customs in Detroit. I did not want to risk losing my naturalization papers and left them in our safe in Chicago. In those days I did not have a U.S. passport. I did, however, have a copy of my service record and thought that this would suffice for reentering the U.S. after our visit to Canada. Wrong!! Edith had no problem getting through U.S. Customs with her green card. But my service record had no picture and did not mean anything to the custom agents. They made some telephone calls to verify that I was a U.S. citizen. Finally, we were allowed to cross the border into the United States. But from then on, we always made sure that we had with us the proper papers, passport or citizenship papers, whenever we visited Canada.

After we returned to our kitchenette apartment in Chicago, we immediately prepared for our trip to Omaha. Since it was questionable that we would ever move back to Omaha, we only wanted to pick up some additional belongings we had left behind in January. I also wanted to do some work in the house and yard. During the week we spent in Omaha, I sanded and refinished the hardwood floor. We put the house in as good a condition as was possible for us. The neighbor even asked me to remove one of the old trees between our homes. He was afraid that a strong wind would topple this tree right onto his house. He even helped me with this job. Although I accomplished a lot during this week and appreciated all the valuable advice and help I received from Dan Bredfeldt, there was so much more that needed to be done. I finally turned over the house to the Otis Company, the real estate company, which originally had sold me this property. The Otis Company rented the house for one year. The rent covered all the expenses, including mortgage payments, insurance, taxes, and commission. We also returned all the borrowed furniture to the rightful owners and gave the furniture and garden tools we had bought to Dan Bredfeldt. In the evenings we visited our friends to say goodbye to them. It was a very busy week and Edith and I were sad about leaving our first home for others to live in. It represented for us an important step into a happier life together! But Chicago offered more professional and educational opportunities for me. We never regretted this move!

After our return to Chicago, we immediately started to look for a better apartment. We found it difficult to find a place that met our three criteria: 1) The apartment had to be affordable for us and must still be in a safe neighborhood. 2) The location must be within walking distance of an "L" (rapid transit) station. 3) I must be able to park the car on the street and near our apartment. These three conditions were not always easy to meet! But finally we found a nice and clean apartment only ½ block away at 4700 North Clarendon Avenue. We paid $18 rent per week. We were not allowed to have children! The furnished apartment was on the third floor and consisted of a "normal" size kitchen with a gas stove, a small bedroom with a full-size bed and a dresser, and a small living room that really was a closed-in porch. We shared the bathroom with our neighbor, a young woman.

Our moving day was Sunday, July 1, 1956. This day started out to be a hot day and we started early in the morning to carry all our belongings the half block distance and up the 3 stairs. We were done shortly after noon and decided to cool off by watching a German movie. When we left the movie theater, we were surprised to find that it had rained while we were inside and the temperature had dropped about 20°F. We drove to our new apartment and cooled it off by opening the windows in our living room. Although we had no air conditioning, we were very fortunate and benefited from living on the third floor and from the gentle breeze that came much of the time from the cooler lake.

On Monday Morning, July 2, 1956 1 reported for work at the Research Bakery of Swift and Company. This marked the beginning of my 40+ year career in Research and Development for various companies in the baking or allied industries. I loved my work in R&D, but encountered a good measure of antagonism from management personnel in the production departments of two bakeries I worked for during this time. The last 19 years of my career I spent at the American Institute of Baking directing the Cereal Technology Research Group. This completed the circle of my baking career, which really started with my training at the AIB and ended with doing research at the Institute. I fully retired from the AIB on December 31, 1999.

POSTSCRIPT

Shortly after starting to work for Swift and Company I registered for evening classes at the Illinois Institute of Technology. I started with taking only one 3-5 credit hour course per semester and concentrated on chemistry and mathematics. I finished the course work for a B.A. in chemistry while attending Wayne State University in Detroit, where I received my degree on December 18, 1968.

When I approached the end of my studies at the University, Edith started to catch up with her education. She graduated from high school in Wayne, Michigan, and then continued by taking classes at the local Community College. She graduated from the Johnson County Community college with an Associate Degree in the spring of 1980.

Edith and I have four children. All were born within the first seven years of our marriage:

Armin Walter Doerry:	born February 19, 1957	in Chicago, Illinois.
Karen Erna Doerry:	born April 5, 1958	in Chicago, Illinois
Hilda Maria Doerry:	born June 16, 1960	in Chicago Heights, Illinois
Norbert Henry Doerry:	born January 16, 1962	in Chicago Heights, Illinois

All four children were very good students in public schools and obtained advanced degrees from Universities. All are married and we now have 9 grandchildren. Except for Hilda, who now lives in Switzerland as a housewife and mother of three boys, Armin, Karen and Norbert do well professionally and have an earning power far greater than mine ever was. We all have a good relationship with each other and we are happy about this. Hopefully, it will always remain this way!

Doerry Family in Wayne, Michigan, November 1966
L-R: Karen, Norbert, Wulf, Hilda, Edith, and Armin

Edith and Wulf
Burke, Virginia, April 2002