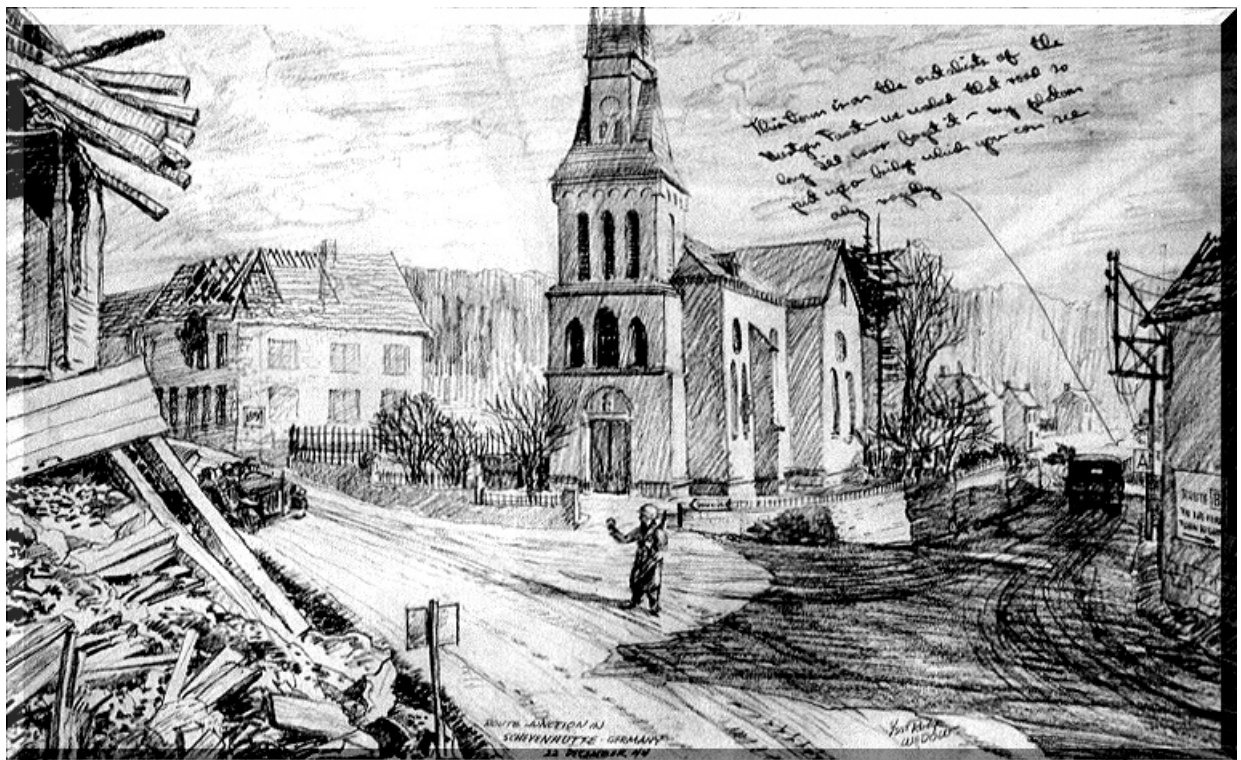


# The End of World War II in Schevenhütte





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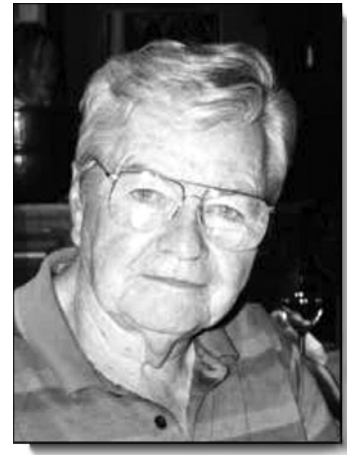
This English translation is dedicated to Lt. Col. (ret'd) **Henry G. Phillips**, to Lt. Col. (ret'd) **Lawrence J. McLaughlin**, to Pfc. **Thomas C. Strain**, and all the other hundreds of American G.I.s who served in Schevenhütte in the Hürtgen Forest during World War II. As you veterans remember well, the situation in Schevenhütte was almost unique in being the front line for nearly two months, with many German civilians present who shared in your privations and constant danger of German artillery and counterattack. Cooperation among G.I.s and German civilians sprang up amidst the emergencies, and bonds were forged between the victors and the vanquished based on their common humanity and basic decency. There is much to be proud of in the behavior and conduct of both sides. This will give you who are not expert in the German language, and hopefully many other interested English-speaking readers, a chance to experience World War II, and the impressions you G.I.s made, through the eyes of the plain-spoken, but remarkable survivor/citizens of Schevenhütte.



Lt. Col (ret'd)  
**Henry G. Phillips**



Lt. Col (ret'd)  
**Lawrence J. McLaughlin**



Pfc.  
**Thomas C. Strain**

Translated from the original

## **„Erinnerungen an das Kriegsende in Schevenhütte“**

by

**Rüdiger Volk**

**Reiner Sauer**

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Massachusetts & Singapore, 2003



# The End of World War II in Schevenhütte

## Foreword

After the Allies landed at Normandy on 6th of June 1944, the German armed forces were faced with a war on two fronts.

Superior power of the Allies turned out to be the decisive factor and allowed their troops to unleash a war without a clear battle front. This type of war reversed the situation of 1940 and within a few weeks carried the front to the German border.

German troops were surrounded, devastated, and pushed back; what was left of them escaped towards the Siegfried Line („West Wall“). Propaganda had it that the Siegfried Line was the ultimate defense to protect the Reich. However the Siegfried Line either had gaps, wasn't finished, or had been cannibalized.

Barbed wire obstacles and minefields were missing. Bunkers had no metal protection, because tank doors, wire barriers, and equipment had either been used for the Eastern front or the Atlantic Wall.

Personnel consisted of Landschützen (country marksmen), and reserve battalions without usable weapons, without artillery and tanks, battle-inexperienced, with untried leadership, and without serious will to fight.

The total cast was incomplete, especially southeast of Aachen.  
No reinforcements could be expected.

The Americans broke through on the 11th of September, 1944, at the front near Eupen, and on the 12th, occupied the first German village, Roetgen.

The Germans expected further action into Aachen, and further to Cologne and the Ruhr area, which didn't happen. General Collins, commander of VII Corps of the 1st US-Army, decided against taking Aachen, proceeding with the following plan:

The 3rd US-Armored Division was to penetrate through the „Stolberg corridor“ into the West Wall. One battle group was to move forward through Rott-Zweifall-Vicht-Gressenich south to Eschweiler, and others through Kornelimünster, Brand and Stolberg penetrating from the north into Eschweiler; the 47th Regiment of the 9th US-Infantry-Division was to move forward to Zweifall and Vicht from east at the edge of the Wenau forest on Düren; another regiment should attack Hürtgen through the „Monschau - corridor“ over Simmerath-Schmidt - in a northeasterly direction in order to reach Düren and, to secure the right flank in the Hürtgen forest.

The German defenders had concentrated their strengths around Aachen, so that merely in the Stolberg corridor the 9th German Panzer division, an association of infantry tanks and artillery - as well as a division shrunken to one headquarters, the 353rd Division, were available. On the evening of 13th, September, Combat Engineer Training Battalion 16 blew up the bridges in the area of Stolberg (including Schevenhütte). On the morning of September 14th, the 47th US-Regiment, started from Roetgen and marched that day to Zweifall, where it arrived at 2:30pm.

Also on Sept. 14th, the Americans overran Vicht and on the 15th conquered Mausbach; they didn't penetrate into Gressenich, however. At dawn of the 15th, the 47th US-Reg moved further forward and encountered in the forests around Vicht and Zweifall dispersed German units which delayed the advance.

On September 16th at the former headquarters of the 353rd Division in Vicht, the 47th US-Regiment captured a German positional map - and acted quickly: the surrounding bunkers were cleared out and the troops pushed forward through the forest. Schevenhütte became a front-line village!





## **Memories About the End of World War II in Schevenhütte**

**Marianne Houben** <sup>1</sup>

reports:

I must preface these remarks: German soldiers had been with us in the schoolhouse; they laid there in the school halls on straw. When we noticed the Americans coming closer, we said to them: "Be sure you get away!" Then they went over to the graveyard and over the wall to the "Hammer" neighbourhood. I believe, as the last was at the lower graveyard, it was about 3 to 4 o'clock or so, someone knocked at the door upstairs. We sat all in the basement, we and the neighbors: us three, my father, my mother and I. Ms. Linden, the teacher and her sister, three from the Liepertz family, the Neffgens, the Wagemanns, and the Wittmanns, and later the wife of shoemaker Urban with her children. Altogether eight to twelve people. I believe that I am the only survivor that can report about it.

Thus, we all sat in the basement, because it was already under bombardement. And then someone knocked. I can still see my father rising, chalk white. Immediately they held a gun to his stomach. They were looking for German soldiers. My father said that none were present. There were people downstairs. And then they went into the basement and checked them all. They were afraid. And then, everything was OK. We all felt it in our stomachs and intestines. That was a terrible moment. This excitement and for the first time we saw our enemies! Afterwards, we must have realized that they actually meant well for us. They looked after us and fed us, and particularly, I must say, my mother, who was sick. She was always looked after first. Afterward, on the same day, even more soldiers came, around five or six. They remained in the basement at night; they had more to fear than we.

And then, artillery shells hit us, always from the "Hammer" area and from "Pittere Pädchen"<sup>3</sup>. They (the Germans) could look down upon us. There were also some soldiers in the right and left classroom, but not for long, because shelling started again. One of the soldiers was badly injured and was brought to the military hospital, and one died. The Americans had covered the basement windows with cardboard and wood. However, this was immediately blown away. When coming out of the basement, we always ducked, so that nobody could see us. Foolishly, I went upstairs once and started a fire to cook something. That was stupid. It produced smoke, and then we got bombarded, of course. In front of the house, the Americans built a small shelter. If there was shooting, they immediately came into the basement. Once in a while, I went outside to see what was happening.

The explosion of the bridges by the German was our misfortune. The whole roof of the school was gone. That was too bad because after that it rained into the school.

The Americans came from the church to us. Up to the Gerads' house, maybe even up to Stiel's house, but not further. We were directly in the front line. We sometimes went to see minister Geimer<sup>4</sup>. There too everyone sat in the basement. When I came back, artillery bombardment started again. A soldier was killed instantly. I don't know at all how I got out of there. I laid down, and when it was calm, I went back again into the school.

Whenever we thought that things had calmed down, we spent the whole day in the upstairs apartment. The Americans were looking everywhere for souvenirs. There, I still played the piano, but only briefly.

Nobody was permitted to do this aloud. I regarded it more as an adventure.

I cannot say that the Germans directly targeted us. There in the school the Americans provided us with canned food. That was something new for us. They also cooked. Left in the basement, where coal was laying two meters high, they cooked on a fuel stove. I must mention this: Mr. Voigt, an old man of far more than 80 years, had died, and the father of the Mrs. Falter, he died during shelling, and then Mr. Wagemann. They went out at noon to eat or to do something, when heavy shelling began and they were hit in front of the house. He was immediately dead. And the old Mr. Neffgen was hit by shrapnel in the head, and was taken away. Therefore two coffins now stood in front of our basement. Nobody could be buried, because the cemetery was being shelled and the house was targeted. Jokingly we said: "Later, we have the two dead joining us in the basement, too". I don't know at all how anyone could manage all this.

One evening, it was already late, about 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., the Americans came and chased us out. Next to the school where nowadays is an annex, there was a brick building, similar to a basement garage. On top of it was the fire station, which was built completely of wood. It was completely destroyed during the war. There the Americans stored food and ammunition, and it had been shelled and everything burned. We were in the basement and knew that this was happening. And then, they got us out. We could only take what we could carry, such as clothing. We had to be careful when crossing the schoolyard because of the strewn pieces of all the heavy, fallen linden trees. Finally, we got as far as Kehren's house. The people were packed shoulder to shoulder.

I think they just let the fire station burn down. But the school didn't burn. Previously it had rained very hard, and everything was wet. I assume that only the wooden buildings burned completely. The school was probably damaged by the bombardment. Afterwards, when we entered the rooms, we noticed bullet holes in the walls opposite the window. The soldiers must have been aiming at the windows of the school. Therefore the bullet flew through the windows and hit the other side of the room.

That's how we got that night to the Kehren family. About 20 [American] soldiers were lying there. We laid down between them. I think that it was my mother and I. Kathrinchen Liepertz was with us. I don't know whether the others came. Mrs. Urban went to the house of Benning, the forest warden. And afterward, we saw each other again in Aachen.

We could not stay at Kehren's house. So, we went to the Casino in the morning. But it was completely full there too.

I must add this: After three or four days, it was rumored in the morning that Father has to go away! Everyone, who had been a member of the Party must go to Vicht. There were quite a few. They were Martin Schönen, Jupp Lenzen, and others. In the beginning, we didn't know where they would go. We were just told that they were taken away. They were taken on orders from headquarters to Vicht.

Yes, there I was suddenly alone with mother. The whole time in the Casino it went well for us. Together with other youngsters, Kathrinchen Liepertz and I went out to scrounge things. We had a hand cart. We went to the school to get a few things. But how the apartment looked! I became very sad about it. How this all looked! But there was still food. The German soldiers had left very much behind: several hundred pounds of sugar and flour. All was still there. In the meantime, it had gotten soggy. We brought it back

to the Casino. Naturally, sometimes we had to take cover because of shooting. We were also in the living quarters of the Stiel family. There, we picked up lots of things for Mrs. Gottfried, who had lived there, but she was now in the Casino as well. She was glad that she had something to eat again.

My mother was 54 years old, but frail at that time. When we were in the Casino, she fell into a deep sleep. It was as if she was dead. Everyone shook and called her. And after an hour or more, she opened her eyes again. This I will never forget. I had thought she was dead.

In the Casino it was certainly safe. The main shooting ground was Gressenicher Street. The houses of Herzog, Lothmann, Jenzen, were built closely together. They all burned to the ground. The same happened below in the Hammer where the Glden, Schnen, and Kruff families lived.

Hopefully, we will not experience this ever again.

At the Casino, we met the Fischer daughters. They welcomed us when we moved in. In the evenings we stayed in the pub of the Casino, played cards and had a good time. We had gotten a feeling for whether or not we had to go downstairs. We knew exactly when to get down to the basement.

We were very well organized. All the cattle from the village of Eilendorf had been herded to Schevenhtte. The cattle belonged to the people of Eilendorf, who tried to get through, but got stuck in Schevenhtte. Well, in those days we lived very well.

But the Americans wanted to have us out of there by winter. They had planned an offensive, and they could not have us here. We were really in their way.

Mrs. Gerads, Mrs. Weber, who lived with the Gerads family, and Mrs. Stiel were already in Aachen. I still remember seeing them drive away with their children. I don't know, my mother did not feel so well. Still, she bravely endured it all. The boys were in the war, the father away.

What a sensation when the Americans came! The clothing, the smell of camphor, and even the leather smelled different. They did not smell like our soldiers. And they constantly chewed gum. Previously, we didn't know chewing gum. Also the cigarettes smelled quite different.

They were very decent. German soldiers couldn't have treated us better. They fed us, because they could not bear that we had nothing. They were very friendly, and we were kind to them. That's what everybody in the front lines said.

On November 11th, we were taken away by truck. That was terrible. The first night we stayed in Brand [near Aachen]. My mother could hardly move. She could not carry much. The first night in the barracks was chilly despite of all the windows being intact.

It took a long time until we felt at home again there! In Aachen, we also had to struggle to get something to eat. But Kathrinchen Liepertz scrounged very well. She and others searched the basements. There she once found a bucket of jam and American cookies. We spread jam on the cookies. This tasted very good. To us, it was more beautiful than Christmas. Kathrinchen did much for us.

We all lived in one room: Mrs. Urban with her children, Kathrinchen, my mother and I. And afterwards, my father joined us. Shortly after Christmas my father came to Aachen. We had always stayed in contact with him. Christel had sent a short note from Vicht. I don't know how this ever arrived. Maybe the soldiers brought it.

Now, we were together again.



Marianne Houben

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Marianne Houben, born in 1927, lived with her parents in the service quarters at the school, which were assigned to her father, the teacher.

<sup>2</sup> This school building was next to the graveyard. "Im Hammer" is the name of a residential area north of it.

<sup>3</sup> "Pittere Pädche" is a foot path at the foot of the hills Hammerberg and Martinberg

<sup>4</sup> Because the parsonage as well the schoolhouse had relatively secure basements, several neighbors looked for refuge there.

<sup>5</sup> "Haus Jülich" is the name of the building opposite the church

## **We will never forget this!**

Memories of the last phase in World War II.

### **Peter Wirtz**

was born on March 6th, 1927 in Schevenhütte.

His memories were recorded in March, 1994

At the time, most of the boys and girls of Schevenhütte who pursued a better education than the village school went to the Lyzeum or to Eschweiler high school. A few of them went to Stolberg. First they had to walk to Hamich or Gressenich; from there they went by tram (nowadays run by public transport company ASEAG) to their schools.

I had, among others, kind relatives in Langerwehe, many known and unforgotten, Uncle Gustav and Aunt Nett. With them I had a second home. By train, it was one stop to Düren where I attended the Gymnasium [Secondary School].

Like most children of my age, I belonged to the “little squirts” [Hitler organization], proud of the uniform, shoulder straps, and belt buckle-attached scout knife. These, and many other things, filled young lads with enthusiasm.

At that time, I was 11 years old and in the sixth grade. I experienced my first scare in the so familiar small town over a government that I trusted so much. It was the “Crystal Night” (Kristallnacht) on November 9, 1938. At first, I saw only the destruction of many houses and business; many facades, windows, and front gardens devastated.

At my age I couldn't understand these events. Careful explanations in school were unsatisfactory. .

By eleven years old, I recognized terrorist acts of some SA and SS groups, about which our beloved leader (“Führer”) certainly knew nothing. With this opinion, we appeased our consciences for a long time and excused much even in the ensuing dreadful war.

We heard of the war in Poland, in the west, the activities in Norway, in Southeast Europe, in Africa, into Italy and finally the disastrous end in Russia. Already in 41/42 we sensed that one day the disastrous events would destroy our beautiful Germany and many of its people. Total war had begun: Everything useable for armaments and for defense was mobilized.

We were in the fifth year at the Gymnasium when the call for air force helpers reached us.

First we were quite happy that we could partially escape school and then quite proud that we were used at only 15/16 years old for the defense of our home airspace. We wanted to become soldiers, but what bothered us was the HJ-armband (HJ = Hitler Youth). Therefore, we were no soldiers. With this armband, we were still regarded as HJ - boys.

Beside the service at the [anti-aircraft] Flak<sup>1</sup>, we still had school, as well our regular service in the HJ, and that didn't please us at all. Among the anti-aircraft troops, sympathy increased continually towards the "Edelweisspiraten"<sup>2</sup> very much to the displeasure of our squad leader, "little Hermann".

Our boss of the battery, First Lieutenant Amlong, was an excellent and understanding mentor for us in these difficult times. He was our model and we trusted him. A small athletic type who won a silver medal at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam -1928 – at middle distances, I believe in the 400m dash. We had our education in Düren at the Schwarzer Weg and then were divided into 5 groups which were often exchanged:

1. Group "Schwarzer Weg"
2. Group "Malteser/Jülicherstr."
3. Group PM machine factory "Banning & Seybold"
4. Group "Café Wirteltor"
5. Group "Ostriedhof" - machine factory "Kanzler".

In Düren, fortunately there had not been any emergency for us and in the spring of 44, when our classmates born in 1928 were drafted, some of us were sent to other batteries.

Our group was moved to the airfield Hangelar near Bonn. At the time, this airport was known for its "night hunter" squadron.

Despite the serious state of war, we were considerably proud. We lived temporarily in the houses of the hunter plane pilots; their food was quite special for us, at that time. Airforce helpers, who were still students had a weekend off once every four weeks.

On Monday morning the return was always difficult and uncertain. We never knew whether the train would run due to the air raid warning. I remember that the uncanny rumbling of the V1 rockets<sup>3</sup> while waiting at the railway stations intimidated us strongly. Despite the air raid warnings, and sometimes being shot at by aircraft, my colleagues and I always got to our position in Hangelar.

Until Friday September 15th, 1944 everything ran smoothly. The invasion in the west was getting serious.

My colleague, Ernst Schneiders of Schneidersfarm in the Schöenthal, and I were called to the battery command position. The latest news mentioned fights in the Eupener forest near Aachen.

Since this was certainly expected to last a long time. Ernst and I were allowed to go home once again for vacation.

On Saturday, September 16th, 1944 at about 11.00 a.m. we reached the Düren railway station.

In front of the railway station, in the city and on the street to Langerwehe-Gürzenich-Düren, on the Aachener Street (today Valencienner Street), we experienced incredible chaos:

Refugees and military units who were streaming back filled the streets. Despite this we got to Gürzenich. There we separated.



Using detours, Ernst reached his home in Schöenthal. He had to detour, as he told me later, because the country road Langerwehe-Gürzenich-Düren had a massive traffic jam due to withdrawing troops.

At the Fuchsecke<sup>4</sup>, I turned towards Schevenhütte, but stayed off the [main] country road to Schevenhütte.

In Gürzenich, the traffic was relatively quiet. Twice I was stopped by M.P.'s<sup>6</sup>, whom we called "chain dogs" and sent back towards Düren. As an air force helper, we did not like the HJ armband, but now the insignia identified me as a student and as a Hitler youth boy and with corresponding excuses, using friends in Gürzenich as a reference, there were no problems.

Then I reached the forest near the Hardt<sup>5</sup> house. There was not a soul. Since I knew from the M.P.'s, that the Americans had nearly arrived in Schevenhütte, I tore off the armband again. I felt, as if I were in a no man's land, between two fronts; hearing only isolated cannon hits from far.

Near Schwarzenbroich there was a clearing. A (German) army company had gotten rid of all their personal supplies. In a well-ordered line, their possessions lay well-sorted. Certainly, they came from France: a whole lot of foods, cigarettes, red wine, Cognac etc. I packed what I could carry on this unusual "home trip" and went further to Schevenhütte.

Passing the Wittberg<sup>7</sup>, I finally reached the Musbend, the meadow behind the Casino. By my observation, everything looked normal, no confusion, no chaos.

I had a joyful reunion with my mother, with relatives and friends. The filthy uniform became uncomfortable; in the warm weather short pants were more practical.

In the Casino, I met people from the neighborhood, relatives and several unknown refugees from the area of Aachen.

If I remember correctly, the people spoke with subdued voices, not exactly anxiously, but in anticipation of events that one could not assess just yet. They had heard from German soldiers leaving there what the situation in the area was like. They clearly sensed that the Americans were approaching fast.

Actually they were not afraid of the anticipated occupation. They were more afraid of how the invasion would proceed.

In the last years, our cupboard was almost bare. Despite the situation, I could not forget the good supply depot which I just found in the Gürzenicher forest. After a short snack, I packed our wheelbarrow and went up the Fränk<sup>8</sup> road to Johann Rombach and told him nervously about my discovery at Schwarzenbroich.

Johann gestured quite nervously toward his front garden, pointing backwards with his thumb. Then I understood: Behind Rombach and Lothmann, at the bench under the old pine tree, at the entrance to the forest warden Benning's house, five Americans stood watching Schevenhütte. That was about 2:30 p.m. I ran home immediately.

We did not expect the Americans so fast. Like typical teenagers at that time: "Where is my uniform, I

must go back to Hangelar”. But our good Nadja, a Russian teacher, who worked at the Casino as a farm aid, had already burned my uniform. I wanted to go back again to my air force helper unit in civilian clothes.

Then, however, I got one beneficial smack in the face from uncle Gustav. That was the end of the war for me.

The Americans moved into Schevenhütte at about 3:00 to 3:30 p.m.

In the distance, we heard isolated cannon shots. Nearby, it was relatively quiet.

At the suggestion of the inhabitants and refugees from the Casino, uncle Christian (Gottfried) tied a white napkin to a cane and stood in front of the house, to show the approaching soldiers: “Here everything is calm, we are waiting for you.”

Actually, about 1 ½ hours later, uncle Christian returned to the house with three American GI’s<sup>9</sup>. The soldiers held their MP’s<sup>10</sup>, ready to shoot. Then there was the language problem, until uncle Christian called me. With my clumsy school English I had to explain the situation in the house and in the neighborhood.

I did not feel well on that occasion, because to the Americans I was a man of draft age. Therefore, I had to explain in great detail what I did as a helper for air weapon (Luftwaffenhelfer) – it was pointless.

When I think back today, things were very quiet in the house, no stress, an oppressive feeling certainly, but no real fear.

The war was finished for us, we didn’t know at this time how far the German units would retreat further or whether they even wanted to recapture lost area again.

At that time, it was clear to me that on September 16th, the Americans could have gone as far as the Rhine without meeting considerable resistance.

Saturday afternoon remained quiet and the population and the GIs checked each other out. This went on until the evening, when the Americans set up two mortars in the court yard of the Casino and fired from time to time towards Wenau and Hamich.

The night proceeded quietly. On Sunday morning, I went into the cow barn. The cows were fed, but stood there with swollen udders. They had not been milked for a long time.

So, I began to milk the cows, which gave relief to the animals and provided food for the occupants of the house.

At same time, the American kept on shooting mortars to Wenau, towards Gressenich, and Hamich. I had soon grasped the rhythm of the mortar shootings and could adjust to it while milking, because the milk bucket and I had been already kicked into the gutter twice by the frightened cows.



Then the inevitable happened: two M.P.'s came into the barn, pointed a hand gun at me, and asked me to follow. What choice did I have? Despite the dirty clothes from the dung and the penetrating smell, I had to follow.

The GIs brought me to the Hotel Roeb. There a provisional local commander had been established. The Americans had found a soldier's photo of my brother Friedel in our living room and now, despite little similarity claimed, that it was me. I tried in vain to clear up the misunderstanding. In fact I got some powerful smacks in the face because they didn't believe me.

One hour later (approximately 9:30 o'clock) a truck containing eight German prisoners stopped. Two Americans led our former police official, constable Nölle. He didn't like our pranks of the past years, which the juveniles had traditionally carried out in Schevenhütte during the night before the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. The fact that at that time I could think back on past misdeeds shows how relaxed I was already about these events; I think I grinned when I saw Nölle sitting so helplessly beside me.

In Vicht and in Zweifall, some soldiers and civilians came to us by truck. We were brought into the reception camp in Roetgen. Here, there were trained people from the CIC<sup>11</sup>, who knew our situation and something also about the concept "Luftwaffenhelfer" antiaircraft, and conceded that I was not a soldier, even with my army ID.

There were still problems with my colleagues Christian Kalkbrenner and Franz Sieglar from Mausbach. They had both been employed as caretakers in the Children's Resort of Süssendell and both carried big key chains in their pockets. They had gigantic problems to explain the purpose of these keys.

Therefore, it was not surprising that we were now questioned more intensively. It became rougher. However we were finally released as civilian internees to the hospital of Roetgen with the duty to report daily.

The Roetgen hospital was at this time more for delivering babies and a retirement home, and became our refuge for the next months.

With my school English I was a valuable help for Sister Valeria. She was the senior nurse, and she went daily to the American camps and army kitchens to collect food, medication and other utensils for the sick and elderly persons. That meant we could take care of all the residents in the hospital

In the atrium of the hospital, there were sheds that served as storage rooms, laundry room, etc. Here, a very hard job began for Sister Valeria, because she was left completely alone by herself.

Every day, injured persons, dead soldiers and civilians were temporarily placed from nearby battlefields. Lightly injured persons were usually given fresh bandages and transported to the military hospital.

There was very little basic care of the bodies of dead soldiers or dead civilians. The bodies of soldiers were picked up quickly; the civilians were buried in the local graveyard. The unselfish operation of Sister Valeria took place without fanfare and was simply exemplary. However, experiencing this sorrow without

help was impossible. So I soon overcame my inhibitions and offered my help whenever I could. At this opportunity, we also looked after Peter Büttgen's wife, Mrs. Margarete Büttgen, from Schevenhütte, who later was buried in Roetgen's graveyard.

Whenever I showed up at the local command centre for my daily report, I got news about Schevenhütte and the whereabouts of the people of Schevenhütte: part had been evacuated to Aachen in the Josefinum (previously Karin-Goering-Stift) and the rest had fled to Vicht.

Soon my colleagues and I obtained permission to go home: Nölle and I went to Schevenhütte, Kalkbrenner and Franz Sieglar to Süssendell and to Mausbach, respectively

The information about the front line was probably also incomplete for the Americans. Vicht was the last outpost. The Schevenhütte evacuees in Vicht were feverish to return to their homes, especially when people from the more distant Roetgen were authorized to return.

Americans in a jeep picked us up on the road to Süssendell and brought us back to Roetgen.

Now, since I had relatives in Aachen, I declared myself to be a citizen of Aachen and was taken by truck loaded with refugees to Aachen.

I'll never forget the cries of the people of Brander Berg when they saw the destroyed city. It sounded like a prayer. "Hail to Aachen, even if it goes under!"<sup>12</sup>

I was not in Schevenhütte, but in the circle of these beloved relatives -- I felt at home again.

On March 12th/13th, 1945, the people from Schevenhütte were allowed to go home. It was great to be home again and the spring weather was dry and warm. Because of that, we knew that whatever lay ahead, we could manage it easily. Unfortunately, I was not yet there. Miss Karoline Lenzen, Martha Fischer and I still had to go to the office of the refugee camp for three weeks. Thea Schoenen rejoined us but only after a longer stay at the Marienhospital, and was brought back home a few days later.

After three weeks, the clerks in the office of the command center allowed us to go home. It was dreadful to see the destruction in our beautiful village, but the most important thing was to be home once again. Mild spring weather helped our efforts to make the half-remaining houses and apartments inhabitable again. It proved to be true here that "Necessity is the mother of invention". What was discarded by the extremely-generously equipped American troops helped our primary needs. Military coats, pants, underwear, shoes, boots, jackets, and above all were fresh and canned food of a quality which previously we could only dream of.

American positions around the place, in the "Hammer", at the Wittberg, up to the "Rote Wehe" and to "Leikul"<sup>13</sup>, in the "Fränk", and to the marshland at the house "Hardt" were many times quite comfortably furnished and separated into rooms/sheds by doors.

Very often we recovered our furniture from these places, i.e. ovens, stoves and dishes. The shelters were partially covered with tarpaulins, partially with corrugated metal plates (1 x 2 meters). This was all very useful to cover or seal our houses. We found almost everything we needed to get our houses ready. The

only thing we had to do was to haul it away. We pushed it, we shouldered it, carried it, and carted it away until we were totally exhausted.

At that time loners were the exception. The needs of the last years of war had shaped the people. Each one helped the other one. One sensed a good feeling of solidarity. So it improved continually, and so it was no miracle that the people soon found themselves in a nice society.

The hall in the Casino served during occupation as a military hospital and was black smoked because of the kerosene burners. Here, the Americans had probably spent their free time.

The old piano still stood in the corner, slightly out of tune, but otherwise intact. First we dared to have a little dance, and that was the beginning of a time so beautiful in our admittedly poor village, that we will never forget. There it showed once how creative people can be when the situation requires it. The church choir blossomed again; we were happy, gathered, and planned first events. The whole place came together at Carneval ( Fastnacht – Mardi gras) 1945/1946.

On April 30th,. Gertrud Gülden was pronounced the first Queen of May, and I was her companion. We left nothing out, and between Carneval and 1<sup>st</sup> of May, we celebrated Laetare Sunday.

Mind you during those festivities we had lots of hard drinks and liqueur, all of it [“moonshine”] from own production. Several first-class experts became specialists.

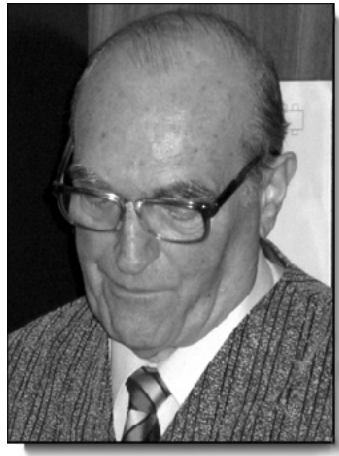
The following year 1947 was relatively dry. Small sheets of phosphorus dropped by English bombers during the years of the war enflamed at higher outside temperatures and due to the sun’s rays. They were the cause of big forest fires, from Schevenhütte as far as to the Hürtgen forest. From May to October, fires raged. Many men, and women as well, from Schevenhütte and surroundings were on the fire fighting teams.

Those on duty were later paid with a cubic meter of lumber per 12-hour-shift. That was again the basis for further activities and undertakings in our village. This wood was used for building projects; and several people had gotten themselves a radial saw.

The wood was like sugar beets, a valuable barter commodity at that time for materials of many types, for food, textiles, grain, etc. Some Schevenhütter became quite crafty businessmen from this need; they used every opportunity and every possibility during this hard time. Hard work, intensive effort, and visible success on that occasion encouraged the people. It could only get better. I personally was occupied so very much with daily problems and necessities that, once it got back to normal, I had real worries about my future.

In January 1946, I reported back again to the Düren school. Our former teacher for religion Dr. Hostenkamp, who was just nominated as the leader of the scientific high school welcomed me with a cynical “Heil Hitler, Peter”. I could not take it badly from him, for God sakes, however, because I knew something about Dr. Hostenkamp, (we called him P5), and how much he had to suffer in the years of war. In the time when it was for him politically dangerous, he held his views; and always took care of “his boys”. In January 1946, an advanced high school diploma course for 12 month began - and I graduated

in March 1947 with the high school diploma. For the last three months, we moved back to the Lyzeum in Tivoli Street; previously, we had to be content with a room of the salvation- and foster institution in North Düren. Even in the almost totally bombed out city of Düren, life continued. There, the “normal time” began, which were anticipated with a mixture of hope and worry.



Peter Wirtz

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> abbreviation for “Flugabwehrkanone” antiaircraft gun

<sup>2</sup> then name for teenagers who were against the Hitler youth and these boys occasionally beat them up.

<sup>3</sup> V1 = “vengeance weapon 1” unmanned projectiles with an explosive head and rocket drive

<sup>4</sup> turn at Valenciennes Street after Gürzenich there was Fuchs restaurant, earlier

<sup>5</sup> last farmstead at the street Gürzenich -Schevenhütte

<sup>6</sup> abbreviation for Military Police.,

<sup>7</sup> Kleiner (small) and Grosser (large) Wittberg, east the village,

<sup>8</sup> in the vernacular according to named valley in direction of Gürzenich (Hardthover Weg)

<sup>9</sup> abbreviation for a) Government Issue (“heereseigen”) b) German invaders, German occupying forces

<sup>10</sup> Machine pistol

<sup>11</sup> Country Intelligence Corps, military secret service.

<sup>12</sup> Original slang “Oche alaav en wenn et versoenk !”

<sup>13</sup> Slate pit at the former street Schevenhütte - Kleinbau.

## **Memories of the last phase in World War II**

### **Magda Jansen**

From a conversation between Mrs. Magda Jansen<sup>1</sup>, and Klaus Lieck, about her memories at the end of war in Schevenhütte recorded on July 28th, 1993

Mrs. Magda Jansen reported:

Two or three days before the Americans moved into Schevenhütte, the bridges were destroyed by the German troops. Only the bridge to the sawmill was not. My father was responsible for preventing it. He said to the demolition officer: "You will not destroy the bridge. Because then we would be living on an island. Furthermore, it is also only a simple wood bridge." I was at that time employed by Dalli <sup>2</sup>.

On Tuesdays, I rode on my bicycle together with my sister and Johanna Klee to work. In Mausbach at the "Weihernest", retreating German soldiers came towards us. At that moment low-flying planes, "Lightnings", came strafing the soldiers and us. The soldiers jumped from their vehicles, pushed us from our bicycles and protected all of us in a ditch. After the attack we continued riding to work. Since artillery bombardment had shattered the factory windows, we had to clean it up. When we came home and spoke about the incident, my father said: "Now you will not travel to Stolberg anymore. That's it!"

On Tuesday, September 19th, 1944 my parents had their silver anniversary. At that time the company Oebel in Mausbach had a small garden center where we had ordered flowers. I insisted on picking them up by bicycle on Saturday, September 16th. Since the thunder of cannons could be heard, my sister objected to my going. My mother overheard this discussion and wanted to know what was going on. I said: "Mother, we ordered flowers in Mausbach and I would like to get them now, because when the Americans get here, we won't be able to get any flowers for you". Mother replied: "Nobody leaves this village. It's impossible, under any circumstances. You stay here." For sure I would not have gotten back to Schevenhütte!

Saturday, September 16th, 1944 was a normal day. After lunch my 8 year old brother went outside to play. Suddenly he comes back, completely upset and said: "Outside are quite funny-looking soldiers, who have quite different uniforms than ours". we looked out the window. I replied: "This is definitely the organization Todt." <sup>3</sup> They wear such gray-brown uniforms. "No, no, they also speak quite differently", he said. Then we went downstairs and walked to the Casino <sup>4</sup>, where three large tanks were standing.

An [American] Officer saw us standing in front of the sawmill. The tanks could not continue because the "Nideggener Street" bridge had been destroyed. The officer came and asked my father if he could speak English. "Yes, a bit", he said. The officer spoke a little German. "How many tons does the bridge carry?" "How much I cannot say", my father replied. "The tanks weigh thirty tons, they must cross here ". My

father said: "It won't hold thirty tons." The officer said that we should not be afraid. Nothing would happen to us, we should just relax, and he went back to the tanks. Army engineers were ordered by radio. In a short time a military vehicle with many Americans came who tore the bridge open and reinforced it with planks and beams. Wood was plentiful. Half an hour later, the tanks drove over the bridge of the saw mill. When 3 heavy tanks stood in front of the Casino at 14:00 hours, we didn't notice that the Americans were in the village. An armored scout car drove first, a soldier walked in front of it and guarded everything to the right and left with his machine gun. The 30 ton tanks, followed quite slowly. They came into the village without firing a single shot.

The old mill <sup>5</sup> was still standing. Of course, the heavy oak gates were torn wide open by the tanks. Then there was the big gate at the other end of the old mill. That's where we have the fire station today. They just rammed this gate too. Then they drove over the present parking lot and came as far as the church. The bridge at the Franzen sawmill was also destroyed, and so they went no further since it was already evening. Later, I heard that the Americans had orders to proceed to Schöenthal. They were stopped by the three destroyed bridges. Down at the Lamersiefen they had to cross the brook, because the bridge there had also been destroyed!

They came by way of "Buche 19" <sup>6</sup>, and Vicht to Schevenhütte. Later, they built a walkway over the brook at Lamersiefen. It became too late for the Americans, it was already 17.00 o'clock and it became dark, they made no further attempt. They called it a day.

The next morning, they wanted to go further towards Schöenthal.

They asked my father: "Are there any German soldiers here?" My father shook his head. After they blew the bridges, the (German) military left Schevenhütte. Here in our neighborhood, (we did not know how it was farther down) – there was no German military.

On this day, the Americans didn't set up camp here. At "Buche 19" was a gigantic military base.

Only 3 tanks remained, one stood along corner Nideggener Street/ Hardthofer Weg road, then at the restaurant "Alte Post", as well as at the "Cafe Stiel", today "Restaurant Sieger". That night, German SS established troops around Schevenhütte. So, the front was created through the middle of the village because the Americans now had taken the village. I assume that our troops came from Langerwehe and Gressenich. If the Americans had marched through, the front would have been somewhere else. Americans were as far as the church, and behind the bridge at Franzen's sawmill was German military.

Then, of course, the battles began. From the "Backofen" hill, and Wittberg hill <sup>8</sup>, our (German) troops tried to reoccupy the village. Consequently, we civilians were lying exactly in the front area - for seven long weeks.

We also had to live, so we harvested vegetables, fruit and potatoes in the fields or gardens. If the roof had shell holes, it was mended. Although our own troops saw that we were civilians, nevertheless, they intentionally shot at us. I'm telling the truth The first week, we were sitting in the basement of the



sawmill. During one nightly shelling, the sawmill was completely destroyed. Also the pond was being hit. Since the sawmill was powered by a steam-engine, it got the water from the pond. This water now seeped through the cellar until we stood up to our knees in water. After an American saw the debris of the saw mill, he called:

“Hello, anybody still there?” We replied. And then, he said: “You cannot stay here. You are standing in water. You must go to Vicht.” However, we didn’t want to go. That was on Thursday, September 20th, 1944. We were then accommodated in the cellar of the hotel Casino. Approximately 40 people were there.

Of course, our (German) troops tried to reoccupy Schevenhütte. The fights took place at night mostly, as street battles. During the day, it was quieter. From Heistern, we were bombarded by artillery. At night during a skirmish from the “Backofen”, our soldiers came through the mill as far as the sawmill. They shot with MP, the soldiers screamed. It was bad, we all were aware of this.

In the first days, nothing was shot to pieces, so my father wanted to keep busy. An old dovecot [pigeon house] was in the attic, and he wanted to remove it. We helped him with it. The Americans didn’t like when they heard any sharp noises. We were enemies. Three Americans came and asked, what we were doing. “We’re cleaning the attic”, my father said. As the soldiers from the gable window saw the wonderful view, they thought, “Oh, nice view.”<sup>9</sup> They said that they would return.

A quarter of an hour later they returned with a scissors telescope and put it right on the gable window. When they were done setting up the scissors telescope, they let us look through it. We could see apples being picked off a tree in Heistern by German soldiers. Meanwhile, our mother called us for lunch. We washed our hands. Not more than 20 minutes had passed, because we had not yet started to eat, when a deafening noise was heard, and glass flew through the kitchen. A direct hit! Our German troops had found the scissors telescope immediately. The whole upper gable was destroyed. The three Americans were severely injured.

One lay on the street in the hedge below, one in the middle of the attic, the third, we couldn’t find. In the hall of the Casino, a field military hospital had been established, the medics came immediately. The missing soldier had been completely hidden in a corner of the attic. The soldier, who was lying in the street, was presumed to have died on the way to the military hospital. This damage to the gable and roof had to be repaired. During the repair work, however, we were shot at by our German soldiers, because they could see our house from the Backofen hill and from the Wittberg hill.

Of course there were also Schevenhütte civilians who were killed. Mrs. Büttgen, the wife of Karl Heinz Büttgen. Mr. Wagemann, who lived opposite the school. In the street of Joaswerk <sup>10</sup>, Mr. Stiel died. Elfriede Büttgen from Gressenich lost both legs through artillery fire. However, there were even more people who died, whom I didn’t personally know. I had not been long in Schevenhütte, at that time.

Suddenly the Captain, told us: “You will be evacuated. We cannot have any more civilians here”. We were supposed to go to the former camp of the federal employment service in Kornelimünster. All young girls and the men would have to go there on foot. Mothers with children and old people would be driven. Hand carts with the most necessary supplies were packed. The next morning, the Captain came again and said: “I bring you good news. You civilians behaved so well, you can stay. I have put in “a good word for you.” From the evening-twilight we had to be in the cellar and we were only allowed to

come out, in the morning when it was light. We stayed in the basement of the Casino, since the house at the sawmill was hit hard, had large shell holes and the cellar was full of water. In the Casino communal meals were served.

Before the Americans came, columns of refugees from Eilendorf and Walheim were led through Schevenhütte. They left some of their cows, which were brought to the meadow of the Hotel Roeb, where the pine trees now stand.

I believe the school <sup>11</sup> burned briefly. Since the school was situated in a very dangerous position, we took Mrs. Houben and her daughter Marianne; together with Kathrinchen Lippertz to the basement of the Casino. Kathrinchen Lippertz could milk a cow - she milked the cows together with Mr. Fischer, whom we called Uncle Gustav

The cows which had been shot were slaughtered. So we also had meat. Uncle Gustav, a brother of Mrs. Wirtz, knew how to slaughter. My father was being trained and helped him. Other nutrients existed as well (for milk soups). We, the youngster got together to collect potatoes, fruits, and vegetables.

Twice we escaped death. It was quiet, there was not much shooting going on when we ventured into the Graffeld<sup>12</sup>, because there were a lot of potatoes there. Suddenly projectiles were fired and they hit right next to us; full of fear, we slid down the rocky hillside. The same happened to us in Gottfried's garden near the parking lot. The relationship with the Americans was good. They provided us with canned food, which we ate later. The fighting troops had better food than the troops bringing the supplies. Sometimes we traded a freshly cooked meal from our canteen for canned food. The fresh meals were cooked by our older ladies, who lived in the Casino. The American soldiers didn't bother us at all!

So, now comes of November 11th, 1944. We were all sitting for lunch in the restaurant – we could eat there - , and suddenly the Captain came in with a Belgian officer and said: "I am awfully sorry, we must evacuate you immediately. Now an offensive begins." They feared that Schevenhütte could be recaptured again, so they could not have the civilians there. So now the situation became serious.

After lunch, we were taken away by Belgian trucks. We had no time to fetch anything from our house. We only had what we were wearing. Then we were driven away to the Bend neighborhood <sup>13</sup>. We stopped for half hour until all vehicles were together. I believe there were two convoys. Since Aachen was occupied since October 21st, 1944, we were brought to the barracks in Brand for a day. The next morning, we went to the clinic/hospital, there we were admitted to the former Josephinum. In the last 4 weeks, we were accommodated in the convent at Preussweg. On March 12th, 1945 we went home again by truck. We all stood there in front of "nothing"!

During the fighting, many people from Schevenhütte went to Vicht.





Magda Jansen geb. Fischer

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Magda Jansen, born. Fischer (born in 1925) At the time, the Fischer family lived at the saw mill Körner, formerly P. Hahn & Co

<sup>2</sup> Dalli Company in Stolberg

<sup>3</sup> Organization Todt (OT) was a paramilitary organization for the Transaction of technical actions

<sup>4</sup> Hotel Casino

<sup>5</sup> Where the parking lot "Schevenhütter Mühle is today, an old grain mill was located. The debris of this grain mill was removed after the war.

<sup>6</sup> "Buche 19", Crossroad in the forest on the road to Vicht

<sup>7</sup> "Backofen", steep hillside on the west side of the village

<sup>8</sup> big and small Wittberg, hills east of the village

<sup>9</sup> [said in English language]

<sup>10</sup> Joaswerk, neighborhood in the upper part of the village

<sup>11</sup> former elementary school on the street to Gressenich

<sup>12</sup> "Graffeld", today developed farmland on the end Hohl Street

<sup>13</sup> "Bend", secluded neighborhood in the forest outside the village, part of Schevenhütte



## **Memories of the invasion of the Americans in Schevenhütte in September 1944**

on tape spoken by

**Maria Strauch** <sup>1</sup>

September 16th, 1944 was a bright autumn day. An uncanny, almost graveyard silence, prevailed after some very tumultuous weeks. Two days earlier, the last retreating German troops had taken quarters in Schevenhütte. They were about to celebrate their first night back on German soil. When they started to sing, my father got up and asked them to stop. Outside there was a never-ending stream of refugees. People with handcarts, horse-drawn vehicles, and luggage on bicycles passed day and night, and for days one heard the front coming closer.

But what would happen to us? Someone had left us a truckfull of Panzerfausts on the traffic island in front of the church, for our defense we were told. On September 15th, we heard cows on the street. We saw uniformed SA-troops ('Schutzarmee' - paramilitary civilian army), who drove a whole herd into the village. Because the front approached faster, they had to leave the cows behind on Rottscheitt's grassland/pastures <sup>2</sup>. We felt sorry for the cows. Later, during the bombardment, the injured animals were slaughtered and the meat distributed among the people.

To stop the American advance, the army had detonated the bridges over the "Wehebach", and since then we had been without drinking water and had to get our drinking water from a well in the Esser family basement. On the morning of September 16th we got some water. We needed more, because my grandmother had been bedridden for one year, and at that time there were no disposable diapers. . We also needed water for a cow and two goats in the stable. About 12 o'clock we were helping mother to cook, keep house, milk, and sweep the stable when the news came: "The Americans are at Werk! <sup>3</sup>". It was a relief to us. The only worry was: What happens to the Schevenhütte soldiers at the front? Three days previously, the mail came for the last time, and with it the last letters from the battlefield. The last time I delivered mail, I had been shot by Lightning <sup>4</sup> fighter planes, near the Müller's house. Unfortunately, the war was not over, as we had hoped. In the true sense of the word, we were at the "front line" until evacuated by the Americans.

On September 16th, shortly after noon, we all went down to the basement of the parish house and waited for what was to come. The whole neighborhood had come there for protection. There was Hannes Lothmann with his wife. Ernestine, Henn and Nissgen Stüttgen, the Wilhelm Lothmann family, a family from Eilendorf, the four of us, Mathias, Agnes, Anna, and Maria Herzog, and my aunt Maria Mathar with five children.

Henn, a very devout man, was reciting the Rosary in a loud voice. All at once Hannes goes to him and shouts: "Henn, Stop it! You're scaring the kids ". Then Henn prayed quietly by himself. Remember, Hannes Lothmann was the wrestling and weightlifting champion of Rhineland and Westphalia. With all his strength, he sat in the cellar just as helpless as us. How difficult it had to be for him.

How long the hours can be when one is waiting. Around half past three my mother could not take it anymore: "I'm going to make coffee for grandma and bring you a sandwich". For five years there had been no coffee. But four o'clock "coffee time" remained. She became very upset when we asked to go with her. After four o'clock, she returned and reported: "I was feeding Grandma when I heard a noise at the farmyard gate. I checked the time and it was 5 minutes before four o'clock. I stepped onto a footstool to slide back the bolt, and there, right in front of me was an American. I said in German: "Don't shoot!" He laughed. Together we went into [she was in the farmyard] the house and he even shook hands with Grandma. Later, I left the farmyard and house doors unlocked. I thought this would be better. "

In the Hotel Roeb, some older guests had sought protection and they waited there for the American Army to pass by. I knew them all because I was at the post office and delivered the mail daily. Mrs. Geduldig from the Geduldig flower shop near the Aachen theater later told me: "We sat in the pub, as a bold, bearded American flung the door open, and pointing his gun at us. We all very nervously held our arms up, and he said "Alles gesund?" [Everybody O.K.?] It was Lieutenant Davis, whom we later learned to know better. He could really scare people. But he was billeted with my aunt Billa, and thus we met him. At that time, we had to evacuate the rooms. He himself told us the Roeb episode, laughing. He was rather pleased about scaring the old people. And his slogan was: "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles! Schinevenhutti, Schinevenhutti, alles kaputt!"

Going back to September 16th, I don't remember when I saw the first American. In the evening, near "Haus Jülich" there stood a tank with its cannon trained on Gressenich. At the driveway of the Lothmann's house <sup>5</sup>, a cannon was pointed at Langerwehe and one tank stood in front of the restaurant "Zur Alten Post" with its gun pointed up Hohl Street. If early the next day the Americans had moved on, as we had hoped, Schevenhütte would have suffered only the destroyed bridges with its associated damage. However, two days later we were bombarded by the Germans, which we all had not expected, and that continued for ten weeks. The bombardment was so intense that we could not eat the apples from the trees, they tasted so strongly of gunpowder. Whoever experienced that can only wonder that there were not even more civilian victims, but anyway there were very many. Poor Schevenhütte! What will happen to you and your inhabitants?

Most people were still living there. Granted some families had fled, but most remained in the hope that it would be a quick invasion.

I cannot say exactly how long we stayed in the parish house, maybe 4 to 5 days. Because we didn't get any sleep for some nights, my mother, father, and I wanted to get some rest, and carried bedding into the vaulted basement of the Lothmann house (carpentry). The cellar could be reached through a hatch in the kitchen. We had slept somewhat when we were awakened by strong artillery fire about midnight. We were in panic. We couldn't stay, but we couldn't get out. My mother said: "Come, we'll light a candle and shout so they see that only civilians and women are here." Then, there was a dull bang. We were quite stunned for some time and couldn't speak. Luckily nobody was injured. It was a German hand grenade.

Nevertheless, because of the curfew we were not allowed to leave the house from the evening 19.00

o'clock until 7.00 o'clock in the morning. Anyway, we crossed the street, to reach the parish house. Machine gun fire sprayed back and forth. Mother and I screamed. At the upper end of the parish house garden a flare was shot up, which hung there for a while at about 5 meters, making everything almost as bright as day.

A severely injured soldier laid in the middle of the street crying: "Hilfe Vater!" [Help, father"!]. The next morning, he was dead. Quite a young man. When we were back in the safety of the cellar, we couldn't believe we were still alive. My mother had bullet holes through her dress and I had a grazing wound on my hand, hardly enough to mention.

The terrible attacks on Schevenhütte claimed many pointless victims on both sides. Every day was a scene of horror. Our big fear was that my father, at that time 53 years old, could have been called in an instant into uniform. He was in the Navy in World War I and fought in the battle of Skagerrak.

On one of the next nights, to get some sleep, my aunt, Maria Mathar and her five children went into the cellar of her house. We were in the parish house in the middle of the night when we noticed that some houses were on fire. Despite the curfew, we stormed out and rescued her at the last minute. Even the wooden cellar stairs were on fire. They had been so exhausted that they slept through the smoke and fire.

Again the next night there were street battles. We carried Grandmother into the parish house. She was hardly safe there, as the first shell hit our house. Then it got somewhat quieter, until about 5.00 AM. All Hell broke loose. We felt safe in the parsonage cellar, when suddenly the cellar windows were shot out and bullets rained on the floor.

We huddled in the corners until this scare was past. Now, there was no chance for us to stay in the parish house. The American commander got some soldiers to carry Grandmother to my aunt Billa Heidbüchel<sup>6</sup>, where she lived for 4 weeks in the cellar before she passed away. Because the graveyard was so often strongly under fire, we buried her in the garden behind the house.

Before we left, we opened the stable door, provided feed and water for the animals, and untied them so they could get away. As we looked in the next day on the animals, they were all still there. A rabbit had had his fur singed, and the older goat - a very headstrong creature, which was feared throughout the neighborhood because of its belligerence - it followed us, like a nice doggy. It was hurt. At the main first aid station, the Americans doctored it.

My parents, my sister and I fled to "Helenasruh"<sup>7</sup>, where the Emmerich family welcomed us heartily. Other families had also sought protection there. The house had to be evacuated after approximately 14 days, because German and American soldiers had met in the house one night, but separated peacefully, out of regard for the civilians. The Emmerich family was evacuated to Vicht and we moved into forest warden Hoor's house<sup>8</sup> for approximately two weeks, where even more people from our street were being accommodated. Exactly when that happened I cannot remember. It was told, at Emmerich's stable the cows were bellowing. With my heart in my hands I went and asked the Commander if I could take care of the livestock. Admittedly, he was not enthusiastic but said, Yes anyway.

I was not allowed to go alone, however, because of the possibility of my engaging in espionage. There was still one big problem: I couldn't milk. So the commander found a soldier who could milk and speak a little German to go with me. The soldier shouldered his rifle, and as we passed the Villa Striebeck<sup>9</sup> the soldiers billeted there, shouted at him. "Do you understand?"<sup>10</sup>, he asked me. I shook my head. They had asked him whether I would be executed.

Meanwhile, my grandmother had died, so we could move in with Aunt Billa, who had already picked up two families. Despite everything, there was still some gallows humor. I remember, as we played cards in the cellar, a considerable amount of cash was on the table (the money no longer had any value). Suddenly, very heavy artillery fire came once again, I can still hear Aunt Billa saying quite drily: "Can you believe it? Now they're trying to break the bank!!"

Once, Aunt Billa came and had brought nothing to eat but iron grapes in her apron and put them on the table. "Look", she thought, "what I found. Hard liquor flasks." In the next room some American officers were meeting, one passed by, looked through the door and shouted: "Danger!, Danger! " they were hand grenades.

Once, an American said to Aunt Billa "You are not in charge, here!" He laughed.

The weeks passed by. We hoped from day to day - in vain. The front remained where it was.

The Americans had procured flour, and Mr. Knauff<sup>11</sup> baked bread during any lull in the firing. Often it pounded all day and all night. And again and again the ghastly news, here one dead, there one heavily injured.

In November, I don't remember the exact day, as we were about to eat lunch, a Belgian officer, carrying a horsewhip, came in and asked us to leave the house immediately. An American followed him, took the roast – from the fallen cows - off the stove, put it into a box, gave it to my father and said in broken German: "You take, in three days you back." What luck, that we had the roast and an old potato knife the next day in the Brand barracks, where the Americans had first taken us. In the rush, everyone had grabbed a bag. My father had gotten a backpack which contained a hammer, a pair of pliers, and a package of nails for repairing the roof. My mother said:

"Maria, nobody will touch your bike, I let the air out the tires!" So we hardly possessed more than we could carry, my mother no longer had shoes, only slippers; but the bombardement was over, we had rescued our lives.

It was not until May 1945 before we saw our house again. It was no longer a home. Where our house had stood, there was only a street<sup>12</sup>. During our residence in Aachen, Aunt Billa, (Uncle Franz, her husband was in Russian captivity) said "Don't worry, if my house is still standing, you can come to me." She kept her word, and we are very, very grateful to her.



Maria Strauch

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Maria Strauch, born in 1920, at the time, delivered the mail in Schevenhütte.

<sup>2</sup> the meadows lay behind the Hotel Roeb

<sup>3</sup> Joaswerk Street

<sup>4</sup> American fighter airplanes with double body (Lockheed "Lightning").

<sup>5</sup> connecting road between Daens Street and Hohl Street

<sup>6</sup> today, Nideggener Street No. 45,

<sup>7</sup> today, Nideggener Street No. 93,

<sup>8</sup> today, the forest warden's house of the Laufenburg-Gesellschaft (Priese) Hardthover Weg Street 6

<sup>9</sup> Nideggener Street No. 91 (Spellerberg), the house was named after Striebeck, who built it.

<sup>10</sup> (in English)

<sup>11</sup> former bakery Theodor Knauff, Nideggener Street 1

<sup>12</sup> today, Daens Street across the street from the community center "Pfarrgarten"





# **The End of World War II in Schevenhütte**

Story by  
**Anneliese Kruff<sup>1</sup>**

It was a Saturday afternoon, and since we had no more potatoes, I was harvesting some from our field, which was located where Heinz's house now stands<sup>2</sup>; I'm not sure, but it was about 2 - 2:30 pm. Rumour had it that the Americans had arrived.

I had an aunt, Mrs. Kirsch, who lived in Else Wilden's house<sup>3</sup>, now owned by the Müller family. Across the street, they had dug a tunnel into the mountainside. My uncle, who was a miner, had built a tunnel for the residents of this house as an air-raid shelter.

Before I harvested the potatoes, I went to visit my aunt. I think I was looking out the window, anyway somebody said "The Americans are here." They walked the path by the hedge. By then, the bridge had been destroyed. They also walked downstream through the river bed. How many I don't remember, but quite a few. We went directly to the air-raid tunnel, and thought "Dear God, what now?" An American came to the entrance of the tunnel. He was very nice. How he communicated, I don't remember either, maybe with hands and feet or so. We responded in a similar fashion, and then he gave us chocolate.

We came home very worried. Then, I went down to the "Knallhött"<sup>4</sup>, and saw Josef Kind on furlough from the war. I said: "The Americans are up there!!" He put on his overcoat and got everything he had. Then he escaped through the river, where Norbert Büttgen<sup>5</sup> lives, ran through the meadows of the Esser family, and up into the forest. Where he stayed, whether he returned later, or whether he found his way to the front, I don't know.

It didn't take long on this day before the Americans were in our street. That was the experience I had with the Americans. The house of the Averdung family was much narrower and lower. We sat there in the cellar. Looking back, that was so absurd. It wasn't safe at all. However we certainly felt safe. That night, we were still there.

On day two, it was still bright. The Americans were in Hohl Street where the garden is now. Although our parents said: "Nobody must talk to them, absolutely No No No.", we talked to them anyway. Naturally, everyone was afraid. Afterwards, we sat in the cellar of the Schönen family. There we brought all the possessions we could carry. We still had cows in the barn. During the bombardment our mother went to milk and feed the cows of which we still had three. We brought a few potatoes and other food we had from the house.

Later, I don't remember exactly when, we went to Vicht. Anyway, it was impossible to stay there in the village. We went to my grandmother, where Renate Wirtz now lives<sup>6</sup>. In the afternoon, we went with a handcart from her place to Vicht and remained until March.

When we returned, everything laid on the ground, everything was destroyed. We still have this in our memory, though I can't exactly remember the details.

Josef Kind lived where Bettina (Gottfried) built her house. There was the old cornerhouse, where Dohmens lived. Here lived Mrs. Geissler, next to the Kind family. Where the Weber family lives now, that's where the Jansen family used to live. He was a cousin of Leni Bornemann. Mrs. Kind and Mrs. Bornemann were siblings.

I talked to Mrs. Schuster. The bridge had already been destroyed before the Americans came. Jungbluths house<sup>7</sup> was affected. The Amis drove their tank all the way down the river. Therefore we noticed them right away. They occupied the place practically without resistance. By the church the tanks stood. In the field, where Heinz built his house, many Americans and Germans lay dead. However, that was some days after the invasion. I cannot say that we suffered starvation here. We had milk and butter, and after the war as well.

My father died here in the forest by stepping on a mine, which happened on March 31<sup>st</sup>, Good Friday. We were all collecting canned food (left behind by soldiers). With Marianne's father, Mr. Dunkel, my father and I went up the "Fränk", to the right shortly before Gürzenich. My father was walking ahead of me on a path through the forest, and behind me came Mr. Dunkel. Father stepped on a mine. He had only a small injury at the heel. Mr. Dunkel went home on foot. There was no car. I believe Mr. Haas had brought milk to Schevenhütte every day. Mr. Dunkel asked him to get the injured person. He said "No, No, I have no time for that!" Then, a truck came from Vicht, and it took some time to reach Gürzenich. Meanwhile, I had already put a tourniquet around my father's leg. He went to the hospital in Stolberg. However, at the time, there was no doctor there. When one came—there was no tetanus medication—the doctor amputated part of Father's foot, however, the infection continued, and they amputated more. On June 12th, he died.

After the war, people scanned the forest looking for items from the Americans, mainly cans. Some people found bags full of it. We didn't go, after our experience with my father. My uncle, Mr. Emmerich, always found many cans. There were cans with grease—shoe grease—that was snow-white. We fried potatoes with it. The people who ate the fried potatoes all survived until this day. The older brother of Nöll Gerhard, while searching for cans, also stepped on a mine and died.



Anneliese Kruff née Wittmann

***Footnotes:***

<sup>1</sup> Anneliese Kruff, née Wittmann

<sup>2</sup> Heinz Wittmann, Nideggener Street 96

<sup>3</sup> Nideggener Street 106,

<sup>4</sup> Nideggener Street 10

<sup>5</sup> Nideggener Street 9 - 11



## **The End of World War II in Schevenhütte**

Memories of the last phase in World War II.

Memories of the invasion of the Americans in September 1944 recorded on tape

**Käthe Süllhöfer<sup>1</sup>**

One or two days before the invasion of the Americans, a column of our “victorious” soldiers came through our village, pulling small handcarts, little war wagons, their legs bandaged, feet amputated, it was a miserable sight. We all felt very sorry for them

On September 16th, I believe it was 10:20 AM, when the Leuchters had the flag out as a sign of surrender. They [the GIs] came slowly, occasionally giving the children something; afterward, they moved into the cellars.

Grandpa went to harvest potatoes; he filled up a steel helmet, and exchanged it for one pack of “Lucky Strikes”<sup>2</sup>. They were very shy. The Americans were not allowed to speak with us. We could read this on the posted signs.

The weather was nice on September 16th. I am sure it was about 10:20 am or maybe 10.00 o'clock. We didn't know how to react to the Americans. That was because of Göbbel's propaganda machine, but afterwards we got along very well with each other. We had to live together in a cellar. At that time I lived down in the village with Schaviers<sup>3</sup>. The Lange Family, living in the Hammer, had no cellar. At that time I had lived there about 4 years. Leni Bornemann, my sister Änni and Klara Lothmann were with us then.

The first Americans we had seen two days previously, up on the Backofen Street. They stood with their binoculars under the trees at the forest edge. Their uniforms were different. They had already made contact with our soldiers, who were in retreat and had positioned themselves more on the eastern side. Later, we told them to just drive through, there were no German soldiers, here. The German soldiers were afraid and were hiding in an air raid tunnel (bunker) near Kupfermühle (Thelen).

They were almost all white soldiers, around 15 to 20 years old. The one on the tank was a black soldier. First, they were fearful and distrustful. Later we got used to each other. In the beginning, they were not allowed to speak with us; Later, they were strictly prohibited from talking with German women.

When they came, I said to my husband Jupp: “ Now, the war is over!” In our cellar, I was together with Mrs. Bornemann and with her daughter, Klara Lothmann – the wife of uncle Will. We were lying in the cellar, in the corner towards the yard. Americans were lying in the part towards the street. Some of them became more sociable later because of my great misfortune. [NB: Käthe Süllhöfer's first husband was accidentally killed by an American soldier.]

The tanks ran day and night up and down, up and down Nideggener Street. As they arrived, they had a tank with them, and used it day and night. This tank, we baptized “Isabella” with a negro sitting on it. There were many people, and they wanted to demonstrate strength. We thought that was nonsense, they were strong enough. There was nothing left of us [i.e. the German army]. They could just drive

through. We would have suffered a lot less, if they had done so. Afterwards, we found out that the village had changed hands six times.

Upstairs in the store, my Grandpa started trading that day. Cigarettes for merchandise - using broken English and sign language. We always had a grocery store and were the only shop in the village selling petrol. And we had something like a small cabinet as they have in a drug store, which was filled with tonics. Later, we weren't allow to sell those and we had to hide it under the counter and below the textiles. We always sold a lot. We moved in Easter 1927, and in June [1927] we opened the store. We were all unemployed.

The Americans occupied many cellars, I think it was during the following night, when there was no shooting. German positions were e.g. up at "Benning's Pädche"<sup>4</sup> near the hill and all the way down to Thelen's mill ("Thelens Mühle"); they had a good field of vision from there. From the Daens area<sup>5</sup>, the Germans shot at the bell tower of the church. On top of the tower, there was a emergency window. If someone came out of the bunker (at Thelen's mill), the Americans gave the Germans a good thrashing. Therefore, the German soldiers at Thelen's slept in the garage. For that reason the villa was completely destroyed. The garage was first gone, there were not much left standing.

They [the Germans] went into the cellar [of the villa] there and got themselves wine and everything else. That the German soldiers shot intentionally at everything, is understandable. They probably said: "They are no Germans anymore, otherwise they would have gone away as well. We consider them as enemies". When there was no bombardment from the Daens area, the dead persons were buried fast, pow pow. It was the Germans who shot at us. The artillery of Langerwehe also shot at us. It was said that they couldn't help it when Americans and German civilians were together, so they would shoot them both. Thus it was said, however, I don't believe it. In those first days nobody knew what the situation and circumstances were.

Approximately 14 days before the Americans came, we went with around 60 to 80 men to the "Rote Wehe" creek. With big carts, possessions on it, whatever was movable. There were trial mineshafts, which had previously been closed off. We stayed in these tunnels for about 5 days or a week. Some of them were flooded, others had two levels. Nevertheless, low-flying airplanes came too, especially when we went home. The father of the bride of Helmut Klee, - his name was Herzog – was killed by strafing airplanes, when he went from the Lürbruch to Gressenich.

Afterward, the Americans took root in the slate pit. They took everything from Schevenhütte, windows, doors, and created a real small village with blockhouses, which were stable. Everywhere, they had shelters, at the meadows near the public swimming pool ("Badeanstalt"). Next door<sup>6</sup>, there were Americans, too. One of them, we nicknamed him "Pancho" on one of the first days. He stole everything. Grandma Wolff was very religious and had a Madonna, a Sacred Heart, all protected by big glass bells. Peter Wirtz lived upstairs. They just took his suits for padding and packed everything in wooden crates which were shipped to America.

One or two days later, he [Poncho] sat on the stairway in front of our house and cried: "Help me!", with all his intestines out.

From Langerwehe, 22-inch mortars, railroad guns were shooting. Two gigantic holes were shot in the house next door. They were so big one could have driven a big cart through it. Soon, approximately 300 people fled to Vicht. We still remained here. Then, Montgomery<sup>7</sup> came, and he said: "First get the civilians out". We were loaded on trucks, we were also allowed to bring some things. Some had beds. And where was I? With Minister Geimer. He had rescued all of the monstresses [eccl. – ostensorium] and everything else. We were so tightly compressed, I stood with my feet on the box with the monstresses, at the back of the truck. I hung on (to the canvas railing above) so that it didn't break under my weight. As we passed the Bend, low-flying airplanes came. We brought with us all the wrong things.

On November 25th, we arrived at the Gallwitz-barracks in Aachen. After a few days, we went to the old hospital at Goethe Street. And our grandpa had such a nice suitcase full of stuff, and what did he take? He took the protective case for a bass wind instrument, inside of which were some cups, old forks, and little buckets, -- all the wrong stuff. From November 25th until March 19th we were in Aachen. There I doctored half of Schevenhütte as well.

A heavy bunker was there where the restaurant "Zum Backofen" is today. Another one was at the "Lürbruch", a bit inside the forest<sup>8</sup>. They were normally used as air raid protection bunkers. We had wired broadcasting: "There is a squadron coming in from the direction of Eindhoven". We always had a bag ready, then we went into the bunkers. Köbes Leuchter came this way when he went down to the "Backofen" bunker. Mattes sat in the bunker; they lived at the beginning of Backofen Street. Mattes said then: "Look, we have another umbrella" Köbes didn't know what this was, however. Someone said: "That is Jupiter". Actually, those little umbrellas were markings to guide the bombers. "Look, come and look. Jupiter is there. Come on, take a look, Jupiter is again in the sky..."

There were no German soldiers in the bunkers when the Americans came. There were only some soldiers (in the tunnel) near Thelen. They were a pitiful bunch of approximately 20 to 40. They were really beaten. If the Americans were not so cowardly, things would have gone ahead. At the time, I lived in the Hammer neighborhood and went to the bunker<sup>9</sup> (tunnel) behind the sawmill 'Franzen'. The one next to Thelens was built with stones and had an iron gate probably made by the blacksmith Hein Mathar. Everyone had to be able to understand English. There was a big sign: "Danger, Mines"<sup>10</sup> standing there. It was said: "Oh, yes, the fat ones are the tank mines" so every day these jokes were made.

Initially, I supposed I suspected German soldiers in the hillside of the at the slopes of the "Backofen" hill to have shot my husband Jupp<sup>11</sup>. He stood on a ladder picking grapes and suddenly "pitsch!"

An American soldier was cleaning his weapon in the yard, and fired one shot by accident. At first, I refused to believe it, but then they showed me the damaged wooden beam. They wrapped him [i.e. Josef Gülden] in a tent tarpaulin and brought him to the military hospital. This stood between 'Dunkels' and 'Breuers', where the restaurant "Wilddieb" used to be<sup>12</sup>. This is where they put the dead. When the German bombardment from the Daens stopped, some damned people from the - we called them "death squad" – went to (the graveyard near) the school to quickly dig a hole and bury them. Sometimes, however, they had already been lying there three to seven days. Three times I looked for the grave, until the old Mrs. Linden, actually Ms. Linden our teacher came and said: "You are wrong, here lies Josef". I gave Will Büttgen and Johann Gülden cigarettes and other things, wrapped in cloth, so they started digging again until they found him. One member of the Valters [family], the dad, who lived where Marx lives now<sup>13</sup> was lying on top of him. They only had put a few boards or something else between them.



Everything was still like that, and remained unchanged until we came back in early spring. New shoes, everything was still in there. Those were dreadful times.

One provided oneself with whatever you could get. Animals died frequently from the shelling. Often, we had 10 to 20 pounds of meat per person per day. What should we do with it? It was quickly cooked into something, and when it was quiet we canned the meat in jars. Upon our return we found the jars in the dung pile and in the brook, but it was still wonderful, because it had been winter in between. The farmers also slaughtered a lot, because they too had 'shrapnel animals', which died in the pastures towards Gressenich. Later, our shop ran out of salt. Before, we had traded pound for pound and later traded 10 pounds of meat for one pound of salt. The farmers from Bend called us "cutthroats". But in the spring when we came back, we used it well, we only needed to dig it out.

The real depot for supplies were in the Casino, established by wholesalers from Düren etc.. When things became normal, the goods were distributed. We had two scales and three or four counters. Everyone got one pound of flour, one pound of sugar, etc.. I estimated the weight, because I had always weighed previously. First, they tested me to see whether I really knew how. For example, salt is a much smaller pile than flour, etc. We distributed buckets full of jam. Willi Esser checked, and it was always correct within five grams. They had hoarded a lot in the Casino.

Two people from Poland were here as foreign workers: Michel, the Pole and one other guy, a handsome man. My mother quietly gave them something to eat, because they were always treated poorly. They stayed in the sawmill.

In the Hotel Roeb was a family that had a wholesale business in Aachen. And their daughter Margret, was really good friends with the American officers.

She followed them through the village. They had the cellar, –I dare not to say this– sprouting furs and blankets. They partied until dawn.

Some time later, everyone went into the forest. Hans Gerhard ran onto a mine upriver near the bridge called 'Schwarze Brücke' <sup>14</sup> After this happened, he bled to death in his truck. Johann Averdung, a bachelor, tried to build a lantern from a small mine. Such lanterns were fueled with gasoline. When it exploded, he died from shrapnel wounds in his face. Other victims in the village were Wilhelm Vogts, father of the Mrs. Valter, he was the one lying on top of my Jupp; Josefine Büttgen, née Roeb, the wife of Pitt Büttgen; and Engelbert Neffgen, that was Heinz Schönen's father-in-law, who lived at the "Am Wirbel"<sup>15</sup>,

Josef Gülden, my husband; Peter Wagemann, of Bärchen Neffgen, who was living where Joe Brandt now lives in Gressenicher Street; Josef Stiel from Joaswerk Street, the grandpa of Albert Stiel, who sells heating systems; Josef Hilgers, the husband of "Lorelieschen"; Heinrich Mathar, was killed during the evacuation; Erich Wirtz, probably a son of "Hötte"; Peter Wittmann, Heinz' father, while collecting cans.

But also a joyful event happened at that time: Winfried Leuchter was born in the Gülden's cellar, which, behind the playground, is the first house on Nideggener Street.





Käthe Süllhöfer née Schavier

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Käthe Süllhöfer, née Schavier, at that time 28 years old

<sup>2</sup> American cigarette brand

<sup>3</sup> Nideggener Street 54

<sup>4</sup> Walkway at the forest edge behind the house of Benning, the forest warden

<sup>5</sup> Forest area north of “Im Hammer”

<sup>6</sup> Nideggener Street 52,

<sup>7</sup> British commander-in-chief

<sup>8</sup> Beside the present-day parking lot at the street from Schevenhütte to Gressenich

<sup>9</sup> Tunnel at the “Pittere pädche”, today, the tunnel is sealed

<sup>10</sup> [translation]

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Süllhöfer married on June 13th, 1944 Josef Gülden

<sup>12</sup> Former restaurant in the Nideggener Street

<sup>13</sup> Im Hammer 1

<sup>14</sup> Bridge over the former street to Kleinhau

<sup>15</sup> last house at the Wittberg Street



# The End of World War II in Schevenhütte

Records of  
**Josef Frentz<sup>1</sup>**

It was September. Day had just proven victorious over night, as the sun pulled us away from sleep. Cold, moist September air moved into the room. We were not yet completely conscious when the sound of motors was heard. Rising and dressing took only seconds. And then out. Formations of four-engine heavy bombers flew 4000 meters high towards their targets. At the same moment, heavy railroad flak from Aachen started also. An exciting fireworks display began. But it seemed to displease the hunter aircraft. They flew some arcs and then pounced on their prey. But the Flak sent its death-dealing projectiles unwavering towards the enemy formations. There, a bomber burned, flying a little, then falling into the depth with a full load of bombs. We overcame the first problem, but the second one followed immediately: we nearly ran out of water. Except for the continued wailing of sirens, the day proceeded without incident.

Tuesday, September 12th, 1944

As for the water, it was then completely finished. In the morning, soldiers came in front of our house<sup>2</sup>. It was the demolition unit. They had exploded the pipelines of the water reservoir in Roetgen. But they also brought us quite good things, for example butter, bread, sardines in oil, candies, cigarettes, and hard liquor. They didn't remain long but pulled further to Langerwehe. From the distance, the wind carried the noise of shelling sounding to us like dull thunder.

On Wednesday, September 13th, the enemy then was in Mausbach and Krehwinkel. From then on, one heard the fire of the MGs<sup>3</sup> and rifles being shot. At first we thought it was German gunfire, however, when some shells landed in the forest near us, we soon learned differently.

On Thursday, the artillery fire came so much closer that we went to the bunker <sup>4</sup> at midday, and came out only briefly. They didn't shoot exactly in our area, but scattered in the forest between Krehwinkel and Schevenhütte. In the evening about 10.00 o'clock, I went to bed early. Actually I was laying on the ground in the bunker. Suddenly, someone said, "The bridges need to be blown up". In the homes all windows had to be opened. I got dressed and went with Mr. Leesmeister<sup>5</sup> up the valley. After a quarter of an hour, there was a terrible bang, and the bridge was gone. Soon, sleep overpowered me. The next morning, the bridge near Thelen to Hamich<sup>6</sup> and the small little bridge where the 'Feeschsiefen' flows<sup>7</sup> into the pond, got their turn. The whole roof of the Thelen house came down. Then, I was supposed to get people from the village to help. As I passed our house, I checked quickly. There were only two window panes broken.

As I continued, I saw that our roof had slipped quite a lot (probably the roof tiles). The houses close to the bridge looked terrible. Valters and Kruffs<sup>8</sup>, could no longer live there. Steel beams 10 meters of length were twisted, lying in the meadows 20 - 25 meters from the bridge.

In the afternoon I went home with my mother. I nailed the windows shut. Then, I climbed onto the roof. Wow, there was a lot of work to be done. I started working whistling a song. I hardly had worked

half an hour, when the low-flying airplanes visited us again. I had to climb down from the roof and go into the cellar of Kauls<sup>9</sup>. When the planes were gone, I exchanged long pants and heavy shoes for short pants and gym shoes, and picked up my work again. In the morning, it had rained, but then we had wonderful weather. The roof wasn't stable and hung in perpetual suspense; because with every artillery impact, it went into motion anew. One got accustomed to it and the work proceeded quickly. But then, our continuous guards, the low-flying planes, came again. This didn't bother me anymore because my mother was still too scared to come out of the cellar to fetch me. All of a sudden I heard gunshots. Soon, I heard them close by but I didn't let it disturb me. Now, the bullets whistled past my ears. Now my mother came running and screaming that I should come down, and that the Americans were in the village.

I came down and washed up, carried pants, jacket, and coat with one hand, took my shoes, some bread, and followed my mother to the bunker. In the bunker everybody was very nervous.. Everybody hoped soon to get it over with and to get out from the darkness of the bunker. In the hallway of the bunker, an active conversation unfolded. Uncle Hein<sup>10</sup>, and Hein Mathar were still at work in their homes. Everybody waited, but the Americans didn't come. Finally, Uncle Hein came and wanted to pick up Aunt Gret, Gertrud and Lisabeth<sup>11</sup>. Just at that moment German storm troopers appeared and a wild shootout began. The women were now all in the main chamber [of the tunnel].

Only now, Uncle Hein told us what had happened to him in the village. He said that he had gone into the cellar until the first American soldiers arrived. He had waved his handkerchief and went outside. Then, he talked with them and got cigarettes from them. As the other people, who were in the [other] tunnel at the "Petterpättchen", saw uncle Hein talk with them, they also came out with a bed sheet tied to a pole. The American held their bellies laughing and slapped their thighs, when they saw them coming with this big white flag. Then he told the Americans that his wife and children were in a bunker in the lower part of the valley. The American told him to get them. But in the meanwhile the German combat engineers came. The Americans now sprayed the whole area with their tank cannons.

Soon, the low-flying planes were back again. This situation lasted until the evening. When it became quiet, Hein Mathar came. He told what he had done. He had taken one bottle Cognac and one glass, sat in the window and waved at them. However, they [probably Americans] did not want to come to him, instead they wanted him to come to them.

They liked the Cognac so much that they stole a few bottles from him and they threw the empty bottles against the wall. Now, everybody got ready for the night.

That was the conquest of my hometown on September 15th, 1944<sup>12</sup>

Now came Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup>.

When we woke up, the artillery bombardment still raged on. About 9.00 o'clock, there was a pause in the battle. Hein Mathar used the chance to go home.<sup>13</sup>



Josef Frentz

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Josef Frentz was 14 years old at that time

<sup>2</sup> At that time he lived in the present-day house Langerweher Street 52 (Ludwig Wolff)

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviation for machine gun

<sup>4</sup> The bunker exists still today. It is located at the slope of the hill across the street from the "Villa Josset" at the Langerweher Street

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Leesmeister, was a tailor, he was evacuated from Aachen and lived in the house of the Frentz family

<sup>6</sup> Bridge at the textile mill Thelen,

<sup>7</sup> This bridge doesn't exist anymore, today

<sup>8</sup> The Valter family lived in the present-day house of Marx, Kruff were the parents of Mrs. Häckler

<sup>9</sup> House Kaul, Langerweher Street 21

<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Gülden, Langerweher Street 6, grandfather of Manfred Jansen,

<sup>11</sup> His wife and children

<sup>12</sup> This is not correct! Schevenhütte was occupied on September, 16<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> On Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1944 the Frentz family and the Leesmeister family decided to drive to Kossen/Tyrol, where relatives of the Mr. Leesmeister had been evacuated. They reached the place in the evening of the September 21st, 1944 shortly after the arrival, Josef Frentz, wrote these notes.



# The End of World War II in Schevenhütte

Interview with  
**Sigismund Heidbüchel<sup>1</sup>**

Until mid-September, i.e. from about the 10<sup>th</sup> of September onwards, not much happened in Schevenhütte. The winds of war had calmed down. Here and there you saw a few groups of soldiers returning, but only a few. They marched either towards Gressenich, or Langerwehe; I remember that – it must have been around the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of September - a heavy gun was driven down from [Joas] Werk Street<sup>2</sup> and up Backofen Street. Some five or six soldiers were on it. Otherwise it was pretty peaceful, although you could hear the thunder of distant guns during the day, but especially at night. We neither saw nor noticed defenders in Schevenhütte. During the month of September, on the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>, the weather was beautiful, the skies were clear and it was very sunny. For safety we slept in the basement, as did everybody in Schevenhütte.

During the morning of September 16th, it was a Saturday, five policemen, wearing long coats but no military uniform, came up Hohl Street. They were armed with rifles and Panzerfausts. My father asked them “Where are you going?” “We are going to defend Germany!” “Isn’t that a bit late, now?”, my father asked in slang. In slang the policemen responded “Yes, but we will get them”. It was about 11:00 a.m. when this occurred.

We didn’t get much sleep during the nights in the basement. During the preceding weeks, many refugees - with cattle and whatever belongings they could carry – came through Schevenhütte. This was very tiring. On Saturday, about noon, I sat down on the bench in front of the house and fell asleep. When I woke up, two of the policemen who had walked up the road in the morning - God knows where they went, maybe to the “Farm” – came down the road again. They were at Michel Vitzer’s house, where Hohl Street bends and where the electric pole stands near the corner, when a shot was fired. The policemen came back and ran through the alley near Andres Alt (formerly Klöer Heck) and escaped via Nöll Berg’s place<sup>3</sup>.

I got into the house through the front door facing what is now Daens Street (formerly known as “De Jaaß”) and saw that an American soldier appeared near the electric pole. He was about 170cm (5 feet, 7 inches) tall, carried lots of hand grenades around his neck and shoulders. These hand grenades, about which we learned more later, looked like pine cones<sup>4</sup> to us. This event stays in my memory as something special. Since I ran into the house, grandpa said in slang “You can’t come into the house now, you have to go outside, otherwise they’ll think something is happening. Go outside” I went outside and talked with them in my school English. They asked me whether there are soldiers here. To the best of my knowledge I answered “No”. Some people were here, but they were only police. That was OK.

They didn’t go around the bend of Hohl Street. Averdung, from the top of the Hohl Street, beckoned me. I walked to his house, and entered through the green basement door. In the basement Averdung explained to me that there were three policemen upstairs in his living room. They wanted to defend Hohl Street. He had already talked to them about giving themselves up etc. and asked whether I could negotiate their surrender with the Americans.

I went back down the street to the Americans, told them that there were policemen defending the street, and asked them what we should do. The American said that I should go back up, get them to come down and surrender. I ran up the street again, came down carrying two rifles, together with the policemen, who had raised their arms. When we arrived at the bend, the Americans had already moved ahead to the house of Johann Hilgers at the corner of Sibilla Flohr's house<sup>5</sup>. They had set up a machine gun and the policemen were taken prisoner and disarmed. I was still carrying the rifles, and the American, whom I saw as the leader, asked me whether I wanted to keep the rifle. When I told him "No, I can't do anything with it, now", I was astonished to see him take the rifle, unload it, and smash it against the electrical pole. The rifle broke into two pieces, only held together by the sling.

One more thing occurred that late afternoon. The Americans walked up Hohl Street, and searched our house. They checked under the beds, under the couch, searched the entire house, and finally found framed pictures of my brothers. They shook their heads and left the house. They walked further up Hohl Street to the Averdung house. I was with them during the entire search, so was my mother. We went along, we were there.

And there was another unusual occurrence. On the second floor of her half-timbered house, Billa Flohr had a window wide open. My mother noticed that one of the soldiers at the machine gun was constantly focusing at this open window. My mother told her about it and Billa Flohr closed this window immediately. That was probably for the better.

I saw about 15 of the soldiers move into Hohl Street. They were armed with submachine guns, the infamous rifle, machine guns, and lots of hand grenades. They appeared calm. A black guy was also with them. He was tall and a fine figure of a man. All wearing their steel helmets etc. They went into all the houses. They went into the house of Kruff, they went everywhere. The black guy was a little drunk. After they had searched all the houses, they walked towards Neuer Weg, but there were no houses there<sup>6</sup>. We didn't follow them, it was none of our business. The Americans were very careful. Grandpa said, in his usual slang: "Look, see how they do it. They are not as stupid as our guys, who always run right into the enemy".

The folks being there during those events were Hannes Hellijesch – who had Elisabeth Hilgers and Billa Flohr living with him – and us, meaning my father, mother, and me. Also Kät Kruff, Jupp Kruff, Ann Kruff, Traud Kruff, and Petter Kruff were there. At the top of the street there were the Averdungs, Kalin Ehrenberg, and Dunkel who lived where Mr. Mengel lives today. There was the entire Willms family, consisting of Bernhard, old Mr. Willms, Mrs Willms, Wittmann, Pitt Wettmann Pitt, Heinz, his son, Niss Wettmanns, and Anneliese.

I think the events were not overly dramatic. I'm also unable to say whether there was a certain amount of relief on our side. I didn't think that I was free now, and everything was over. Events were totally different than we thought the end of the war would be. You must know that my father, like many other men where we lived had served during the first World War, was certainly thinking how to survive when we were overrun in this phase of the war. First of all, we started to bury things in our back yard. That meant we went to uncle Martin (Martin Schoenen) [who was a carpenter] and made boxes. He still had old boxes which we lined with tar paper we had found. We dug holes in the back yard. We also used an



old boiler for burying things in our back yard. The following things were put inside: clothes, bed sheets, china, and a coffee grinder. This was buried and covered with dirt. My father had probably done this during the first World War in the French countryside.

Secondly, my uncle Hein, who lived in the Hammer neighborhood, that is Hein Schoenen, kept in close touch with us. I must point out that we had much closer contact during the last days and weeks of the war than today. At Luis Franzen's place down the street<sup>7</sup>, there was a German Army supply depot, which they had set up at the end of the war. The soldiers, who had other things to worry about, left this place rather unguarded. Hannes Franzen, Luis Franzen, uncle Hein from Hammer, Hein Schoenen, Hein Jöldgen plundered the place a little bit. There was a lot of solidarity among the folks. Even we in Hohl Street got our fair share.

The contacts went beyond the immediate Hammer neighborhood and reached into Hohl Street. Uncle Hein, my father and others developed a plan to build a hideout. We didn't want to escape, we didn't want to be exiled, we wanted to stay home.

In a protected pine forest plantation on Hammerberg hill, towards Fäschsief – which had trees about 18 to 20 feet tall – we build a hut. From Franzen's sawmill we got boards, carried them up the hill and build a roof. We also buried food. We, that is uncle Hein, my father, Bernhard Kruff, and uncle Martin (Schoenen). We also had camp beds. Uncle Hein from Hammer organized very well, he got most of the things. We even had a small oven, an old stove. Such things had to be guarded. God forbid if someone would steal it.

At night we needed to sleep there. Now we had the going-to-sleep adventure. It got dark, and uncle Hein in his usual slang said "Let's go to sleep. Who comes along?" Uncle Hein, Heinz Schoenen, Majret Kruff, Hein Langen and I came along. Uncle Hein said "One of us has to go ahead with the lantern, so we can get up Hammerberg hill and pass Schnikke<sup>8</sup>. If you hear anything in the forest, drop down, cover up the lamp, everybody must get down, and be quiet!" Of course, we climbed up the hill. Everybody was quiet. We nearly reached the top of the hill near the pine trees, and suddenly heard a gunshot. I covered the lantern with my body and everybody laid flat on the ground. Suddenly Uncle Hein started laughing. He had a hand gun, had fired a shot and cracked up when we hit the dirt. Then we slept there. One night, but what a night! We felt like cops and robbers. When Uncle Hein compared our environment with that of a cock living on top of a manure heap we couldn't sleep, we could only laugh. In the morning, we returned. The adventure of the hut was that we never used it. We never made it there. When the war was over, we were cutting trees at Fäschsief. We saw that the battle line had gone straight through our hut. We were lucky that our emergency measure was never activated. Lots of things developed totally differently from what we had thought.

Actually, it was very sudden when the Americans arrived in Schevenhütte. When I think about it today; there were no German soldiers in the village at all. Not even close by. The Americans could have driven all the way to Gürzenich, and they could have driven all the way to Langerwehe. Nothing would have happened. Only a few days later, when the Germans noticed, 'Hmm, they aren't coming, let's take a look what's going on and where they are', all Hell broke loose. Whether I was afraid in those days, concerned about what would happen to me in the future, what the history of the Third Reich meant? I didn't think that at all, although a few weeks earlier I had still been digging trenches in Kornelimünster, and deserted. Some of us were picked again, but I was only 14 1/2 years old and too young for digging

trenches. The American had enough military equipment (for a walk-through). During the next days, we went to the center of the village. There was plenty of equipment. Near “Lahmens en de Pooz” was a Sherman tank, in Hannes Lothmann’s driveway there was a tank, and another tank stood in front of [the pub] “Alte Post”. The tanks guarded all roads.

For example, during the following days, that is 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of September, I walked around with my cousin Josef<sup>9</sup> to see where the Americans had their tanks and how they were armed. There was another interesting experience we shared when standing on the traffic island, in front of the church, but more about that later.

We were amazed about the radio equipment of the Americans. “Lightning” fighter planes were cruising the sky, and soldiers on the ground were constantly in radio contact with them. The Americans were very friendly. On 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of September, we thought the war was over. Then the worst times began. The nights were no longer quiet, there was street fighting going on. I remember being in the living room and although the window facing the street was covered, I heard German commandos run by. There was shooting, but luckily the soldiers didn’t enter the houses.

During the morning hours of the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>, we were in front of the church on the traffic island. A number of soldiers killed in battle were lying in the driveway of Michel Jenzen<sup>10</sup>. Minister Geimer came outside and scolded us: “You’re not supposed to be here”. We ran home. I remember from hearsay that Jakob Liepertz was ordered by the Americans, together with other local men, to bring the dead soldiers into the church, from where they were taken away later. I saw the the first German shell hitting the Klingner’s<sup>11</sup> house above the entrance.

There were lots of things going on during the night from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of September. We had street fighting again, with many casualties, but we didn’t leave the house. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, Jupp Kruff and I were standing in front of our house on Hohl Street. Grandpa said “Boys, you must come inside, there will be shelling, I can hear it!”. And it happened during the next instant. I was wounded. At the same time, Hannes Hellijes, my father, and Jupp Kruff were wounded too. Later on we found out that a German soldier, who couldn’t retreat during the night, and was hiding in a little grove in front of Wagemann’s house, was wounded, too. A little bit later, they took him away, together with Jupp Kruff.

After the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, Schevenhütte became the front. We didn’t accept this development. The 16<sup>th</sup> of September, especially the days thereafter, caused me to always remember the war as something very cruel. I know the hardship, and sympathize very much with people in war-torn countries like Jugoslavia. In the back of my mind, there is always the memory as to what happened around me and within me while in Schevenhütte. The 16<sup>th</sup> of September was a normal day, but one sensation occurred anyway.

I need to add the following, which occurred during the time before the 16<sup>th</sup> of September. If I recall correctly, the summer holidays ended on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1944. Before and during the holidays – I attended the high school for boys in Eschweiler. Whenever they sounded an alarm warning for incoming enemy fighter planes, we were forced to walk all the way home, because they switched off electricity and the tram didn’t run anymore. During the summer of 1944, I didn’t go to school at all for that reason. After all, school was closed after the holidays.

There was a constant stream going through Schevenhütte. There were columns of people and cattle from

Stolberg, Vicht, Breinig, Zweifall und Roetgen. At the beginning of September, there were large streams of Russian prisoners of war, streams of refugees, for example a family from Breinigerberg which was overtaken by the Americans arriving in Schevenhütte. This was a family with 6 children, and they stayed in the house of Trenge Hannes (Johannes Stiel). The family father was wounded in Schevenhütte and was transferred, together with me to the hospital in Liege. Due to this, the days were not quiet. Additionally, fighter planes were constantly above Schevenhütte and hardly anybody dared to go outside. One day, I was biking with my cousin Josef Heidebüchel, and fighter planes appeared. For cover, we pressed against the walls of the bridge near Averdung. The planes were always banking when flying along the streets, so that the pilots could see exactly what was happening below. A few days earlier, a small truck was attacked by fighter planes near Luerbroch<sup>13</sup> and destroyed. The driver, a man from Mausbach was killed.

This was indeed a turning point. My childhood and my youth came to an end. As a youth, I was somewhat influenced by the ideology of the Nazi era. When doing trenching work, I also thought about defending my motherland (or “fatherland”). The days in September 1944 brought an important change, and although it can’t be proven, it took my life in a different direction. If it weren’t for those days in September, I wouldn’t be where life has taken me today.

## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Sigismund Heidebüchel, at that time 14 years old

<sup>2</sup> Joaswerk, a street in Schevenhütte

<sup>3</sup> In former days, there was a service walkway, which led to a watering hole at the little creek; today access to the house of Vera Alt (Hohl Street 4). Their escape route was from the watering hole through the garden of the Montag family, passing the house of the Werker family (Daens Street).

<sup>4</sup> He used the German slang term “Wearmännnschere” for pine cone.

<sup>5</sup> House at Hohl Street 6 (Montag)

<sup>6</sup> The “Neue Weg” currently has the houses of Marianne Mundt und Werner Wolff

<sup>7</sup> Currently Langerweher Street 14 (Karl Schaal)

<sup>8</sup> House name of members of the Lennartz Familie

<sup>9</sup> Josef Heidebüchel

<sup>10</sup> Currently near house at Daens Street 11 (Lothmann)

<sup>11</sup> Currently Daens Street 5

<sup>12</sup> Between Hohl Street and house N<sup>o</sup>. 13 (Mengel)

<sup>13</sup> Luerbroch, near the street to Gressenich



# **The End of World War II in Schevenhütte**

Account of  
**Josef Heidebüchel** <sup>1</sup>

Today, after 50 years have passed, I will try to recollect from memory and tell you about the events when the Americans came to Schevenhütte in September 1944.

It was on Saturday, September 16th, 1944, at 4 pm. It was beautiful weather. I had heard about Americans of course, but only in a general way. The Americans came from the direction of Joaswerk Street, the present-day Nideggener Street. A soldier walked in front with a firearm, a rifle or something similar, followed by a tank, and behind that, a jeep. That was it for the moment. It was not a big force, at least from what one could see on the street. I heard later from other eyewitnesses that other routes, such as from the Wittberg hill and from Esser's meadow were also used to enter the village. But that was only the beginning. They stopped briefly at the Casino (hotel). A tank drove past it to the bridge by Averdungs and returned immediately. The bridge had been destroyed. The Americans set up a few mortars in the Casino yard and shot towards Langerwehe. The tank then tried to pass over the sawmill<sup>2</sup> bridge at a snail's pace, inch by inch. The bridge was reinforced later.

Whether it was on the same day or a few days later, I don't remember. I cannot say exactly with what it was reinforced. In the sawmill yard there was enough wood lying around. The tank drove over the unreinforced bridge, passed the living quarters of the sawmill and drove towards the gate of the old mill. It stopped right in front of the gate. They saw that they couldn't go through the gate without damaging it. Then they turned to the right about 90 degrees and went parallel to the outside wall of the mill stables, flattened the wooden fence, drove around the mill, and secured the position by standing behind the north-east corner of the mill building; probably to safeguard the advance American soldiers through the mill complex. For the tank, it would have been easy to simply ram the gate to open the way for the following vehicles. If I were asked why they didn't do this, I can only say that I always thought they didn't want to break anything unnecessarily.

That is an idea which would be incongruous in war, but maybe it was also my positive impression of the American soldiers, which was reinforced through numerous additional observations of their behavior and through experiences that I had during approximately six months of contact with them. Later, all of the military traffic ran over the sawmill bridge, passed the sawmill and went through the mill yard. The first spared gate was broken and as well the gate diagonally opposite at the North side of the mill. By using the intact bridge, the Americans avoided the obstacle of the destroyed bridge near Averdungs and thus used the detour. On the first day, Saturday, three tanks drove through the mill as far as to the bridge in the "Hammer" neighbourhood. In the next days, a tank stood at the restaurant "Alte Post", one at the gate of the Jülich house, the third at the "Schwan" building so they could cover with their guns the present-day Langerweher Street, and the roads from Gressenich and Hohl Street.

Most of what I have reported until now I experienced as an eyewitness, because in the afternoon, as I said, about 4 pm, I heard the sounds of the tank tracks. I lived with my parents in the sawmill residence. As soon as I came from the house, I saw some people standing on the street in front of the Hotel Casino, among them bomb victims from Aachen who lived in this hotel. I remember exactly that Matthias

Averdung was one of them. I don't remember any other people. I was alone, i.e. not accompanied by peers or relatives. There were other foreigners in Schevenhütte, some people from Walheim; a family of five to eight people. They were stuck here, having been surprised by the Americans.

In the following days the Americans established an observation post in the sawmill house attic, to watch the bombardment activities of the Germans. The Germans shot from the Wittberg towards Schevenhütte. Rifle and machine gun fire was to be heard also around the "Backofen", even from the area below or just above the pond. In the roof hatch which they [the G.I.s] looked through, a German projectile smashed in. One of the three soldiers was killed instantly, another was hurled through the air down to the sidewalk. A trailer from the sawmill was parked outside. What happened to the soldier, I don't know. The third left no trace at all. Presumably, Germans at the Wittberg spotted the observation post. The roof hatch could not have been seen from anywhere else.

The Germans were dug in near the public swimming pool as well. During the daytime, no shooting battles occurred near the village. At night, the troops attacked from almost every direction into the village. During this time on the front line, one could not learn details about the nightly, often bitter hand-to-hand combat.

The people who lived in this alley<sup>3</sup> had no reason to come and visit us. Only later when I was evacuated with my parents to Vicht did I learn about the German attacks, often with high losses on both sides. Conversations about the situation in the village could not be held during bombardment because of the continuous threat; and in my case, my parents were concerned, and they complained if I left the house even once. Later I also heard that down the valley near the Kaul house<sup>4</sup>, a German tank often came and shot. Again I didn't see this myself. Nor did I see for myself how three German soldiers came in a VW (Volkswagen) from Gressenich and rushed past the three American tanks near the church. First, they tried to drive the unpaved road left of the bridge, because of the destroyed bridge at the "Hammer", but were stopped by cows, which had been driven to the meadow of Güldens and Franzens. They tried to continue on foot, but were shot at by the Americans, who wounded one, but the others stayed with him, and all three were caught. I only heard this later. I believe Sigismund (Heidbüchel) witnessed this event from the church. The VW still remained there after the war. The three German soldiers were brought to the Flohr house<sup>5</sup>, where their arms and their equipment, as well as their personal items were taken from them. Then, they were interrogated at the Büttgen house<sup>6</sup>. This was told to me by Heinz Büttgen. The Americans thought they were SS-soldiers ['SS': abbreviation for 'Schutzstaffel': special elite unit of the Wehrmacht] because they wore the black uniforms of tank personnel. I saw only the equipment of the German soldiers lying on the sidewalk. Heinz Büttgen was still very young at that time, about eight years old, and I was just 15.

The first day, that September 16th, was a quiet war day, but the next day went really crazy. German artillery shot into the village and shells exploded everywhere. This increased considerably in the following days. At night, as I said, the German storm troopers came into the village. Because of that, nights became worse than days for soldiers of both sides -- even more so for the civilians, who were caught in the middle of the front line chaos of war.

As I already said, my parents and I lived in the sawmill residence. That was hardly reliable protection. The cellar had a wooden ceiling. The whole house was probably far less stable than the numerous quarystone houses in Schevenhütte. Therefore, every evening we went into the cellar of the old mill. It had a stable stone vault. Also the main structure was built of massive quarystone. Furthermore, this



cellar was not far from our place, maybe eighty meters. We needed only to go from the house, through the gate of the mill, pass the residence, through the door to the wood bridge over the canal from where the mill's waterwheel was running.

Left of the wooden bridge was the mill wheel. Straight ahead of the wooden bridge was the cellar, past the mill wheel. For about a fortnight, every evening before dark we went to the cellar, staying there overnight. Occasionally Americans entered and checked that no German soldiers were there.

After about 14 days, it happened that just when we started for the cellar, I had to go urgently to the toilet. My father was indignant. "You always have to go just at the right time" he said sarcastically. Just then a heavy bombardment of German artillery came in. It landed exactly in the mill area, in the path we had to take to the cellar. That evening, we did not go to the cellar but slept in the sawmill cellar. So we were there the next morning. Then there was another artillery attack because the whole area could be observed by the Germans, who responded to any vehicle movements of the Americans.

We had to go through a place that looked exactly like a shooting alley. This was caused by the undestroyed sawmill bridge and the course of the shooting alley through the mill. Again, heavy artillery fire came on the same evening. During the previous night, when we were in the sawmill cellar, we heard the tramping of military boots or shoes. Whether they were German or American, we couldn't tell. I remember no shooting volleys or close combat. The sawmill and mill area was a highly dangerous place for us. The focal point, so to speak, of the fights. The Americans had to supply their soldiers in the lower village and in the "Hammer", and there was no other way than through the mill. The Germans wanted to close or disrupt this route.

On the evening that I just mentioned we could not go back to the mill cellar because of heavy artillery fire. We went past the pond to Joaswerk Street. On that occasion my father carried one of Jacob Drüg's boys. I don't remember whether we went over Roeb's bridge<sup>7</sup>, to the present-day Nideggener Street, or whether we went another way to Joaswerk Street. Behind the pond, behind the corner where water flows into the pond, there is a canyon on the right side, which you pass if you go to Joaswerk Street<sup>8</sup>. Here there was also shooting. Rifle and MG-shots. Instead we ran along Nideggener Street. On this street, German casualties were lying here and there.

We went to Emmerich<sup>9</sup>. They told us that last night they had been aware of the war for the first time. There were Mrs. and Mr. Emmerich, Hubert, Willi and Hedwig, and their children. The others were soldiers. I think there were also the family of Albert Stiel, with children Christina, Heinrich and Peter. Whether people from Schevenhütte were with the Emmerichs at the "Helenasruh" house, I don't remember.

As we arrived, the Emmerichs told us that German soldiers were near the back wall of the house, and that the Americans had a small field hospital in the house. Short negotiations between Americans and Germans occurred, in which a ceasefire was arranged because of the wounded soldiers. The Germans then retreated.

From Emmerich's house, we then saw small columns of people from Schevenhütte walking on the street towards Vicht. Some sat on American vehicles. Heinz Büttgen later told me that the people riding on the vehicles had sat on dead Americans covered with blankets. We went also on foot to Vicht. On that



Snow was falling. An officer came and stopped us. He sent us home. It was very bad weather. After that we did not go anymore to work in the quarry. Nobody expected us to work under those circumstances. In that matter, the Americans were very correct. Whenever we were deployed, we took along fruit etc, which we bought from the people there. The people in this area were overrun by the Americans earlier than us. They didn't live in abundance either, but they were in better condition than we, and they knew it when they saw us.

We could move freely within Vicht itself, except at night. That didn't change when the Allied Forces began its Ruhr offensive on February 23rd, 1945 or so. Beginning with this offensive, fighting in our area stopped.

However, we were accustomed to make somewhat bigger "trips". This had to do with our "predatory raids" for getting food. Once I was with Arnold Gerardts in Süssendell. There we found an American crate. Unbelievable how long it took to open! At that time they already used steel bands around the crates. When we finally cut the steel bands with the most primitive tools, we found six big cans of goulash in the crate. When carrying our loot back to Vicht, unfortunately, we encountered a jeep. We lay behind some trees, flat on our stomachs. We succeeded. We brought the six cans home: We called these cans "the five-pounders". We were experts in the science of canned food.

We were able to go back home at the end of March, beginning in April, 1945. We, that was Sigismund (Heidbüchel), Ludwig Klinkenberg, the eldest son of Mrs. Klinkenberg, who was with us at the Mertens in Vicht since the end of September, they were from Krehwinkel. We were at "Om Duetschend"<sup>10</sup>. Mrs. Heidbüchel from Hohl Street, Billa Flohr, Mrs. Klinkenberg and my mother managed to get as far as the Heidbüchel's house on Hohl Street that day. We saw them near "Schmezzkrüzje"<sup>11</sup>. We were walking into the crevasse of the "Hohle Schell"<sup>12</sup>, to meet the four women. If you looked from our place towards the little creek, there was a wire barrier on the opposite slope of the hill. We hadn't seen anything like this. Hand grenades were present in this barrier. As we crawled through it, a hand grenade exploded. Only then did we notice the hand grenades. And this in a very loud and dangerous way.

Luckily, nobody got injured. Only Ludwig Klinkenberg's cap was blown off his head. As we were recovering from the scare, we saw women run over the steep hillside towards us. We had already called them from "Duetschend", the opposite hillside. Therefore they knew that we were on our way towards them. Fear showed on their faces as well as ours, and our great luck got us all back on our feet. The further the front drew away after the beginning of the American offensive, the quieter it became around us.

Our raids for food were less successful. We were now dealing with support soldiers. They had exactly the same quality and quantity of food, but they didn't leave it lying around like the front line soldiers. But everywhere there still existed, especially in the forests, unimaginable amounts of cans of all sort left behind by the American soldiers.

After our return from Vicht to Schevenhütte, although there was initially no administration which could supply the most basic things, above all food, these cans provided what one needed in the beginning. Later on they were also enough to guarantee the food supply for the whole population for months. Of course, this hadn't been planned. Order meant only that one helped the other as necessary. When

occasion, we saw the masses of American equipment, vehicles and .. and ... and..

So we went to Vicht. On the road from Schevenhütte we lived with a Mertens family. There, we were together with a number of people: the Stiel family of five people, Eta Franzen, we with three people and a Mrs. Klinkenberg with two children from Krehwinkel. We stayed there a short time, and later had to move out when the Americans confiscated the house. A bit further on the same street, but closer to Schevenhütte, we found accommodations, and spent a night there. Then we had to get out of there as well. Then, we were near the main street with a Heinen family, where we stayed until the end of March. The Heinen family lived on the present-day Pützweg.

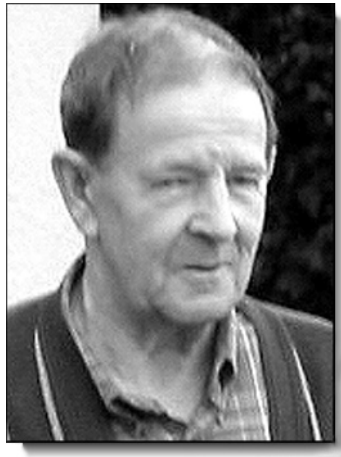
Our relationship to the native Vicht people was neither good nor bad. They couldn't give us anything because they had nothing. The Vicht people certainly were not happy that so many of us were there. It wasn't just me and my parents, but all the "strangers", mostly from Schevenhütte. But that also is understandable. It was a bad situation. The Vicht people had to come to terms with it, but we did too. In some ways there was friction and in other ways not. We felt that the Vicht people were not happy to see us. Maybe a community, a refugee community emerged, despite all circumstances. When we were in the beginning with the Mertens, Mrs. Mertens cooked right away for us all, whoever was there. That were altogether fourteen people. What portions there were was not the whole world, at least not very much. What the woman did for us, she did from a feeling of responsibility, from consciousness of a duty that came from within. At that time, such things were not discussed widely, it was simply done. Mrs. Mertens is used here as an example of all Vicht people.

The "system" of rationing worked out in such a way that there was an announcement, that somewhere we could pick up bread, milk, butter etc.. In such an event, someone came with a bell and announced the quantity of the foods and the location where it could be picked up.

In the beginning, the people from Schevenhütte could hardly contact each other. Everyone was busy with himself. Afterward, this got better. Common business was executed, not actually executed, because that would require planning - it was more about "stealing" from the Americans i.e., to remove something from the ones who had too much to us who lacked. That way, we put some "meat on our bones", and I think they didn't mind us pinching things. Actually 90 percent of the time they looked the other way when we "pinched" something. Then, after the Ardennes offensive, we didn't know at all what this was. Later, I heard the name. Then we had no permission to leave the house, and we did not go out, of course, because it was strictly prohibited. The Americans were very tense at this time.

The people who could work were brought to work sessions, not only during the Ardennes offensive. We had to report somewhere, then we were sent by a vehicle. We were driven towards Aachen, to Oberforstbach, as well as to Breinigerberg and Forstbach at the border, where we cleaned the streets. There was no payment for it, but we got food. Only older men, skilled laborers, were put to work and paid for it. My father worked for money paid by the Americans in the sawmill "Krings" in Zweifall. He and others cut wood for the Americans. The Americans brought the wood. The German workers were getting both food and money for their work. The Americans even paid money to my father when we were back in Schevenhütte. The money was not a currency, neither Reichsmarks nor Dollars. Due to the circumstances, we had an internal settlement money, with which one could legitimately buy merchandise. One day we were with a deployment in the quarry belonging to the Stiel family in Vicht.

one considers that the people, who had to use all their strength and time in the first days and weeks to put a roof over their head, then, the solidarity of the Schevenhütte people was, looking back fifty years, the greatest and most valuable event of the terrible wartime. Something like a prescribed social order emerged only gradually. This guaranteed a supply in the form of various goods and food for the “inhabitants” (as official German language called the people from Schevenhütte). Life returned to normal in Schevenhütte.



Josef Heidbüchel

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Josef Heidbüchel (eyewitness), born 19 Sep 1929, interviewed by Franz Heidbüchel on 14<sup>th</sup> of September. 1995

<sup>2</sup> The sawmill mentioned in this story, is the sawmill of Körner, which is shut down today.

<sup>3</sup> “En de Jaass”, old popular name for the present-day Daens Street

<sup>4</sup> Langerweher Street 21

<sup>5</sup> Hotel Flohr, today hotel “Zur Tanne” (formerly also “Hotel Waldfriede”)

<sup>6</sup> Nideggener Street 2,

<sup>7</sup> Little bridge over the Wehebach behind the Hotel Roeb (currently “Wehebacher Hof”)

<sup>8</sup> At this corner of the pond (later used for boating), there’s a restaurant today

<sup>9</sup> House Helenasruh

<sup>10</sup> Meadows in the area of the “Hohle Schell” (see <sup>12</sup>)

<sup>11</sup> Crucifix at the extended Hohl Street towards Wolffs-Farm

<sup>12</sup> Name for the valley between the “Backofen” and the extended Hohl Street towards Wolff’s Farm

## **The End of World War II in Schevenhütte**

### **Account of Hubert Koll**

Hubert Koll from Mausbach, born 1920 experiences terrible things after the American invasion in Schevenhütte:

„Because I worked at the Prym company in Stolberg, I was declared „irreplaceable“ and exempted from duty in the armed forces. On September 12th, 1944, I, along with several others, received my „draft notice“ to report on Sept. 12th, 1944, to the Prym company in Weissenbach, near Vienna to start working.

I had learned days earlier about the production relocation from Stolberg to Weissenbach. Since the Americans had nearly reached the border, I decided to stay home. To avoid possible investigation, I had begun days earlier to build a simple, well-concealed cottage as hideout in the area of the „Rote Wehe“. With provisions for 2 to 3 weeks, I intended to wait there for the entry of the Americans.

When I tried to say goodbye at home on the evening of September 12th, 1944, the others decided to join me in escaping to the forest. I was surprised, because my parents, together with the neighbors Hagen, had built a small shelter in the garden. They went there after air raid warnings and planned to take shelter there during the coming war. The reason for their latest decision was news that the citizen from Mausbach were about to be compulsorily evacuated into the interior of Germany.

Although it was counter to my plans, actually I had no reason to object the decision of my parents and the neighbors Hagen. My cottage needed only to become enlarged. So, it happened. Now with eight people, the place would almost turn into a small camp at the „Rote Wehe“. People worked diligently on it.

On the afternoon of Sept. 13th, a small column of singing people came walking up the street. I couldn't believe my eyes: It was Matthias Bach from Vicht and his family. Matjö Bach, as we called him, was the manager at Prym, and my boss. This almost looked pre-arranged, but no one had confided to the other at that time, though he'd considered it. Unfortunately, that was normal behavior in those days. They got settled below our housing area as it was getting dark there. They soon began to create a temporary arrangement for themselves for the night. From time to time, we all had coffee and everybody was in a good mood.

In the night, it began to rain and it got colder. It was not yet quite light when the Bachs came to inform us that they had to return to Vicht. All their stuff had gotten wet. We offered to provide dry things for them and the children; but they could not be persuaded and went back again.

This saddened us somewhat, but we continued work on our housing. In the afternoon of Sept, 9th, it got uncomfortable. From the direction of Breinig-Mausbach, we could hear shelling and the rattle of machine guns . There in the forest explosions came crashing, and they got closer. The women became nervous and afraid. It was quiet in the direction of Schevenhütte, and someone urged me to ride my bicycle there to see if we could stay there. My father was against that and suggested that we build a foxhole as a precaution.

After further coaxing, I rode to Schevenhütte and returned with the news that we could move into the Stiel's house.

I didn't see any German soldiers. We spent a part of the following night in the foxhole because of the continuous explosions. I couldn't understand why these impacts were so close.

Suddenly, everyone decided that they could not stay there any longer and some people wanted to go right away. Because we wanted to stay together, we all set out towards Schevenhütte. It was pitch black and ice cold. Our departure looked like an escape, and after we had gone about a hundred meters, we found the „artillery“ impacts: German soldiers, perhaps the final units, had exploded dozens of trees that now lay across the road to hinder the American advance through the forest.

The fallen trees, combined with the cold, hindered the women so much that we found a nearby tunnel and waited there until morning. When it got quieter at the start of dawn, we went back to our shelter because of the cold. At first some people argued about whether to stay or go to Schevenhütte. Some didn't want to remain, and so we all pulled our loaded carts, wagons, and bicycles towards Schevenhütte. It was a laborious trip because of the trees obstructing the road which had to be circumvented again and again. My mother made the trip with the girls twice to get everything to Schevenhütte. Meanwhile, Mrs. Stiel had prepared a hearty, warm stew and everybody had a lot to talk about.

We still saw a few isolated instances of small groups of German soldiers escaping towards Langerwehe. My father, as well as Mr. Stiel advised me to hide, because one never knew whether the military police were looking for young men.

The Stiel house (today Nideggener Street 13) had no basement at that time, and the Stiels spent their previous nights in stone cellars of relatives living across the street. We were allowed to use the cellar of the Hammerschmidt family next door.

From Gressenich, we heard shelling – artillery or bombs hitting. Allied airplanes flew above us, shooting towards Hürtgen. Even though the villages had been spared until now, we planned to go to the cellar as soon it became dark.

On the morning of Sept. 16th, we assembled again but no one knew exactly what to do. The women made coffee and stood almost on each other's feet. The men stood in the front gardens and debated how soon the Americans would come.

Nothing else happened. At noon again we got some stew. Some Schevenhütter went towards the public swimming pool („Badeanstalt“) to watch for the Americans. I had joined them and suddenly, one said: „Do you hear the clank of the tank treads? There on the horizon they are coming. Let's go back. They will soon be in the village“. I also saw something greenish grey and hurried back with the others. Meanwhile, some inhabitants had hung out white linens. Then the first tank came closer.

Across the meadows we saw the Americans proceed in a chain, protecting each other. It was a ghostly show, without a single shot fired. The first civilians dared to come out and wave to the soldiers. Later came the rearguard. Open Jeeps, trucks and many soldiers of the American army filled the village streets. Some of the soldiers went to the civilians and told them clearly to go back into their houses. Meantime,



it had gotten dark. We sat inside, waiting eagerly for what would happen next.

Suddenly, the door opened and my brother Karl entered followed by a soldier carrying a gun. Karl grinned mischievously. None of us had missed him or seen that he had gone outdoors. Clearly he could not speak fluent English, but as a high school student, he seemed to communicate with the soldier. The soldier put a loaf of white bread on the table, something we had not seen for a long time.

The women offered him some hot soup using sign language. But he indicated No and said something we didn't understand. Karl translated that the soldier said that we can't leave the house tonight and we should stay in the cellar. We felt relieved.

The soldier left the house and we went into the cellar. I went with my parents to the cellar of the other house and Gerta Stiel went with her parents to the cellar across the street. There were additional families in the cellar with us.

Everybody was in an optimistic mood, encouraged by the luck of having survived the war so well. We figured that the Americans would be in Wenau and Langerwehe by tomorrow. Now, with the battles on German soil, the German armed forces certainly would soon surrender. Probably with these thoughts, most inhabitants of Schevenhütte fell asleep that evening of September 16th, 1944.

The next morning, everybody awakened early. Nervous unrest and curiosity certainly mobilized us all. My brother was already outdoors, and we went on the sidewalk from the cellar into the house, and the soldiers left us alone.

The street was bustling. It swarmed with American troops, and everywhere stood Jeeps and other motor vehicles. Large amounts of wire was being strung, and it looked as if nobody noticed the civilian population. It was quiet, and the war noise could be heard only in the distance.

The weather had also had brightened and it looked like a beautiful day. The residents stood in the front gardens and watched the flow of the soldiers.

While I kept prudently back, my brother was on his way, getting information from the soldiers. But he had nothing concrete to report. Supposedly there was still hard fighting in the villages of Mausbach and Gressenich, and the soldiers here came from Zweifall through Vicht. Nor had he realized that the soldiers had stopped at the end of the village and wouldn't proceed any further.

It stayed quiet the whole day. Anyway, as a precaution we again spent the night in the cellar. On the morning of September 18th began really nice weather. Because German artillery shells hit from time to time in the general area of the village, many civilians remained in the cellars. Karl, of course, was again on his way and approached the soldiers here and there, and it seemed actually that some soldiers talked kindly with him. Our parents didn't like that and Father asked several times this just-turned 16-year-old boy to stay in the house, however it was in vain. The women tried somehow to make themselves useful and had even washed my mother's things and hung them outdoors. The others crouched in the kitchen or the living room and somehow killed time.

Soon it was evening and time to go back again to the cellar. I went there mopingly because Gerta Stiel preferred the other cellar with her parents. The night also proceeded quietly and the morning of September 19th promised to be a sunny day again. I watched the soldiers, but consciously stayed back.

In contrast, my brother Karl, despite Father's repeated warnings, was out on the street again. Around midday he appeared with his latest information. At the end of the village towards Wenau-Langerwehe, the Americans had not moved a step further. Karl reported that the Americans are in Mausbach, but German soldiers still held their position in Gressenich. Gressenich would be severely fought over, and the village would change hands several times. Also at Hürtgen, the advance of the Americans had been stopped.

This news, assuming it was correct, gave ample topics for people to talk about. My father, Peter Hagen and Johann Stiel, discussed the situation, and from time to time I also took part. Our unspoken wish was that the Americans would move forward further and that the Germans would finally surrender.

I had finished my bread with lard that my mother had made, and went into the garden. I watched the Americans through the hedge. I was getting sad and dissatisfied with the Americans sticking here. I thought of home, the business and my colleagues, who were perhaps working in Weissenbach by now. How many may have gotten there and how many had stayed here?

Then I thought of the Bachs who had suddenly appeared in the forest. Never had I believed that Mr. Bach would simply have stayed here, because of his leading position. Then however, I remembered that Bach's wife, had been rumored in the company to be of Jewish descent. This could, No - this had to be the reason for Mr. Bach's decision. He didn't want to expose her to further danger from the Nazis.

Actually, I realized now, that her Jewish heritage was the reason for him acting in this manner. I was several times at the Bach's house and had known Mrs. Bach to be a nice, friendly woman. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted as several artillery shells whistled along closer, crashing down somewhere right next to the village. The Americans were yelling, and someone from the house yelled: „Quick, into the cellar“! I sprinted around the house, while more shells from the Heistern-Langerwehe direction hissed along. Everybody sat in the cellars, listening. The noise continued and it seemed to be a German counterattack. After 10 p.m., the shooting ceased and it was silent all night. On the morning of September 20th, it started again. Along with it came the noise of rather low-flying fighter airplanes, flying across the valley and shooting towards Hürtgen-Vossenack with their cannons. Somebody in a corner of the cellar began to recite their Rosary and the others joined in. Hour after hour passed. Once, the noise outdoors stopped, only to start again after short time. In late afternoon the shelling pauses became longer, and one of the men tried to explore the situation outdoors. With the accompanying shelling, he came quickly back into the cellar. As far as he could determine, no shell had hit in the near vicinity. When it was dark, the shooting stopped. But no one dared to venture out of the cellar because of possible shooting by the Americans. The women distributed some sandwiches, and after the meal some laid down to sleep. The men still talked, but soon everybody seemed to sleep. The silence remained on the morning of the 21st of September.

One by one, almost everyone left the cellar, glad to breathe fresh outdoor air once again. My mother had taken care of the goats in the barn, and was now preparing a meal in the kitchen. She had delayed it until midday because she did not trust the silence. My father disagreed, but everybody longed for a warm meal. It might have been about 4 p.m.. My sister Gertrud had set the table, and everyone was seated. I



stood in the doorway and looked across the street. Gerta Stiel's father stood there and talked with the other house occupants. In the stone cellars of that house she and her parents spent the nights.

My mother was busy at the stove beside me. Suddenly, I heard the sound of an artillery shell coming close. Instinctively, I spun behind a doorpost for protection. Simultaneously, there was a deafening bang. With the sudden spin, I had almost pushed my mother over the stove. I heard screams from the street and from the next room. I saw my mother rush into the room.

As she said later, she had seen through the open door that father, Gertrud, and Mrs. Hagen fell to the ground because of shrapnel flying through the window. She immediately threw herself down, lying head to head with my sister, Gertrud. Then she saw Gertrud's eyes roll back, and saw right away a small wound in her neck, near the larynx. She called to Gertrud but got no answer. Then she screamed, and I helped her carry my dying sister into the next room. I was stiff with horror. My mother bent over her child, already dead, and talked insistently to her. She caressed her head, and spoke louder and louder, as if to awaken her from sleep. Then, she cried out loud, she refused to believe that her hardly twenty-year old daughter was dead. But as she must have begun to recognize it, she called on the Lord. She spoke and argued with God, as if the Lord were standing directly beside her. She simply could not grasp it and yelled: „Won't anybody bring a doctor?“ I, kneeling stunned beside her, jumped up to fetch an American medic. I turned around quickly, made one step and suddenly stopped. There was Mrs. Hagen lying on the ground in front of me, moaning. Her husband bent over her, trying to close a big wound in her stomach by pushing with his bare hands. Mr. Hagen was also crying out desperately for a medic. This motivated me even more, and I ran out the door. The moment I reached the street, I suddenly stopped and came right back. Beside the entrance I had seen a human being lying there. As I passed by, the thought flashed through me, „Is that my father?“ I knelt beside him and called to him: „Dad, What's the matter?“ I shook him and called to him again, but his eyes stared past at me into the infinite.

I don't remember what else I did. I can't describe what I felt. Nor do I know how long I had knelt beside my dead father when the American medics pulled me away by the arm and brought me into the house. Karl had brought the medics, who now took the seriously injured Mrs. Kahlen in an ambulance.

They also pulled my mother away from my dead sister, and forced us all to immediately return to the cellar, because shells were still landing in the area. My mother looked around crying and called. „Where is my husband?“ She looked at my brother, then me: „Where is your dad?“ No one could tell her the monstrous. When she asked me quietly in a pain-racked voice: „Did something happen to him as well?“, I only nodded.

Then, she asked incredulously: „But not dead?“ When I only nod, she moans loudly and collapses. The medics helped support her, and gently persuaded us to go into the cellar. Outdoors the shells were still crashing, the noise of shrapnel whirring. Hastily, but silently, as if in a trance, Karl and I brought our mother into the cellar.

We had to pass by our dead father and hold on to our mother, because she wanted to go to her beloved dead person. What went on in those seconds cannot be put into words. Back in the cellar, everybody felt so sorry for her.

She kept on crying and just collapsed. She had no strength left in her and was just moaning. However, a few seconds later, she gathered herself again and cried, „This is no good. We can't just let him lie there outdoors. Bring him here, or at least into the house with Gertrud.“

A woman took her by the arm, and one of the men said: „Mrs. Koll, we can't do that. Anybody who goes outside now puts his life on the line. We must wait for a pause in the shelling, and then we will help you.“ This reasoning did not help. She shouted out in her pain: „Nobody understands me. My husband lies there outdoors. I cannot let him lie on the hard pavement.“ Although I agreed we should wait until it was quieter, then she took two blankets, pressed them into my brother's hands and said sobbing: „Then, at least cover him up!“ She told us by her heart-wrenching gaze that we had no other choice.

We both gave in and climbed the high cellar stairway. We knew our mother's wish came from the sorrow that filled her heart, and if thinking normally she would not have sent us into such danger. We tried to do it quickly, opened the front door and started to run. One street away, an artillery shell exploded. My brother covered our father and walked back. I went in the house to see Gertrud. There, Gertrud lay in front of the wardrobe in a narrow room, just like when we had left her. I looked at her sadly, and as I heard the sound of incoming shells, I covered her hastily and then it happened: A mighty explosion shook the house, followed by breaking and bursting. I fell to the floor and saw the wardrobe coming down on me. The wardrobe hit the wall and stuck diagonally. Wall stones, mortar, and dirt fell in a cloud of dust. I laid in the triangle of wall, wardrobe and ground, half on my dead sister. It groaned and gnashed above me. Then it was quiet. I tried to move and noticed that I was not injured. The wardrobe had protected me. The dust lifted and, to free myself from this awkward situation, I had to crawl, clearing some stones ahead of me. Then, I squeezed up and out of the small side window. I wanted to reach the cellar again as quickly as possible, but what I saw outdoors took my breath away. The shell had directly hit the Hammerschmidt house next door, in which my mother was with the others. The gable wall of the house, where I was with the dead sister, had caved in. It was the collapsing wall that had overturned the wardrobe.

I heard from the debris dull cries and screams, and then at my side I saw my brother Karl, who was eagerly trying to clear rocks, wood and chunks of dirt from the cellar window.. I hurried to him and saw the former entrance covered with debris. I could imagine what was happening in the cellar, and Karl helped with the clearing. He said: „They're not getting any air“. With our bare hands, we proceeded with great difficulty. But they worked from indoors as well, and soon we saw a small hole that quickly became ever bigger.

I saw that Karl's knee was bleeding and asked him about it. He said: „Only a scrape“, and dug further. The voices in the cellar became louder, and someone announced that no one was injured. Our mother pushed to the cellar window, and when she saw the two of us, we heard aloud, „God, Thank you“. Karl suddenly paused and looked at his hand. He had blood on his fingers. I had seen this and to my inquiring look he said: „I just felt a slight piercing pain in my chest and automatically grabbed there. It's not really sore.“ He wanted to continue, but I urged him to get help from the American medics. I would clear the cellar window alone. When I saw Karl run towards the restaurant where the Americans had established a first-aid station, I thought: „I really hope it's nothing serious!“

Soon the cellar window was free, but the older people had no chance to get through. Since the shells were still falling in the area, I had crawled in through the cellar window. My mother immediately came

to me and said: „I was happy to see you both outdoors, but now where is Karl“? I told her about the slight knee injury, and that I had sent him to the medics. I didn't mention the other injury, and merely thought: „Karl will return probably immediately again.“ Mother gave me a hard look, but said nothing. I watched the men take pains to free the cellar steps. Also Hagen helped. I looked into his face - a face full of horrors. From the dust and wiped tears it had become almost unrecognizable. He said crying: „My wife won't survive the injury. If only we had stayed in the forest. If only we had gone with Bach's back to Vicht. Lord, how can this be?!“ He desperately shoveled more rubble aside.

The people had two shovels, with which the work went ahead quickly. Suddenly the shelling outdoors had stopped. I went to my mother, who was holding her shoulder and asked her if she was injured. She said: „It's nothing. During the explosion I was knocked against the cellar wall. It's only a small bruise.“ Then she started crying again, and said: „Why did this have to happen to us?“ I had no further words of comfort and said: „It's quieter outdoors. If we go right now, we can bring Dad into the house.“

But the short silence was a cruel illusion. The German artillery soldiers once again began the scary shelling. They had probably concentrated their fire on this place. As soon the exit was cleared, everybody wanted to go to another cellar as quickly as possible. They grabbed all their belongings they could carry and sneaked to the street along the house wall. Before we crossed the street, we had to pass again my dead father. I held my mother tight and used a lot of force to get her past the dead body. The shrapnel whistled around us and a Hell of noise from the shooting of fighter planes made us hurry. Finally, we got across the street and into the other cellar.

The cellar was full of people and they let us in only reluctantly. Mrs. Stiel was there and everyone already knew what had happened. She was also crying and only then did we find out what had happened to her. Her husband Johann was at the same time, by the same shell severely injured, and had been taken away by the Americans. Gerta's father, whom she adored so much, had also been hit. She sat on a chair, staring ahead with red, tear-stained eyes. I went to her and put my arm around her. She didn't look up as I stroked her hair. I could say nothing. What could I say?

My mother was with Mrs. Stiel. Both talked and cried about the events. I thought of my brother Karl. Where did he end up? I silently sneaked out. I intended to go, at any cost, to the first-aid station to find out what had happened to him. The cellar had another exit to the street. I opened the outside door and heard the war noise again. At a full run, using every cover, I crossed the brook and then happily came to the first-aid station.

So far this building (Hotel Casino) had been spared, and inside it was bustling with activity. Besides American soldiers, who were bandaged on folding beds, I saw also some civilians. But I saw neither my brother, nor any other friend. Then I saw two village girls who were previously active in the Red Cross, and went the American medics to help out. I knew both and spoke with one of them. She knew about my brother, that he had a slight knee injury, but also a wound in the left side of his chest. They suspected shrapnel in his chest and thus took him right away to a military surgical tent in Mulartshütte. She didn't believe it was life-threatening.

I answered: „It sounds good. I believe you, but how do I tell this to my mother? She answered: „You don't have to tell her everything now, just tell her about the knee injury“. She reported on the condition of the other injured persons, and that they had taken Mr. Stiel away as well. His leg injury was very

serious as well as she could judge it so far, and it probably required amputation. However you must not tell Mrs. Stiel and Gerta!“ I nodded and asked about Mrs. Hagen. She didn’t know her, but had heard of a woman who was taken away with a dreadful stomach injury. I was very upset about this news, and I knew I would convey only half-truths. She looked regretfully to me and said: „I am very sorry for you and Gerta about all of this, but now I must go. Take care of yourself!“ „Thank you,“ I replied and exited pensively.

Outdoors, the howl of the artillery shells greeted me again, the crash of their explosions and the rattle of the fighter plane cannons that continually scanned the village and shot into the forest. The fear inside me began to increase. Would we even survive this? I was genuinely afraid, and thought about my mother, with whom I was now alone. Then, I ran quickly. It was only about 150 meters I had to run, but to me it felt like an eternity. Between was the destroyed bridge. However, I could find dry footing in the residue of the bridge lying in the water, and crossed over the brook. I used every possible cover and arrived safely in the cellar without being stopped by the Americans.

My mother received me, melting in tears. She had only one question: „Where is Karl, and how is he doing?“ I told her about his knee injury and that the Americans took him as a precaution to a military hospital. I added: „At least he is out of this whole mess.“ She breathed a sigh of relief, but in her eyes I also saw her doubts about whether I was withholding anything. She said nothing, wished the earth would open up and swallow me whole. “Dear God”, I thought “How I behave, knowing it’s not right! But I also have my worries”. Gerta’s mother took me aside to ask about her husband. I reported what I had found out, but withheld the fears of the nurse. I was sorry about Gerta’s mother. She was a good person, that faithfully took care of her household and understood everyone’s needs without words. I was pulled out of my thoughts. In the cellar someone had begun to pray loudly. It was for me as if they wanted to drown out the noise outdoors. With the howl of each incoming shell, the voices became louder, and every time, the people bent forward for protection. Everybody expected a hit at any moment. It was an eerie scene in the flickering candlelight. I didn’t think about praying. My thoughts jumped back and forth. I looked across at Gerta and spoke to her. But she only nodded and cried. She didn’t even look at me. I looked at my mother. Yesterday, loaded with energy and purpose, everything working, and now knocked down, a sorry sack of a human being. I felt helpless and alone, and I felt the tears dripping down.

I thought of my sister how lively and funny she was, of my father, who always did everything for the family to keep it together. Only now I realized that it hit father outdoors. Both mother and I thought that father too had been sitting indoors with the others at the table. I thought and thought and I simply could not grasp it all. Oh God, what you let happen here is cruel! I still hear the artillery howling, the noise of the airplanes, the people praying, and I pray with them.

Hours and hours passed in prayer. Then suddenly my thoughts went their own way again. The thought of being powerless and exposed to it all. Shouldn’t I simply run out the cellar out and run away?

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted. I thought I heard steps and rubbing sounds outdoors. I crouched beside the door and stared at it. I could clearly hear gun shots and as an answer the rattling of a fast firearm. That was no illusion -- something was going on there outside. At the moment, there were no shell impacts. I was more outdoor with my ears, as indoors and had asked the people who prayed to be quieter. But they couldn’t do it. I tried to fathom the events outdoors.

If the Americans shot with handguns, German soldiers had to be nearby. Logically, German shock-troops had forced an entry into the village. The nonstop artillery fire of the Germans was probably the preparation for it. My thoughts jumped again: If the Germans recaptured the village and the Americans had to retreat, then, it would be bad for the villagers. And what would they do with me? With this thought, I looked as if hypnotized at the door which could be pushed open any second. In my mind I saw them already come through: The leader of the shock-troops with a pistol in his hand. Behind him several privates with guns ready to attack. The idea drove my fear into my neck.

And it would be so indeed. The Germans would search each cellar and each corner for American soldiers, and if they find me here, I would need an excuse. Admittedly I was no longer a soldier, as obviously could be seen from my draft card, but on further examination, they would ask me why I am not in Weissenbach. It was completely comforting that there were others in the same situation as I, detained in the village.

I was wide awake, with my nerves tense with these ideas. I knew that they still existed, those Hitler fanatics, who still, where the allied forces in the own country already held a foothold, believed in final victory. The rumor of a new miracle weapon made them blind to reality. They were usually blood-young fellows that were overzealous about their careers, caused by the high losses, many of whom were promoted too fast to NCO and officer status. Without consideration they followed the slogans of „persevering to the last man“ and proceeded thoughtlessly against each dissident. Tasks were transferred to them that they could not handle, and too often they enforced their commands with their handguns. I learned to know such types at the German-Russian front near Naberosnoje/Woronesch at the Don. With these thoughts and ideas, it became scalding hot for me and I felt perspiration on my forehead. I was far away in my thoughts and did not notice that for a long time the outdoors had become silent. Only the recent shell fire brought back me into harsh reality. The renewed artillery impacts could not be far. Some who had slept were awakened and prayed vociferously now with those who had prayed the whole night. It seemed to become even worse outdoors than the day before.

Now - the howling along of an artillery shell, and the very noisy, terrifying bang! Everyone in the cellar had ducked down on the ground. Dust and chunks of plasters blocked our view. I looked upward -- a hole gaped in the wall there and we saw that it had already become bright. Large wall stones had fallen down and lay on the ground in front of the wall. There, where children had played hardly a hour ago. Like a miracle, nobody had been harmed.

Now I was finally finished here! I had firmly decided to leave this center of German artillery fire. I grasped my mother under her arm and said with a voice that allowed no argument, „I'm staying here no more, we're getting out of here!“ I let Mrs. Stiel and Gerta decide for themselves whether to come along. My firm determination and the haste with which I collected some of our possessions didn't leave the women any choice. As if in trance, I put a few coats over my shoulder. Two blankets over one shoulder and over the other shoulder a cord, from which several bags hung in the front and behind, holding food and a few kettles. My mother put two coats over her shoulders and tried to drag along a bundle of laundry as well as a big bag. I took the bundle from her and put it in a corner. Then, I grasped her under the arm, pushed the door open and pulled her outside.

A hideous noise welcomed us. The street lay totally in the target zone of the German artillery and I wanted to get quickly to cover in the side street lying about fifty meters away. Once again we had to pass



the house where father was lying dead under a blanket. My mother cried again out loud and I sensed that she wanted to tear away herself from me. I had expected this and pressed her solidly to me. I was in a hurry to get away from the firing and simply pulled her along. I don't remember what mother yelled in her pain, but I noticed she was angry at me. I did not want to lose her as well, so it didn't bother me. Several times I pushed her down on the ground when shells hit nearby. I allowed no pauses and kept hurrying. When we got to the protective hillside, I looked around. Gerta, her mother and others followed us. I knew the area. A canyon-like path led into the forest and finally we would be out of the danger zone.

Halfway up we were stopped by American soldiers, who allowed us into a bunker. There were more civilians taking refuge there beside the American soldiers. We three, Hagen with his daughter and others who had fled the witch's cauldron rested here.

The Germans seemed to have the bunker exactly in their gunsights, because often, one had the feeling it shook from the impacts. I observed the hectic fussing of the soldiers and was not sure whether this unit could withstand a seriously concentrated German attack. We felt not at all safe there and pestered the Americans by our gestures to let us move further ahead. When after a while the shelling stopped, the soldiers let us move on towards the forest. Only the uncanny noise of the low-flying American airplanes that shot without stopping had remained. Some men with women and children, and behind them Gerta, went ahead. I had lifted my mother and Gerta's mother and pulled us laboriously up the rise with the two of them crying again and again. At the edge of the forest we met more American soldiers. They gave us canned meat. I was overloaded and could hardly move. From time to time, I threw off some ballast which I thought I could survive without. Then, it went downhill and we came to the Vicht road. There, it swarmed with American military. In the hillside, we took a pause and sat down in the grass. Hardly had my mother sat down, when she became again conscious of her situation and began to cry loudly.

She aroused the pity of some soldiers, and a German-speaking officer came to us and asked: „Why is the woman crying?“ My mother, sobbing, told what had happened a few hours ago. The officer listened patiently and then put his arm around her. Then, he shouted some commands to the soldiers. Afterwards a truck drove up, on which we were all to go. He personally helped my mother up on the vehicle. The trip was to Vicht, where we were received by a small flock of villagers. Since the Americans had already brought several civilians there from Schevenhütte, they knew of the dreadful occurrences. Waiting there were also Matjö Bach and his wife, who were with us in the forest and went again to Vicht back because of all their wet stuff. They invited us to their house.

But there was somebody else that had great compassion for my mother: It was Wilhelm Prost, a long-time co-worker of my father, who could hardly believe what happened. He also invited us to his house. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bach had consoled my mother and taken her by the arm into her house nearby. There we all sat in the room and no one knew what to say with all the sorrow. Hardly any war noise could be heard from here. Mrs. Bach offered us hot soup and something to eat. But no one had any appetite. Everyone was deep in his own thoughts. My mother still sobbed, and suddenly it broke out of her: „What have we done? We can't just leave our dead people lying there! I have to go back!“ Mrs. Bach kept trying to comfort her, but she could not calm down. Matjö Bach came and put his arm around her and said firmly: „Dear Mrs. Koll, what happened to you is bad, and for you there is no solace, and it is very sad that you had to leave your dead behind. But now, you're going too far. You punish yourself and also your son with this conflict of conscience. You have a duty to rescue and preserve your life. Now, you must think of your other children, who still need you, and for whom you must be still there.“ She shook her head and cried: „You speak well, but my husband lies there outdoors, we should have brought him into the house!“ Mr. Bach responded: „You are a devoted woman - you may only endanger your life and the lives of others only when you rescue people. Now you can't help anymore, and imagine if another of you would die from this action? Then you would be sorry your whole life long. Try to see it this way and pray for your husband

and your daughter, because only God knows why he let these dreadful things happen“. A priest could not have said these words better, but what good were words? My mother sank into herself and kept sobbing. Everyone was close to tears and Mr. Bach himself wiped away his tears with a tissue. He left the room and went to his wife. The words of Mr. Bach reassured me that I had acted properly, but being safe now, I began to wonder whether I should have fulfilled my mother's wish to bring my dead father inside. - It got dark and since the electricity had been out for days, Mr. Bach lit two candles for us. We all sat around in silence and everyone brooded. No more conversation came up. Gerta Stiel had suddenly passed out and tilted sideways from her chair. I was ready to catch her just before she fell to the ground. However, she immediately came again to consciousness, with a cadaverous face. After she had drunk a glass of water, she was better again. Only now, her mother told us that the deadly artillery shell had also injured Gerta. Her calf had been hit by shrapnel. By luck it was only a scratch, which the Americans had treated with a band-aid.

Meanwhile, some of us had prepared a place to sleep in the attic. The family Bach had offered us enough blankets that we needed not to fear the cold of the night. Little by little, all had fallen asleep.

A short time later I awoke, and had to remember where I was. As my mother moaned beside me in her sleep, everything came back to me again. I sat up and saw the cruel pictures again in the darkness before me. I wanted to scare all of this away, but I couldn't. I was dog tired, and wanted to sleep. But the thoughts could not easily be expelled. They always turned around one point: „How could this have happened? What did I do or what have we done wrong?“ With these heavy thoughts I fell asleep.

In the following months of the evacuation, much solace and understanding was brought from everywhere from the Vicht people to us, but –

Broken houses can be built again. Injuries can be eased and healed. But – dead persons never come back again!

Whoever experienced first-hand the last days of the war and the months of the postwar era is concerned about how often and when people use the words „distress and misery“ so easily and quickly in our society of full prosperity today. People are not ashamed to speak of „distress“ if a fellow citizen cannot afford a car, vacation or similar.

This and similar experiences should awaken us from the dream of materialism, and should remind us to be pursue a simpler life style, unless, one day, we may suddenly forced to do so!“



Hubert Koll





American soldiers at „Lamersiefen“ cross the Wehebach creek.  
A temporary bridge built by the Army Corps of Engineers is on the left.



The same location as above but from the opposite direction.  
The picture was taken looking East from the „Lamersiefen“ side.



Two American tank destroyers at a sharp right turn on the road to the Müller quarry.



The blown up bridge at the Wehebach creek near the Backofen intersection.  
The force of the explosion damaged the surrounding houses considerably.





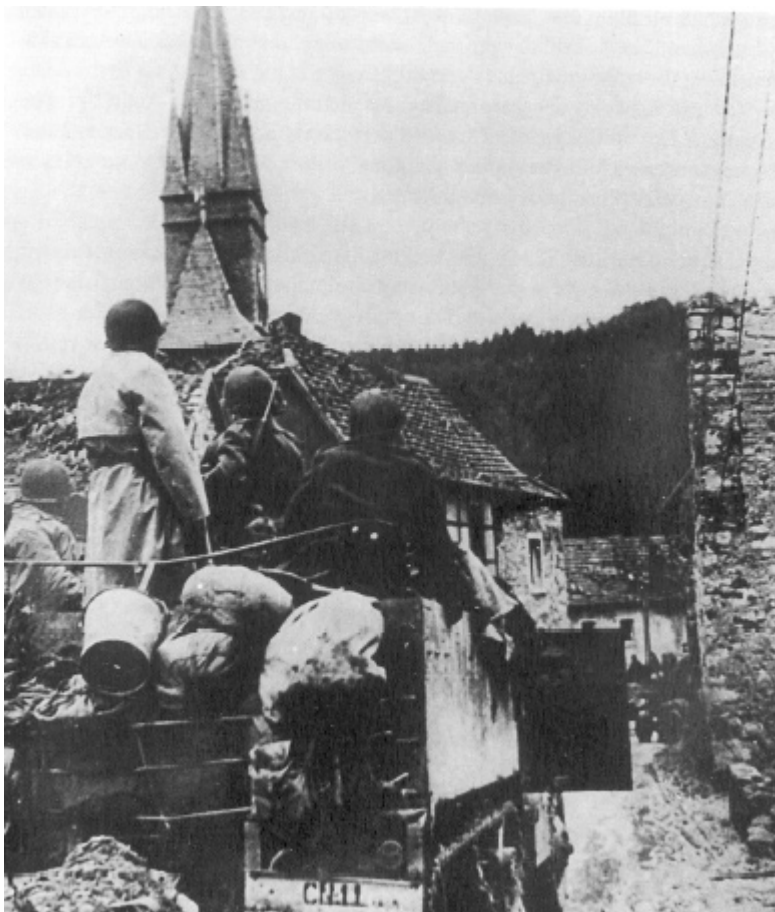
An American medium „Sherman“ tank guards Langerweher Street. A second one stands in front of the restaurant „Alte Post“ with its gun aiming along Hohl Street.



Fleeing civilians at a location, today called Nideggener Street. The building „Knallhött“ had to be totally torn down after the war.



This picture was taken before the American offensive on the 16th of November 1944.  
The view is from the church looking down Langerweher Street.



American armored  
vehicle in (today's)  
Daens Street



American officer  
and a goat on the  
Nideggener Street



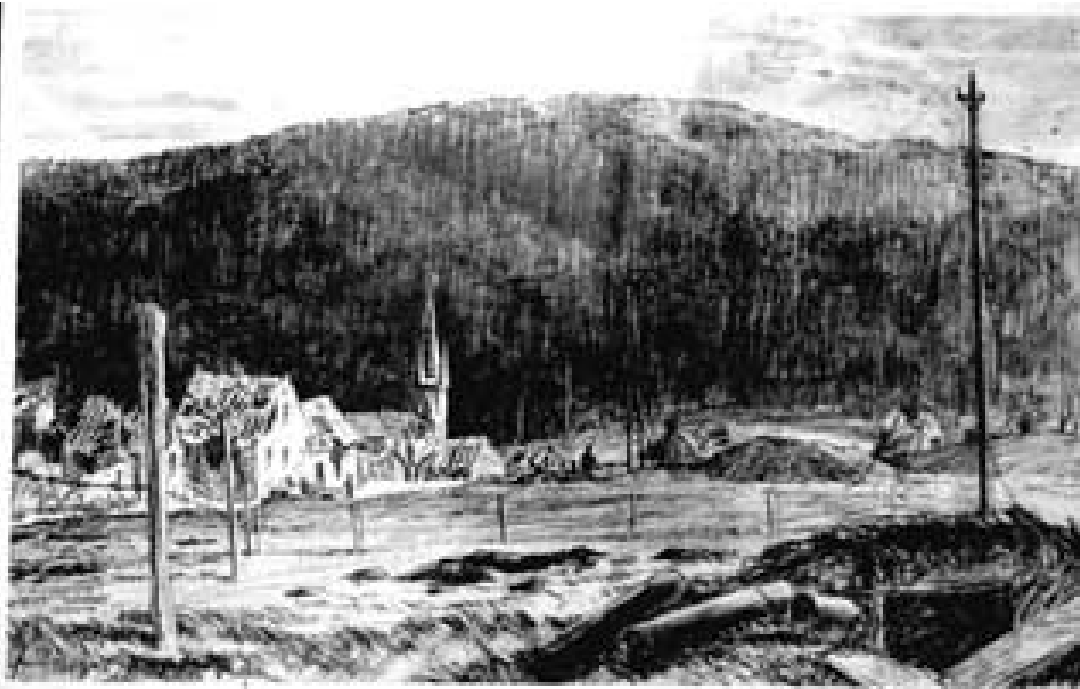
Route junction in Schevenhütte

Artist: S/Sgt Rudi Wedow - Military Archives Washington - 22 Dec 1944

Reproduced by 663rd Engineering Co. US Army. 1945

A captain of the 298th Engineer Combat Battalion wrote: *"This town is on the outskirts of the Hurtgen Forest - we worked that road so long I'll never forget it - My platoon put up a bridge which you can see only vaguely."*





Hohl Street in Schevenhütte

Artist : S/Sgt. Rudi Wedow - Military Archives Washington - 26 Nov 1944

Reproduced by 663rd Engineering Co. US Army. 1945



American soldier lying in a Schevenhütte street, after being hit by German flak. The medics had tried giving first aid, but it was not enough.

(NWDNS-112-SGA-44(30564))

— image previously not included —

### **Civilian casualties from Schevenhütte**

Wilhelm Vogts	08 Jan 1872 - 17 Sep 1944
Josefine Büttgen geb. Roeb	11 Jun 1915 - 19 Sep 1944
Engelbert Neffgen	23 Jan 1867 - 20 Sep 1944
Heinrich Schoenen	15 Feb 1900 - 22 Sep 1944
Josef Gülden	19 Mar 1911 - 23 Sep 1944
Peter Wagemann	11 May 1901 - 26 Sep 1944
Josef Stiel	20 Sep 1893 - 28 Oct 1944
Josef Hilgers	09 Jan 1895 - 05 Nov 1944
Heinrich Mathar	17 Feb 1905 - 02 Feb 1945
Erich Wirtz	14 Jun 1940 - 12 Mar 1945
Peter Wittmann	20 Aug 1900 - 12 Jul 1945
Johann Averdung	08 Jan 1883 - 15 Jul 1945
Johann Gerartz	30 Aug 1927 - 15 Jul 1945

### **On the battle field**

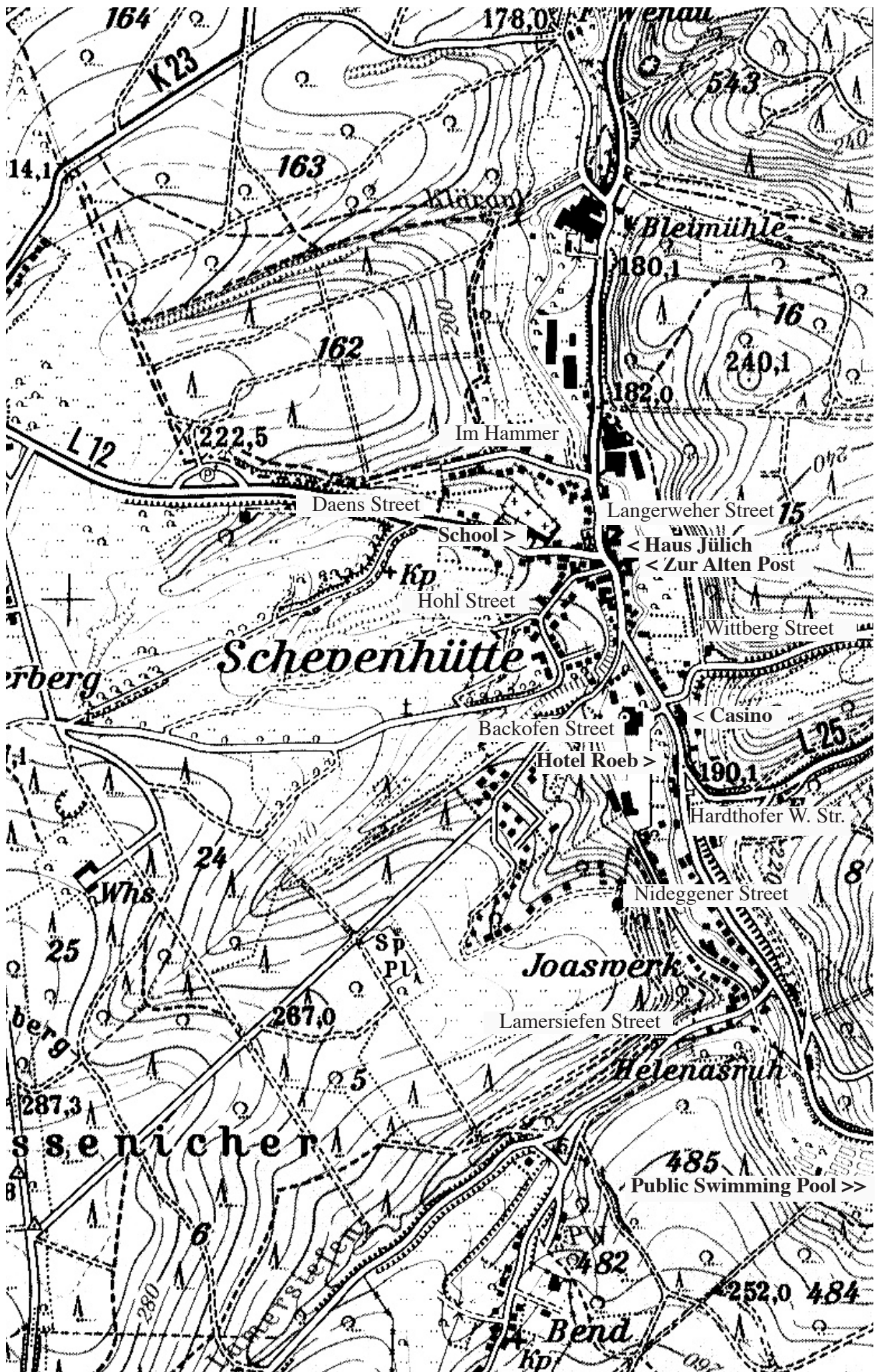
Heinrich Schavier	06 Jul 1919 - 01 Jul 1940
Heinrich Jungbluth	15 Jan 1905 - 04 Jul 1941
Peter Schavier	09 Sep 1920 - 31 Jan 1943
Heinrich Schoenen	01 Nov 1924 - 08 Feb 1943
Jakob Lück	12 Jan 1922 - 17 Mar 1943
Johann Wirtz	27 Sep 1922 - 16 Aug 1943
Jakob Dunkel	14 Dec 1904 - 08 Oct 1943
Peter Wirtz	03 May 1908 - 06 Dec 1943
Heinrich Kruff	15 Dec 1914 - 30 Apr 1944
Willi Hilgers	09 Jun 1922 - 21 Oct 1944
Christian Gülden	27 Jul 1924 - Jun 1944
Hermann Stiel	17 Sep 1926 - 12 Oct 1944
Franz Stiel	26 Jan 1923 - 09 Dec 1944
Josef Dunkel	27 Dec 1925 - 12 Dec 1944
Josef Emmerich	06 Jan 1920 - 27 Dec 1944
Wilhelm Rombach	23 Apr 1906 - Dec 1944
Engelbert Werker	29 Jan 1912 - 01 Dec 1945
Josef Frentz	22 Dec 1900 - 25 Mar 1945
Franz Wirtz	03 Apr 1914 - Apr 1945
Heinrich Wirtz	11 May 1910 - 20 Jan 1946
Josef Rombach	10 Mar 1917 - 20 Apr 1948
Hubert Kruff	26 Jul 1927 - 28 Oct 1949



### **Missing in action**

Wilhelm Frings	23 Mar 1904 - 16 Aug 1944
Josef Kessel	05 Jan 1924 - 27 Aug 1944
Martin Pütz	12 May 1906 - Sep 1944
Ernst Ebert	25 Nov 1911 - 27 Nov 1944
Peter Heinen	1909 - Nov 1944
Christian Falter	01 Feb 1927 - 11 Jan 1945
Hans Thelen	26 Aug 1926 - 25 Jan 1945
Wilhelm Joussen	21 Nov 1908 - 20 Apr 1945
Heinrich Weber	21 Mar 1910 - Sep 1945
Arnold Frings	09 Mar 1923 - 1945
Edmund Werker	18 Jan 1907 - 02 Mar 1945





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