

Recollections of the Franco-German War, 1870-71

by **Barbara (Böhr) Dick**

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Introduction

On July 19, 1870, France declared war against Prussia and early in August German troops attacked the French near Wissembourg (Weissenburg), Alsace. In this first encounter of the Franco-German war Alsatian Mennonites were caught in the crossfire of the opposing armies, causing them to respond to violence and bloodshed. Barbara Böhr Dick's recollections of the war deals with what happened and what the war meant to the Mennonites.

On the northern Alsatian border, just south-east of Wissembourg, there stood until May 1940 the old castle of the Geisberg. The lands around and the castle itself, built by Baron Johann von Hatzel in 1711, became the home of some Swiss Mennonite families as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. Baron of Hatzel favoured the Mennonites as renters and agricultural workers on his estate, resisting the 1712 decree of King Louis XIV to banish the Mennonites from the area. Under King Louis XV the mandates against the Mennonites were eased somewhat, although the rulers and society continued to discriminate against them, limited their population growth and caused them economic hardships.

During the French Revolution the nobles were driven from many of their possessions—which affected the owners of the Geisberg as well—and in the 1790s Mennonite families acquired ownership of portions of the Geisberg estate and castle (Foth 44). Among the early Mennonite families on the Geisberg were such names as Hirschler, Lehmann, Schowalter, Böhr and others, all of Amish-Mennonite background who sought to live their faith and life according to the Dordrecht Confession of 1632.

In the time of Napoleon Bonaparte and his conquests it became increasingly difficult for Mennonites in France to uphold their principles and values, especially the traditional practice of nonresistance. While Mennonites under Napoleon were granted equality of citizenship and religious toleration, they were not exempt from military service. They either had to serve in the military or pay for substitute soldiers. Those Mennonites who believed this to be inconsistent with their beliefs emigrated to North America. Those who remained in the Rhine River regions, including the Alsace and the Palatinate, sought to maintain their traditional German language and faith as well as they could, but nonresistance was greatly weakened among them and the acculturation process took its toll, reducing church membership and integrating many of the Mennonites into French society (Yoder).

Sometime before the Franco-German war part of the Geisberg castle and estate passed into the possession of the Jakob Böhr family, while other parts were held by other Mennonite and non-Mennonite families. The Böhrs continued to live by the old values and faith of their Amish-Mennonite forebears. However, when they achieved a modest prosperity and became exposed to such cultural things as music and the arts (Schotter), the earlier Amish simplicity and separateness receded more and more into the background. While the Böhrs and the other Mennonites in the Alsace were respected members of their communities, their Mennonite faith and German language continued to set them apart from the predominantly Catholic and Protestant population. The Mennonites thus remained until fairly recently strangers in the land.

The war between France and Germany was to affect Mennonites everywhere. Started by the French under Emperor Napoleon III and used by the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck to achieve his political objectives, including the unification of the German states, the war not only affected the Mennonites living in the battle zones, but it also had far-reaching consequences for Mennonites throughout Europe. Increasing nationalism in Germany, war hysteria in the 1860s when Prussia fought successfully against Denmark and Austria, and the approaching conflict with France—all this resulted in Prussian governmental measures aimed at Mennonite exemption from military service. When Mennonite delegates to Berlin suggested to the authorities that in the present political circumstances they might be compelled to emigrate to Russia where many of their coreligionists had gone before, the crown prince, Friedrich, told them bluntly that in Tsarist Russia everything was changing and that there too exemption from military service might be coming to an end. Crown Prince Friedrich was right. One of the results of the Franco-German war was that the Russian government under Tsar Alexander II announced to the world that it would no longer regard itself bound by the naval clauses of the Treaty of Paris which had ended the Crimean War in 1856. The Tsar would now build naval or military bases on the shores of the Black Sea and generally build up his military. Beginning in 1870 Russia introduced universal military service with the result that one

third of Russian Mennonites eventually left Russia for Canada and the United States and those who remained behind had to come to terms with forms of alternative services for their country. Thus with regard to nonresistance, Mennonites throughout Europe were fighting a losing battle. In Germany specifically, during the Franco-German conflict many Mennonite young men participated in the military and many German Mennonites were not only loyal supporters of their fatherland but they also defended and protested their loyalty and active participation in the military as the Ernst Wildenbruch drama affair reveals (*Menn. Blätter*, 1888). With the renunciation of nonresistance the German Mennonites under Bismarck gave up many other of their traditional distinctives (Friesen).

While the European Mennonites found it increasingly difficult to maintain their peace position in the face of governmental policies, individuals, families and communities sought to live the way of peace and love in their relations to the society around them. This is where the Jakob Böhr family, the subject of the following story, serves as an example of how Mennonites responded to war and violence around them.

The Böhr family on the Geisberg consisted of Jakob Böhr and his wife, their two children, Barbara ("Bärbel") and Jean, an unmarried brother to Jakob, Peter, and several maids. Together with the other several Mennonite families living on the Geisberg, the Böhrs prior to the war enjoyed a life of peace, security and harmony. During the week they worked on the fields and took care of their cattle and on Sundays they generally worshipped together with other families in one of the rooms of the castle. The children of the estate, including Barbara and Jean, attended school in nearby Wissembourg, but private lessons such as music and languages were taken at home under the supervision of tutors (Schotter 6). According to Barbara's account the Mennonites on the Geisberg enjoyed their peace and a modest prosperity due largely to harmonious relationships on the estate, hard work, and generally good crops.

When the news reached the Mennonites on the Geisberg that there would be war between France and Germany, the Böhr family and their neighbours were deeply distressed. Not only were they as Mennonites always vulnerable in times of war, but this time they were especially so since they lived in potential war zones and as German-speaking pacifists they might be viewed with suspicion by the French and the Germans. In fact, prior to the war the German-speaking Alsatians were ordered by the French authorities to maintain a strict neutrality. The Alsatians "had not fared badly under French rule, they felt no special sympathy for the Prussians, and they remained quiet and unpolitical, and this all the more since Mennonites were peace-loving people who according to their confession [of faith] were forbidden to bear arms and fight" (Schotter 1).

When on August 4, 1870, the fighting between France and Germany began in the Wissembourg area, which included the Geisberg as well, the Böhr family took cover in a cellar. They were soon joined by a number of

French soldiers, which alarmed the Böhr family since this not only compromised their neutrality but also might be seen by the German army as giving support to the French military. All pleading with the French soldiers to leave the cellar fell on deaf ears. In fact, when the Germans stormed the Geisberg, the French in the cellar were about to shoot had it not been for the timely intervention of Jakob Böhr. However, when the Germans occupied the Geisberg Jakob Böhr and his brother Peter could not convince them that they had nothing to do with the French military. They were taken prisoner as spies—despite the pleas and protestations of Mrs. Böhr—and then transported by train to Küstrin, east of Berlin, to be tried and, if found guilty, executed. It was not until six and a half weeks later that the two brothers' innocence was established and they were allowed to return to their family on the Geisberg.

The account of fighting around the Geisberg was recorded by Barbara Böhr thirty-four years after the event. During the war Barbara was about eleven years of age. In 1879 she married Heinrich Dick of Rosenhof in southern Russia (see Epilogue) where friends and relatives prevailed upon her to write down her recollections of the Franco-German war and her family's involvement in it. She thus wrote her recollections in 1904. That she was well qualified to record her experiences there is no doubt. She was a bright child and was most observant of everything that took place around her. In the Geisberg community she was considered somewhat of a leader among the young people. For example, when at the end of the war the German Crown Prince Friedrich came to inspect the battlefields and on that occasion also paid a visit to the Geisberg, it was Barbara who was chosen to greet the prince in the name of the Mennonites there and to present him with a basket filled with select grapes (Schotter 2). When Barbara's mother died some two years after the events described in the narrative, the 13-year-old girl had to assume the responsibilities of the household, looking after her father, brother, and the servants on the estate (Schotter 2). Also, when she married the Russian-Mennonite Heinrich Dick at age twenty and then followed him to Russia in 1879, Barbara soon had to assume the womanly responsibilities of the Rosenhof, an estate which the parents of her husband had established and built up. Her cheerful disposition, her love of people, and especially her ability to counsel young and old alike, drew relatives, friends and even strangers to her (Schotter 3-4).

Barbara's story is an interesting and important document. The recollections provide the reader with glimpses into the life of Mennonite estate owners in the Alsace of the mid-nineteenth century and into how these heirs to the Anabaptist peace tradition responded to international conflict and human tragedy at a time when that tradition was sorely put to the test. While the document nowhere mentions Mennonites and their nonresistant position specifically, the story is an eloquent witness to peacemaking, sacrificial love, and human bridge-building between friend and foe in most difficult times. Barbara writes her narrative not only as a committed Mennonite Christian, but also as a woman who experienced war, brute force, and inhumanity with

sensitivity, understanding, empathy, and compassion for suffering and dying people and animals. Without moralizing about the evils of war and without taking sides in the Franco-German conflict, Barbara leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that there is nothing heroic about war and that peace and reconciliation ought to be pursued and promoted. Barbara's account breathes humanity, tolerance, Christian piety, and an unshakable belief that in the end the forces of love and good will conquer the forces of hate and evil.

A copy of the document was made available to me by Martha (Dick) Neufeld of Winnipeg, a granddaughter of Barbara. To my knowledge the manuscript has not been published before, although the accuracy of what happened on the Geisberg, including the most important details, has been confirmed in an October, 1870, issue of the *Mennonitische Blätter* (Christian Schowalter 63-64). The manuscript consists of ten and a half single-spaced type-written pages written in a very good German. The first seven pages and a paragraph on page 8 contain Barbara's recollections of her first-hand experiences of the war. From page 8 to the end of the manuscript Barbara records the experiences of her father and uncle during their arrest and imprisonment as "spies" as "remembered by a friend" of hers. It is not known who this friend was, but the accuracy of the Böhr brothers' story is confirmed by other accounts, including Jakob Ellenberger, a Mennonite minister in the Palatinate. Ellenberger's account includes primarily J. Böhr's story of his and his brother's imprisonment and trial as "spies," which agrees in all details with Barbara's narrative (109-120).

Martha Neufeld also provided me with a copy of "Bärbel," the story of Barbara Böhr's marriage to Heinrich Dick and her life and death in southern Russia, as told by Agathe Schotter, a governess, teacher and close friend in the Heinrich and Barbara Dick household. Many details concerning Barbara's character and life in Russia as well as glimpses into the life of a Russian-Mennonite estate at the turn of the twentieth century are provided by this document. The epilogue at the end of this article relies heavily on Schotter's story. I am most grateful to Martha Neufeld for allowing me to translate, edit, and publish her grandmother's story.

I also wish to express my indebtedness to Ken Reddig of the Mennonite Brethren archives in Winnipeg who has visited the Geisberg on several occasions. He provided me with valuable details concerning the area around the Geisberg and directed me to published material with regard to the history and geography of Wissembourg.

BARBARA'S STORY

Upon requests from many persons I shall attempt with the help of God to put in writing my experiences and those of my relatives during the war years of 1870-71. This will be a simple yet true story, whose smallest details are still very much alive in my memory. To be sure, 34 years filled with sorrows and joys have since then passed. The main characters, both nobles and



Barbara (Böhr) Dick. Picture: 1904



Since 1850 the top floor of the Geisberg gate was used as a meeting place.

common persons, have gone long ago to their eternal rest, so that no one can provide me with exact information to fill the possible gaps in my notes. However, the fears and terrors connected with a battle which was fought close to where we lived have been deeply etched in the child's soul. Many a worthy reader will no doubt know that suffering and endless misery are the inevitable consequences of war. Yet no pen can fully describe what can only be comprehended through one's own experience. May the following varied scenes serve primarily to glorify our faithful God who also in times of terror protects, keeps, and helps those who put their trust in him.

In the beautiful Alsace—in former times called the Garden of France—close to the Bavarian border and on a considerable elevation there stands the old castle of Geisberg with its several houses and barns. This was my home (Heimat). Toward the west, some three kilometres away, there lie the forested Vosges Mountains. Toward the east one has from the garden of the castle a beautiful view of the Rhine Valley and beyond that of the Black Forest. Toward the north there lies the small town of Wissembourg, at that time the border town between France and Germany. The castle was built in 1711 by Baron Johann Kaspar von Hatzel. The names [of the Hatzels] can still be seen in the bells which today call the inhabitants to the worship services in the church. In 1790 the noble owners [of the castle] fled, and the castle with its land passed into the hands of middle-class citizens. During the war and long time before that the entire estate and part of the castle itself belonged to my relatives and my father, while the other half of the castle belonged to two other families and was used as a temporary summer home.

Peace in the land and the yields of the fields, especially the hops industry, contributed toward a modest prosperity. Working together, coupled with unity and love, united our hearts and made us thankful to God who in our home was worshipped with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Then suddenly, like lightening from the blue sky, we received news that there would be a war. The people living along the border were terrified. I must note here that father remained very calm in all this, and upon the advice of people that because we lived far away from villages we should flee, father had but one answer: "We are in God's hand everywhere." This assurance from father had a calming influence upon all of us; even the servants remained calm and decided to stay with us.

We had heard that in the past people thought it advisable to hide the inventory and money which were not needed for immediate use. Thus each of the five families filled a chest with underwear and clothes as well as some money and immured the chests in a large vaulted cellar below the castle.

In the last days of July there appeared three French outposts, rudely invading the surrounding orchards and thus indicating that the peaceful times were coming to an end and that war was imminent. In spite of this my four-year-old brother and I continued to attend school at Wissembourg until one morning Bavarian soldiers appeared at the Geisberg and frightened the inhabitants. After this father decided to keep us home. The situation now

became more and more threatening. Reports indicated that a large military formation was approaching and thus measures were taken to gather in the grain harvest. When the battle began the fields were quite bare except for the hops, potatoes and beet fields which were then completely destroyed during the battle.

On August 3 [1870] toward evening some French regiments approached and occupied a wide stretch of land all the way to the Vosges Mountains, including the villages of Steinseltz, Oberhofen and Rott. General Douai was the chief commanding officer of the army which also included a regiment of Turkos [Algerian soldiers]. The soldiers were stationed in the open fields and in the town, thus contributing to an increasing lively activity. Tents were set up and the tired soldiers began to prepare their evening meal from the partly purchased and partly donated provisions. People came and went, so that it became difficult to maintain order in the house. At ten o'clock eight officers arrived for whom supper still had to be prepared. When after all the excitement my parents and we children prepared to go to bed quite late, my parents expressed their serious concerns about the days ahead. This was to be the last time where we all had our devotions together to thank God for the protection of the previous day.

During the night there was a frightful thunderstorm. After three months of drought God mercifully quenched the thirst of the parched earth. This too was an expression of God's wonderful and caring love, for without this rain the fire which was later deliberately set would have destroyed the entire settlement. For the poor soldiers, however, who were tired from the long marches there was little rest on account of the rain. Wet to their skin, many of them came in the morning and asked for either straw or wood to make fire. Most of them did not ask; they simply took whatever they could find. It is impossible to fully describe the mood which had taken hold of the soldiers. In spite of the courage and sense of victory which they seemed to express in word and bearing, the older ones among them were visibly depressed.

We children had of course no idea of what might happen. I remember only that early in the morning of August 4 the necessary chores were quickly completed, after which my mother together with the maids prepared beds for wounded soldiers, something which had been ordered by the officials in the village. Father intended to go to town to purchase a blanket which was still needed. My uncle, an unmarried brother of my father, busied himself with others to prepare the necessary fodder for the cattle. About ten minutes later, at 8:30 AM, we heard the first cannon-shot fired by Bavarian soldiers on the other side of Wissembourg. Fear and terror gripped all of us. Our first thought was father, hoping that he would return soon, for we naturally felt most secure within the confines of our walls. It did not take long before our dear father appeared and calmed us with his presence, strength and firm trust in God. He had heard and seen the first cannon-shot from the hill. Father and my uncle, who had also returned to us in a hurry, now sought to hide quickly the most valuable papers and documents and did whatever else had to be done.

All of this took about half an hour. The artillery fire became more intense. One of our maids came in pale and terrified, telling us that a bullet had whizzed by very close to her.

I should note here that when the shooting began there was an indescribable confusion in the French camp. The soldiers, occupied with their breakfast and not knowing how close the enemy was, now left everything and rushed to their weapons. The camp which our people later inspected and searched presented a curious sight: munition, rifles, cooking utensils, underwear, and hundreds of letters lay scattered about.

Father said: "Perhaps we'll now have to get into the cellar so that we're at least safe from the bullets." For a better understanding I'll have to insert here that the vaulted cellar was located in a hill behind the house, level with the ground. The terrain was such that half a wall, toward the north-east, was accessible from the outside. In this wall there was a small window which, however, we forgot in our hurry to cover properly. In the next hour or so countless rifle bullets entered through this opening. That not a single bullet injured us was the Lord's miraculous leading. All of us went into the cellar to hide: my parents, uncle, my only brother, I, and our two maids. After the house and cellar doors were bolted, father read a passage from the Word of God and then commended us to the protection of the Almighty. At first we sat on the bench, but since the cannon and rifle shooting became more intense and came closer we had to sit down flat on the floor, for one bullet after another came through the window and broke bottles and glasses. My dear father had a piece of mortar shoot loose spray into his face. Later he told us that only one thought crossed his mind, namely who of the small group would be killed first. All of us, no doubt, cried out in our hearts to God that he might help us, for the moaning and screaming of soldiers as well as the whistling of bullets and the rattling of the mitrailleuse [a recently invented machine gun] were terrible.

For four full hours we found ourselves in this terrifying situation. On the third floor a grenade hit through two thick walls and exploded. It seemed as if the house would collapse. Approximately a quarter to half an hour before the end of the battle eight French soldiers crashed through the tightly bolted door of the cellar and came to where we were, dragging with them a badly-wounded comrade whose flowing blood wet the clothes of my mother. No one dared to move, however, and cold perspiration covered all of us. Father requested of the soldiers through us children, who could speak French, that they might not endanger us through their presence and thus leave. But the soldiers stayed. In the outside door of the cellar there was a small sliding window through which a bullet passed, very close to us, and which tore a piece from a soldier's cheek. Immediately the soldier lifted his rifle and intended to shoot. I don't know how it happened, but my father jumped up and knocked the rifle out of his hands. The man no doubt realized that it was inadvisable to shoot and thus calmed down.

Soon thereafter we heard uninterrupted hurrah calls, the cries and rage

reached their climax, the cellar doors toward the kitchen and outside were torn open, and the Prussians yelled: "Get out!" How we got out I don't know anymore. I still heard my father saying that we should surrender. Outside there were many men who were looking at the [French] soldiers who were jumping out of the broken windows. One of the [soldiers] men called to the others: "Stop them! They are spies!" Immediately they grabbed my father. He wanted to defend himself by saying that this was our property, but nobody listened to him. He was taken prisoner and beaten so severely with a rifle butt that father thought he would be killed. When I saw this I shouted to my mother: "Mother, mother, they are killing father!" When my mother, who had already entered the house with my brother heard me, she came to my father's help, but a soldier hit her on the chest with a rifle and threw her back. They also took my uncle captive, leading both away, and we lost sight of them.

I cannot describe our misfortune. Having passed through fear and terror for the past hours, we were now also orphaned and forsaken in the terrible tumult which followed. When we entered our living quarters we saw a seriously wounded soldier crouched under the bench. He was then brought to bed in the living room, but died the next morning. After a few hours everything not shot or smashed to pieces was taken from the lower level and from the kitchen and cellar. In the rooms of the second floor beds were made for German officers. The next morning they left for Froschweiler where a great battle was fought. In the cellar soldiers, after drinking their fill, poured out wine and milk without regard of the countless half-famished other soldiers who after the hot day were left without any refreshments. The same happened in the other houses. We were left with nothing to eat until the next morning, when relatives of ours from outside [Geisberg] pushed through the guards with great difficulty and brought us food and drink.

Immediately after the battle we found no place to stay, because there were so many wounded soldiers who had to be put up. My mother who was practically numb against everything taking place around her, was compelled to taste the food that was brought from the kitchen and cellar since the soldiers believed it to be poisoned. The soldiers themselves had still not recovered from the battle. Men who had taken part in the battle and in later years visited us described the emotional condition in which they had found themselves: first it is the fear which grips even the most courageous at the start of the battle, and then it is rage at the thought of whether a brother or friend will die, a thought which enables one to push forward and shoot down ruthlessly whoever belongs to the enemy.

Many [German soldiers] scoffed at us when they saw us standing there sad, saying: "Serves you right! You wanted this war!" Others, more compassionate, sought to comfort my poor mother by saying that they too had left a wife and children at home and did not know whether they would see them again. Tears rolled down their cheeks.

It is difficult to describe how the hours passed until evening. There was indescribable confusion everywhere. New troops arrived constantly, men and

horses required water, and by the evening the water level in the wells was down to the bottom so that there was no water left for the wounded soldiers. Well into the night the wounded were picked up in the fields and brought into the stables and other available quarters. Moving scenes took place between friend and foe who now lay so peacefully together. Many died of their wounds the same day. A seriously wounded French soldier asked my cousin to kill him in order to relieve him of his pain. The bodies of the dead covered the ground and one walked through them numb against everything. One could not help it. The living thought of themselves only. Death had been so close and fear of new danger was written heavily on everyone's face.

All day we had seen none of our relatives until about five o'clock in the evening, when they [soldiers] began to lead out horses, cows, calves, in short, all the cattle from the barns which caused our servant maids to cry out time and again, while my mother and we moaned for father. Then we suddenly saw my cousin who had to lead away his favorite horse. Soon thereafter his brother came pressing through the soldiers and shouted: "Fire!" New terrors took hold of us, for the buildings were all connected and there was not a drop of water to extinguish the fire. What was to be done? Our people then got the idea to fight the fire with liquid manure. By the barns there were large tanks with wooden pumps to preserve the liquid manure used to fertilize the fields. In this too we experienced the visible help of God who commanded that the fire stop. As we found out months later from an officer the fire had been wickedly set by another officer, for the Geisberg was to be burned to the ground.

It was not till now that our people were informed that [the Germans] had taken father and uncle prisoners. However, nothing could be done to set them free. All enquiries with officers and common soldiers concerning their whereabouts were unsuccessful. And thus our greatest worry was the uncertainty with regard to the fate of our dear prisoners.

The victors searched for hours for [possibly] hidden French soldiers. With threats, which caused the blood to run cold, the searchers came to my uncle and demanded that the fleeing men be given up. Yet none had hidden any of them, declaring that they knew nothing [about any fugitives]. Thereupon the cellars and passages were searched, but God helped in that no one was found, for otherwise we would have been killed and burned in the courtyard. To think of sleep during the following night was impossible. The constant fear of fire, added to that the restlessness outside, kept everyone from falling asleep.

In the middle of the night one of my cousins was taken outside in order to serve as guide in the search for fugitives. When he refused to enter a caved-in subterranean passage, they wanted to shoot him immediately. However, one of the soldiers thought the better of it and convinced himself that it was impossible to proceed farther and thus the search in this place was halted.

An hour after the battle the affable (*leutselige*) Crown Prince Friedrich came to inspect the battlefield. Had someone advised us to appeal to the

Crown Prince and ask for the release of our loved ones, we would have done so. The noble gentleman, who later presented himself most amicably, would have immediately granted our request, for on the same day he released two prisoners who were innocent citizens of Wissembourg. However, no one had such compassion for us, for in a place where many persons die and others end up as prisoners of war and experience misery the individual finds little consideration. I wish to note here that all further enquiries remained unsuccessful until their release took place 6 1/2 weeks later upon the (order) of the highest authorities.

What was our courtyard like the day after the battle? The regular army had left in the early morning of August 5 for Wörth where on August 6 the great battle took place. Left behind were only a small occupation unit and a medical corps detachment with physicians and attendants who now performed their difficult task. My brother acted as an interpreter during the two days that the wounded were staying at the Geisberg in hastily established sickbays until they were transported. The wounded languished for some refreshment which was hard to come by since each house was completely cleaned out [of all provisions]. Only my aunt had managed to hide in an unguarded moment a little pot of melted butter, and when during the night the wells were filled with water again she prepared a soup which my relatives gave to the wounded. They were rewarded amply by the gratitude of the poorest among the poor.

Since there were no longer any wagons and horses left, it became necessary upon strict orders of the chief captain in the medical corps, to send messengers to the surrounding villages to request acquaintances that necessary vehicles be provided, a grant which of course was gladly given. The wounded were then transported away in hay wagons by day and by night; their pain was intense and they moaned [as this was done]. Men from the neighboring village looked after the burial of the dead, although under the supervision of the military authorities. Some of the corpses remained unburied until the evening of August 6, and only after our special request were they buried. I will say no more about this. Aside from this, the air was already contaminated through pieces of decaying meat which in the haste of the days had remained uneaten and unused. Three cows had been killed in the barns by stray bullets.

After six weeks the case of my captured father seemed to unravel. The commandant of Wissembourg notified my mother to appear before him with regard to my father. When my mother appeared before the commandant he presented himself as a most friendly and amicable gentleman who told my mother everything he knew concerning father's whereabouts. She discovered that father was a prisoner of war in Küstrin.

I shall now insert his own experiences as recorded by a friend of mine from her recollections. [See also Ellenberger 109-120]

When after the battle the shooting had ended, we came into the open where the Prussians grabbed my brother Peter and myself and led us away.

Wanting to defend myself a bit, I said: "But this is my property." However, they did not listen to me but instead the soldiers beat me so hard that I thought I would be killed even before I had left the courtyard. In the meantime my brother did not have to suffer as much. Without a jacket (*Wams*) and cap we two brothers, together with the captured French soldiers, were taken to the village of Altenstadt where we had to stand [and wait] for about three hours. Along the street there came a man I knew. I asked him kindly to get me a jacket and a hat. Fortunately he brought me the desired articles. When I put on the jacket I found in one of its pockets a piece of bread. This was our only food from Thursday morning till Friday evening when we arrived in Kassel. From Altenstadt we walked three hours to Schaidt. Here we were given, for our money, a glass of wine which together with the piece of bread constituted our meal. Then we were ordered to board the train.

Arriving in Landau, the train stopped and with that our misery began. From all sides we heard the calls: "We want to see the spies!" It had become known already at all railway stations that two spies were coming. I was just standing at the door of the freight car—we had been put into a cattle car—when the people lit a torch made of tar in order to view us better. A richly-dressed gentleman began to scold angrily: "You bad dog! You miserable dog! You are not worth the powder in a rifle, but you will be shot anyway!" With that he took a loaf of bread and threw it against my head, so that I would have fallen over had it not been for the many soldiers sitting in the car. Shortly after that a stone also hit my chin so that I thought they intended to stone me to death in the car. To avoid this mistreatment we withdrew to the back [of the car]. The soldiers did not care about us. They had received enough to eat and drink. Thus it went from one station to another until we arrived in Kassel. Here we were told to get off and eat. "Oh God," I said, "I would rather die of hunger than get off." My brother did not feel any better either; nevertheless we had to get off and go to a large tent where each one received a portion of soup with meat in it.

We had many spectators. While eating I wept for the first time on this trip. A lady asked: "Oh, what kind of people are these here?" I answered her: "We two are brothers. They have taken us along because they suspect us of being spies. I am doubly unhappy because I had to leave everything behind and I could not even say goodbye to my dear wife and my two children." Remembering my loved ones I was unable to speak further. Seeking to comfort us, the lady said: "You will no doubt soon be able to return to your family." Weeping, the sympathetic lady left. After we had eaten we had to board the train again to continue our journey.

When the train stopped at the last or second last station there came a higher officer and said: "Out with the spies! Because of these I am here!" We two brothers had to walk the entire length of the train and back in order to be seen by all. We were greeted here similarly to what happened to us in Landau. I thought to myself: "But I am like a deaf man, I do not hear, like a dumb man who does not open his mouth" [Psalm 38:13.RSV]. From there we travelled

to Berlin where we arrived on Saturday evening. The train entered the station slowly and proceeded out again, evidently to provide some pleasure for the Berliners. For us, however, this manoeuvre was most painful. In Berlin we again received something to eat. The people behaved most decently and sympathized with us. After we had eaten we had to board the train again in order to travel to Küstrin where we arrived on Sunday morning at 3 o'clock.

In Küstrin we were ordered to stand on a large open place with an entire regiment of soldiers with mounted bayonets surrounding us. In front and behind us stood two soldiers with loaded rifles who commanded: "Just a step to the side and you're dead!" Now the first lieutenant began to hold court. I explained everything to him, but he did not believe me, saying: "We will soon be through with you. You will be shot!" But then I answered him: "I shall not be afraid even though the case goes to the highest court. If we are to be shot I shall be able to look straight at the bullet. If, however, there is a just court, justice will have to prevail, for we are innocent." I admonished my brother also and told him to remain steadfast: "I think our last hour will have struck, and if we have to die, we have to die innocently." After standing there for another half hour, we were taken to prison where we had to languish for six weeks.

On the first day my money was taken from me. In the morning we were given bitter-black coffee and black bread, which, however, did not taste good. When on the second day I received my money back, things went a bit better. During our imprisonment we were always separated, only seldom did we get together, and at first we were treated most coldly. Soon, however, the [guards'] confidence in us increased. The custodian (*Beschliesser*) asked for permission to obtain for us the most necessary clothes, coffee with milk, etc.

The sleeping cot in our room was hard, but our situation was harder still. During this time we were interrogated once more, but separately, and each of course told only the truth. We also found that it had helped somewhat, for the commandant of the fortress wrote again to the armies in France in order to enquire with regard to our innocence. He received, however, a negative reply.

At first we stayed all day in our rooms, but after some time each one of us was permitted to go outside daily for an hour, my brother from 8:30 to 9:30 A.M. and I from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M. We were, however, closely guarded. During our daily walks we could either walk or stand still, just as we wished. The length of our path was approximately 220 metres and bordered on the garden of a military officer[?]. One day while I walked up and down I saw a lady and her servant picking pears in the garden. When the lady noticed me she put three pears into the apron of her granddaughter, a girl of about seven years of age, and lifted her across the fence. The girl ran after me with the childlike words: "Spy, spy, just stop a minute!" Whereupon I stood still. The child now asked the guard whether she could give me the pears. "No!" said the soldier sullenly. I turned around and said: "Yes, of course, dear child, just come here and give them to me!" As the child approached me slowly and gave me the three pears, I got a two-silver-dime (*Zweissilbergroschenstück*)

from my pocket and wanted to give it to the child, who, however, shouted: "Oh, I can't take anything!" Then I said: "Then come to me and give me your little hand!" The child did so at once, and at that I put the money into her pocket. When the girl noticed this, she jumped happily toward the garden and shouted: "Grandma, grandma, this spy has given me a two-silver-dime." I now walked on, and when I again came to the same place I saw how the lady again lifted the child with an apron-full of pears across the fence. She ran toward me and said: "Spy, you have to take these pears as well." When I was about to take the pears, the guard said to me: "You ought to go for walks and not to take pears." Knowing that I had a right to it, I said: "Do you want to rob me of this pleasure as well which the innocent child was granting me?" The soldier said nothing.

Since in the meantime my [free] time had ended I took the pears and went back to my prison room. On the last Friday of my imprisonment the two commandants of the fortress came to my room and said: "These people will have to get something to read or else they'll starve (*verschmachten*)."

Each of us had in our room a prayerbook, a [New] Testament, and a hymnbook. "Well, I have nothing else," the custodian said. "Let us get for them the history of our fatherland." Thereupon I said: "My dear sir, I would have a different request—if only someone would take pity on us and grant us justice." The gentleman, however, answered: "We can't do anything about that," and with that he left.

This conversation took place at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. At half past five we received our soup, at six I took off my jacket and was about to hit my hard cot when there was a knock at the door. It was the wife of the custodian, who said: "Listen, by tomorrow morning at half past four you will have to be at the railway station in order to travel to the Geisberg." In my great joy I didn't know what to do. I cried out loudly: "Now my innocence has seen the light of day!" I asked the woman to convey the good news to my brother as well, but he had already heard the news from the custodian. The latter soon came and asked me who had broken the news to me. I told him that Madam had communicated [the news] to me. At 3 o'clock they wanted to wake us up, but this night we did not sleep at all.

The next morning we were up and on our feet punctually. The sergeant's wife prepared coffee for us and we drank it. As we took our leave I rewarded the woman for her goodness. At half past four we boarded the train.

Epilogue

It was Peter Schmidt, an uncle of Heinrich Dick, who had told his young nephew that Barbara Böhr of the Geisberg, Alsace, "would make a suitable wife" for him. Uncle Schmidt had just returned from his long trip to western Germany where he had visited friends and relatives in the Palatinate and the Alsace. Young Barbara had "conquered his heart like a storm," Agathe Schotter later wrote (1). When Heinrich Dick travelled to the Geisberg to see

this girl for himself he agreed with his uncle's judgement concerning Barbara. The two young people fell in love, the wedding took place in 1879, and Barbara followed her husband to Russia, thus symbolically uniting the Swiss-Mennonite and Russian-Mennonite traditions.

While Barbara's life at the Rosenhof with its well-furnished houses surrounded by orchards, vineyards, and rose gardens was generally comfortable and pleasant, she found the many household responsibilities and social activities at times most taxing. In time five children were born to Heinrich and Barbara Dick, which added to the heavy work and responsibilities of the young woman who eventually had to assume the duties of sole mistress of the estate. In addition to the many visits from relatives and friends of the children, the Dicks arranged festivities, musical evenings, and other cultural activities. On such occasions various instruments were played, including the piano, accordion, and the clarinet, and "serious and happy songs" were sung in formal and informal gatherings (Schotter 5). While the music-making was generally not of polished artistic accomplishment, it nevertheless lifted the Dicks and their friends "from their daily life and their loneliness of the steppe to the realm of the ideal and beautiful" (Schotter 6). On Sundays Heinrich Dick would gather the family and sometimes neighbors for worship, at which time he read a sermon, prayed, and led in the singing of a hymn.

Meanwhile Barbara's father on the Geisberg made plans for the remaining years of his life. When his son Jean completed his military service in Germany and then shortly thereafter died, Jakob Böhr sold his property on the Geisberg and moved to his daughter in Russia. It was not long before he died there. He was spared the political and military turbulence in his homeland which during World War I (1914-18) became a battle zone again between the Germans and French and at the end of the war was returned to France. The Geisberg castle itself was destroyed during World War II and never rebuilt, although a new meeting house was built on the Geisberg and there is today a congregation of 110 members (*Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* 1989 161).

Back at the Rosenhof, Barbara's husband, Heinrich Dick, died fairly young after a lengthy illness. Barbara herself developed a heart condition. In the hope of finding a cure she travelled to Germany, but there was little improvement in her condition. However, her trips to Germany afforded her opportunities to visit her former home on the Geisberg and thus renew ties with her relatives and friends. At the Rosenhof Barbara continued to live for her children and manage the affairs of her estate. Since Russian-Mennonite estates were larger and owned by single families, unlike estates in Alsace where several families owned and worked them, Russian-Mennonite estate owners were more heavily burdened than their Alsatian counterparts. Barbara's life after her husband's death was thus difficult. She died on May 17, 1912, in Woronaja, the home of her oldest daughter, Anna, who was married to Abraham Bergmann, a son of Hermann Bergmann, the later first Mennon-

ite deputy to the Russian Imperial Duma (parliament). Barbara was buried at the Rosenhof.

Little did Barbara know in 1912 that just a few years later, beginning in 1917, not only would the Dick's estate be liquidated, but that the Russian-Mennonite world would be coming to an end as well. When in 1919 Hermann Bergmann and three of his sons, among them Barbara's son-in-law Abraham, were tortured and murdered (Töws 384-88; Lohrenz 104), they were among the hundreds of Mennonites who in the aftermath of World War I suffered similar fates. Barbara's descendants, like many other Russian Mennonites, were either exiled to northern and eastern parts of the Soviet Union, or they managed to emigrate in the 1920s to Canada and the United States where several of them are still living today.

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