

THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS MESSAGE SERVICE

The International Red Cross established a message service in 1936. **DEUTSCHES ROTES KREUZ** form letters enabled emigrants to stay in touch with relatives who had remained in Germany or had already been deported, even if they could not use the regular postal service. From 1940 onwards, corresponding by regular mail with countries at war with Germany was prohibited.

Family members were permitted to write messages of up to twenty-five words on a standard D.R.K form, but it often took several months for the messages to reach their recipients. Fearing censorship, the letter-writers often used prior-agreed, ambiguous phrases to relate bad news.

DEUTSCHES ROTES KREUZ FORM LETTER

Serial No: 8 Jan 1943 454171

Sender: Resi Blatt, Köln-Nippes, Hartwichstrasse 102.

Addressed to (her) brother

Recipient: Dr Helmut Müller c/o Pastor Wilhelm Lückhoff, 63 St. Georges Street, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Message (translated): 4.1.43 Dear brother! All healthy. Best wishes for the birth day. Parents, Hermann-Schmitz greet. Are glad that you are fine. Desire continued success. Sister Resi Blatt

Sent: 18 Feb. 1943

Arrived: pencil inscription 28.7.43. No evidence of handling by local censors

RESEARCH NOTES

1/ CONTENTS OF DEUTSCHES ROTES KREUZ FORM LETTER ANALYSED

Resi Blatt has not been traced. Maiden name may well have been Hermann-Schmitz. It is speculated that the original building at Hartwichstrasse 102, Köln-Nippes, was destroyed during the 288 aircraft RAF bombing raid on 8 to 9 July 1943. The geography is intact, but architecture is of post-war design.

Dr Helmut Müller (* 1908) was a teacher. Wife Henriette Augusta Müller (* 1908) (formerly Sacks) (born Papenhoff) was a business agent. Their marriage solemnized 22 April 1943 by

Minister W Lückhoff of the German Lutheran, Johannesburg; witnesses James H Taylor and Irmgard M(inna) M(aria) Lückhoff ¹.

Hermann-Schmitz not identified with any certainty.

2/ PASTOR WILHELM LÜCKHOFF

To-date nothing is known of the German background of Pastor Wilhelm Lückhoff.

In South Africa, Lückhoff was of the German Lutheran Church, first in Bloemfontein later Johannesburg. His known history is sparse and relies on his own recounting. In a letter from Bloemfontein dated 22 February 1940, he informs the reader of his membership of the Niemöller Group of the Confessional Church and of threats of violence and death made against his person when in Bloemfontein, South Africa. As a consequence, he resigned his position in Bloemfontein effective April 1940 and, together with his family, left town. *Inter alia* he mentions that he was secretary of the (local) German Relief Committee ².

In the Morning Tribune (Singapore) 4 March 1940 Lückhoff recounts how Nazi sympathisers and Church Counselors in the Orange Free State censured him for refusing to pray for God's blessing on Hitler. Receiving threatening largely anonymous letters, he was warned that his life would be in danger were he not to leave the province. He is quoted as saying "I have been fighting the Nazi spirit in Bloemfontein ever since I realised that Nazism and Christianity are in direct conflict. To have asked God's blessing for Hitler would have been a mockery" ³.

In an affidavit presented to the South African Supreme Court, Johannesburg by Lückhoff and dated 21 May 1943, he states that he is a pastor of the Lutheran Church, living at the Grand Hotel, Kerk Street, Johannesburg. That is where the trail ends.

3/ THE 1933 ALTONA DECLARATION, THE CONFESSING CHURCH (BEKENNENDE KIRCHE) AND MARTIN NIEMÖLLER.

From the middle of 1933, the Third Reich set up a State Evangelical Church with a Reichsbischof, Johann Heinrich Ludwig Müller (1883-1945). Always controversial, he was one of the leading figures in the movement of German Christians, an alliance propagated between Christianity and National Socialism. By creating a Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1935, the Nazis took various measures to place the Church entirely under the control of the State.

¹ S A Archives: TAB WLD 397/1943 *Ex Parte* Application. Helmut Müller and Henriette A Müller (26th May) 1943

² The Hour Glass. Die Uurglas. I/2017, p. 16 Graaff-Reinet Museum. Original archived.

³ Pastor Refuses to Bless Hitler. (Singapore) Morning Tribune 4 March 1940, p. 11; NewspaperSG, Singapore Government

Following the riots of "Altona's Bloody Sunday" when, on 17 July 1932, Communists and National Socialists had a bloody street battle leaving 18 dead, 21 Lutheran pastors signed a declaration which was first read in St. Trinitatis and St. Peter's Church, Altona on 11 January 1933⁴. The declaration, entitled "Wort und Bekenntnis Altonaer Pastoren in der Not und Verwirrung des öffentlichen Lebens" ("A Word and Confession in Times of Strife and Confusion in Public Life"), denounced political ideologies and stressed the importance of the Church's independence from political parties and the state. "We see our nation threatened with mortal danger; the danger lies in a new religion. The Church has been ordered by its Master to see that Christ is honoured by our nation in a manner befitting the Judge of the world. The Church knows that it will be called to account if the German nation turns its back on Christ without being forewarned." The declaration became a rallying point for the formation of the Confession Church, a group within German Lutheranism who opposed the pro-Nazi German Christians.


In 1934, Martin Niemöller (Martin Friedrich Gustav Emil Niemöller) (1892-1984) a prominent (though highly controversial) anti-Nazi theologian and pastor joined other Lutheran and Protestant churchmen such as Karl Barth (a Swiss Reformed theologian: 1886-1968) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)⁵ in founding the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*). The Confessing Church made a stand against this totalitarianism. This declaration was read from the pulpit to congregations throughout the nation. In 1935, 700 Confessing pastors were arrested; in 1937 Niemöller was placed in "protective custody" in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps from 1938 to 1945. A total of 2579 (2720) clergy of all denominations were incarcerated in Dachau of whom 1034 (692) died in the camp, were "transferred or liquidated", with more than 336 presumed dying in "invalid trains". In April 1945, Niemöller together with about 140 high-ranking prisoners survived a journey to the Alpine Fortress (*Alpenfestung*) where he was liberated by advanced units of the U.S. Seventh Army.

The Altona Declaration was followed by the Theological Declaration on the Current Situation of the German Protestant Church (DEK) (the Barmer Theological Declaration or the Barmer Confession) adopted at the first confessional synod from 29 to 31 May 1934 in Wuppertal-Barmen. It was celebrated philatelically 50 Years later with a special stamp issued by the German Federal Post Office in 1984.

⁴ Brochure and Postcard: Short history of the main church of St. Trinitatis Altona together with a contemporary postcard is presented Visited personally 2 August 2018.

⁵ "This is the end—for me the beginning of life." In response to Hitler's orders, Bonhoeffer was condemned to death on 8 April 1945 by SS judge Otto Thorbeck. He was executed at Flossenberg at the dawn on 9 April 1945, just two weeks before soldiers from the United States 90th and 97th Infantry Divisions liberated the camp.

Waltham 28.7.43
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Deutsches Rotes Kreuz
Präsidium / Auslandsdienst
Berlin SW 61, Bücherjahr 2

2 JAN 1943 454171

ANTRAG
an die *Agence Centrale des Prisonniers de Guerre, Genf*
— Internationales Komitee vom Roten Kreuz —
auf Nachrichtenvermittlung

REQUÊTE
de la *Croix-Rouge Allemande, Présidence, Service Etranger*
à l'*Agence Centrale des Prisonniers de Guerre, Genève*
— Comité International de la Croix-Rouge —
concernant la correspondance

1. Absender .. Regi Blatz, Wilm-Nippes
Expéditeur Harwichstrasse 102
bittet, an
prie de bien vouloir faire parvenir à

Verwandtschaftsgrad: seinen Bruder

2. Empfänger .. Dr. Helmut Müller, o/o Pastor
Destinataire Wilhelm Lückhoff, 63 St. Georges Street
.. Bloemfontein (Südafrika)
folgendes zu übermitteln / ce qui suit:

(Höchstens 25 Worte)
(25 mots au plus)

4/1 43. Lieber Bruder!

Alles gesund. Viel Gutes zum Geburtstag.
Eltern, Hartmann - Schmitz grüßen.

Sind froh, dass es Dir gut geht. Wünschen
weiter Erfolg. Schwester Hesi.
(Datum / date) (Unterschrift / Signature)

3. Empfänger antwortet umseitig
Destinataire répond au verso

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