

May 17, 1945: The Day I Will Never Forget

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I was, at the end of the war, eleven years old, my sister Gerlinde was seven, and my mother--Hermine Schwab--was seven months pregnant. For about one week the Soviet troops had been in our village of Ober-Johnsdorf, near Landskron, in the Sudetenland. Since my grandparents, Julius and Hermine Kreuziger, owned not only a farm and a guesthouse, but also a butcher shop, my grandfather had to butcher cattle for the troops. All of the young women were in hiding, including my mother, because the Soviet troops were still raping women. Thus we children were in our grandparents' house. My grandmother was severely handicapped, crippled by arthritis, and thus the soldiers did not bother her.

My father, Robert Schwab, was not drafted during the war due to a problem with his legs. He worked in Landskron in the City Hall. My uncle, Reinhard Schwab, had finished his engineering education and worked in a factory also in Landskron. Our families did not feel in any way guilty of having harmed our Czech neighbors. That is why we did not flee before the Soviets and Czech partisans arrived.

On May 17, the situation had somewhat normalized and thus my father and uncle went to Landskron to work. Later in the morning a few truckloads of Czech partisans arrived in order to conduct a People's Court. Of course this was not known except where it was happening. The Czech partisans went to the nearby villages and collected all men between sixteen and sixty and even older and drove them on foot to Landskron. During the journey they were beaten and rifle shots were fired over their heads to prepare them for the tribunal. My grandfather, Julius Kreuziger, who was at that time sixty-five, was also among those who had to go to that court.

By early afternoon, hundreds of men were at the city square and the tribunal started. My father and uncle were among these. As they too appeared before the tribunal, they were beaten with rifles and they had to salute "Heil Hitler." Others had to kneel down in front of these judges, and Czech partisans would kick them in their genitals and knock them to the ground. My father was so severely beaten with rifles that his eyes were knocked out of his head. Half dead, he was then hanged on a lantern in the city square. My uncle

Reinhard was equally beaten and then, half dead, thrown in the fountain, where he drowned.

During the late afternoon, the tribunal resumed. Over forty men lay dead on the square or were hanging from the lanterns. The German men who were not killed were ordered into custody overnight, and the tribunal continued the next day. On May 19 all these dead bodies were thrown on wagons and hauled to the cemetery. Among those who came to view the tribunal were many Czech persons, who either wanted to see "justice" served or felt sorry for these men. My uncle, Emil Pelzl, was also among those at the City Square. Since my grandfather and Uncle Emil were known by many Czech farmers due to their cattle trading, they were both, though separately and unknown to each other, taken by the Czech farmers, removed from the square, sent home, and told to hide during the next few days until all this terror ended. At the cemetery, the other German men had to dig a mass grave. The dead bodies were thrown into it with a very ugly disrespect by the Czech partisans, who urinated on them.

Before my grandfather came home, we had heard of the terrible crimes and massacres which were committed at Landskron. My grandfather, in total frustration, decided to destroy his whole family, as he told us years later. During that night, my grandfather wanted, while we were sleeping, first to shoot us children, then the rest of the family, and after that himself. My grandmother, obviously suspicious of this, did not rest and kept us children awake. Thus, one hour after another went by. As morning broke, my grandfather gave up his plan. Terrible days and nights followed this massacre at Landskron.

On August 2, my sister Marlies was born, and thus my mother and grandparents had new responsibilities.

In the spring of 1946, our family, my mother, we three children, my grandparents, and Aunt Anni Kreuziger among others were expelled from our home, put in freight cars, and shipped to Germany. We arrived in Kaufbeuren, Bavaria, at the expellee camp, and a new life started.

In the summer of 1964, my husband and I traveled for the first time to Czechoslovakia on the occasion of a medical conference in Prague. We were already American citizens and hoped to be safe. During this trip, we also visited Landskron and the cemetery. Near the wall of the cemetery, where the mass grave was, we saw a pile of dirt and weeds of all kinds covering it. In this mass grave, where my father and uncle, along with the other men were buried, nothing—like a plaque or monument—had ever been placed over the grave. When we revisited that gravesite in the spring of 1992, we could not find

the mass grave. The dirt had been leveled, and the area had been seeded with grass. Thus nobody knew any longer that men had been buried here in a mass grave.

At that time, not one of the criminals who had been involved in the murders had been brought to trial, and the Czech Government, even now, under a so-called democracy, has never found it necessary to investigate and punish those responsible. Some of these Czech criminals are still alive and still protected by the Beneš Decrees.

On September 17, 1995, we dedicated a chapel at our farm in Sauk City, Wisconsin, in memory of all the expellees. In this chapel a plaque was installed in memory of my slain father and uncle and all of the others, who suffered at the hands of these brutal criminals. The Memorial is under the motto: "O GOD, FORGIVE THEM AS THEY DID NOT KNOW WHAT THEY WERE DOING."