

An Autobiographical Composition by Johann Hapke



The family of Johann Hapke, ca 1942-45, Michenau (Warthegau)

Front: Johann, Otilie (nee Krüger), Natalie
Rear: Hugo, Johanna, Dina, Reinhold

These accounts were hand written by Johann Hapke, apparently sometime during the final eight years of his life. His reason for writing this was to convey to his children certain important experiences in his teen and early adult years. These episodes in his life seemed to help shape his character and devotion to God as many people described him.

Course of Life Since 1901 – Confirmation

Since June 2, Sunday

Treatise for young and old.

Johann Hapke, farmer's son, born June 6, 1886, community of Debowiec, district of Wlodawa, Province Lublin

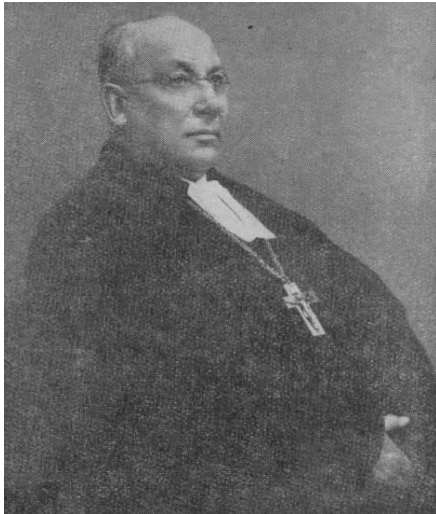
My last school year was of great personal significance in spiritual instruction. My teacher, Gottlieb Tondt, had a distinction that matched his name. He loved God and Jesus. He ensured that we confirmands did not fail to honor the love of God and Jesus, and to lay this on our hearts. Particularly the final instructions were concluded with prayer on our knees. We the confirmands were commended to the Lord, as a shepherd should do with his lambs. Since

he would have to give account for his responsibility in eternity before the shepherd of souls Jesus Christ, he laid the responsibility of this life on our conscience before Christ Jesus.

I was 15 years old then. That made an impression on us to prepare our souls for the Spirit of God. With eyes swollen, tears streaming, the heart full of shame and disgrace pertaining to so many transgressions of the holy calling, even the souls spoke with pleas and supplication. How I paid close attention to see such a tender state of well being of the frightened consciences about previous violations with shame and regret. Yes, we wanted to confess our sins to comfort our souls.

On confirmation day, after a preceding test from Dr. Schöneich, who devoted his soul to what is written in Ephesians 5:14, *“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you.”*, a great tear bath resulted from his powerful preaching at the confirmation and initiation at the prayer chapel. The Spirit of God moved mightily on preacher and listener, revealing to many poor souls their sinful state through the testimony of Luke 19 about Zacchaeus, specifically verse 9: *“Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has*

come to this house, ... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’” Oh, that was the bait for me and for every poor soul that was prepared for the Holy Spirit. First the Spirit awakens the desire as with Zacchaeus, then the personal experience ensues.



*Dr. Alexander Schöneich –
Pastor of the Augsburg-
Evangelical Church in Lublin
1888 – 1939*

For me the holy state occurred while on the altar. In spirit I vowed during the blessing through the laying on of hands *“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of eternal life.”* **Rev. 2:10.** Here I vowed to be faithful unto death before the triune God and the awareness of the evangelical Lutheran church. However, it occurred with me as it did with Peter, as I came from the altar to the confirmand room, even with tears flowing from my eyes and a penitent soul, my colleagues greeted me and said, “Now, if you belong to Him, come with us.” Instead of my soul being at peace there came great unrest. I even regretted that I vowed before the altar and God to be faithful unto death. A plan to live uprightly was nearly made, but not completed.

Surely it did not go so easily for me to resist the angry flesh and rage, as Satan obsessed my poor heart with the world and sin. Then came the admonishment and remembrance about the vows on the altar before the triune God and Shepherd of heaven and earth. Often I needed to get out of the “pleasure realm” as the younger generation would call it. On the way home accusations and remorse arose, pleas and prayers, promises and refusals, for such a long time. When I was 17 years old, after I had participated in the four-part choir and trumpet band since confirmation, I considered my vows and promised to return, to calm my soul in peace via religious practice.

One night the Lord gave me a frightful dream. I dreamt that a swarm of bees attacked me and stung me so severely that I sought refuge. I ran to a pond and wanted to throw myself in the water in order to save myself from the bees. As I approached the pond I remained defenseless because it was winter and the pond was frozen over. I screamed from fear and terror in my pain. In this pain I heard a voice say, "Come and hold on to Me. You can only find deliverance and peace by Me." at which point I saw the form of a cross. I cried out loud and woke up.

My brother who slept next to me woke up and asked, "What is with you?" I explained my dream and cried in fright. As I finished he provided the meaning by explaining, "The bees are your sins. He who grasped you is your and my Jesus in whom deliverance alone can be found."

I must reveal what a blessing we received that night. My brother was Samuel who studied as a teacher and cantor and was two years older than me.

In this emotional state and conduct I stood up once and then a second time and observed if my mother was already up, since she was always busy on the spinning wheel early in the morning. As I came in she looked at me in my frightened state and asked, "What is the matter? Did Samuel hit you?"

"No." I said.

"Did somebody steal the horses?"

I replied again, "No." and explained to mother how I had such a terrifying dream.

She interpreted the same as my brother. "The bees are your sins, which made you so fearful. He who called to you in your fear of sin is Jesus, the Savior of sinners, who alone can save you if you don't want to be lost." My mother belonged to a small group based from church that met in homes.

I remembered my devout teacher who pointed to Jesus, on the spiritual confirmation, on my vows at the holy altar before the triune God, and the congregation that was present. But I also remembered the bitter, painful unfaithfulness, that I lived contrary to the vows I made. I pledged anew to live according to faith and obedience contrary to my distressed soul. On [that confirmation] Sunday I attempted to flee the way of youthful desires, but oh, how long it took me to come to this.

1908

Military service in Moscow, during the reign of the czar.

In November 1907 I was enlisted and placed in the second grenadier regiment in Moscow. On the third of March we were sworn in since basic training was completed. Immediately after swearing the young soldiers were assigned to various groups. First came the medical division. Because I could read Latin script I was supposed to volunteer for this division, however, it would involve one year more of service. For that reason I did not resolve to assume this duty, something I regret to this day.

On another day the bandleader came with the regiment adjutant and were seeking wind instrumentalists for the regiment band. Because the band already knew me, and I was required to be tested by the adjutant concerning emergencies, things were pointing my way. Since they did not want me to leave this company, as I was selected for corporal officer school by the company commander, my position was critical.

Another day the company commander, who was not present on the previous day, came to forcefully and sternly ask me, "What, you do not want to stay with me? I have considered you for non-commissioned officer training and already selected you. You will stay with us."

I answered, "Yes sir, your Excellency, but I want to show you my right arm."

"What's the matter with it?"

I undressed myself abruptly and showed him the blemish on the arm. He examined the veins that looked blue and injured, and upon raising the arm they would swell. He took the officer's journal and a corporal and ordered me immediately to the regiment medic to determine if I could stay with the company.

As we arrived the corporal presented me before the medic. I showed him the arm and he shook his head, "What is your occupation?"

I lied and lied big. I claimed that my father is a forest ranger and I am his assistant. The medic took the pencil and wrote in red that I was not suitable for the company nor for any labor group. I was from the seventh company.

After me came my colleague from the eighth company. Two bulls had struck him on the pasture. He wanted to drive them away. The bulls attacked him and broke a rib, and left a mark. As he did not want to wear the Russian uniform, he claimed that with such an injury he should be discharged. He was missing a rib such that you could stick three fingers in the gap. His father was truly a forester and hunter and he was his assistant. When the medic asked him what his occupation was he said, "Hunter."

I heard from the corridor as the medic raved. "Are all of you forest rangers?" I realized what I did since I previously heard him say this excuse.

As he came from the inspection he abruptly stated, "You must have also claimed to be a hunter."

I laughed and said, "Yes." When I studied his and my records in the book, mine written in red and his in blue, he became indignant but it was already past and we both went back to our companies.

On the following day my commander demanded for the journal, looked in it dumbfounded, and I was sent to the large military hospital for inspection. After one month the request arrived for my colleagues and me. I returned to my company, was examined before my colleagues, and was acknowledged to be unsuitable for service in the company. My comrade Rudolf Hirsekorn from Michelsdorf¹, remained in the company and was to serve longer. However, after a couple months he made it out to America. The next day I needed to present myself before the commander, who had the journal in his hands, and he released me to the music band.

August 1908

The nicest time that I endeared the most during my military service was while I was in the music band during camp. This lasted for four months from May until the end of August. In nature everything flourished green, however, in my soul every day became more gloomy. On the 29th of August, Saturday afternoon I could not restrain myself from unrest and tears. I saw how my comrades had fun playing cards and were taking things too far with their sinful talk. I took my new testament, opened it to some place, read and prayed, but my mother remained in my thoughts.

At noon I went to my comrades. They wanted to make fun of my sadness. In opposition I prophesied and said, "My mother died today. Either today or tomorrow I will receive a telegram for the burial so, should I partake with you in sinful character? For that reason the sorrow about my mother is more pressing."

"Hold on," said one, "we will wait and see if this comes to pass."

Sunday evening I received the telegram. Saturday morning they had sent the telegram to "Come on leave; mother is severely ill." From the train station where they sent the telegram it was 16 kilometers to go back home, and in that time she died.

The trip home seemed so long to me. I was impatient from unrest. "Too late, too late" always kept echoing in my mind. When I arrived at the train station in Trawniki I was particularly hurried. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon and I wanted to run quickly through the train station, but there was a young boy who kept in front of me so I thought I should know him. Since he realized that I did not recognize him he spoke to me and then I recognized him. He was our neighbor's son. I asked, "So what are our families doing? Are they all still alive?" and I ran on.

Finally he said, "It is too late."

¹ Michelsdorf was a town about 20 km from his hometown.



The pumphouse in Trawniki

Water was pumped from this house to fill the steam engines at the train station.

I asked, “What is too late? Has my mother died already?”

He answered, “She is already buried.”

When I heard that my spirit broke. I thought about my departure when we said good-bye for the last time. During the last handshake as we wept she cried out, “Oh, my child, my son. We will not see each other again in this life.”

I tried to comfort her but it was

to no avail. She answered, “No more, no more!” In due course the tears and pain of mother proved true.

Oh my children, that you will read this, your father’s course of life at some time, either before or after my departure. Pay attention to this, as I have lived through these experiences with costly tears and also in tears have I written this.

I would have rather just returned to Moscow from the train station in Trawniki since I did not want to go to my parents’ sorrow-filled home. The telegram indicated to come on leave as my dear mother was still alive, but on their way back from Trawniki to home she had departed and died in the afternoon.

Before I arrived home I first met my father. I was like the lost son to mother, but it was still more heartbreaking at home. My brother Samuel sat at the table and wrote me a letter describing the burial. He did not notice me reading over his shoulder as I embraced him and caught a glimpse of what he was writing. On the afternoon of August 29 dear mother died and she was buried on September 1. I arrived on leave on September 2nd - one day too late, eternally too late.

At her deathbed the prayers of the intercessors of her home fellowship meeting were conducted. My siblings were all gathered around the bed. Then the meeting leader said, “If you children all pledged to be converted before Jesus then we will pray.” One after the other each one affirmed, “Yes.”

My leave went by fast despite it being thirty days. Once again the hardship of separation returned. My dear old father accompanied me by himself to the train. We said good-bye like poor, reprimanded, and abandoned children in profuse tears.

After a two-day train ride I arrived in Moscow. My comrades watched for me for some time. During my vacation I was able to rest my soul and did not sense any remorse. In the evening I explained to my comrades what I experienced during leave.

Three days later a spectacle occurred again concerning playing for the music band, but my efforts were to no avail. When I had the opportunity, I laid my head on the table and cried, praying that God would take me out of here. However, I still had to wait a couple months in unrest before this was accomplished. When the performance was most pleasurable for the dancers, that is when it was the most painful for me.

In my soul arose questions: "Is this how one should be faithful unto death? No one will receive a crown by this kind of faithfulness. Another time sinner, don't you hear the appeal of His Spirit in your heart? Don't condemn your emotions. Come and flee sinful lusts!" These admonitions came progressively more intense as I would pray, and he who asks receives, to him who knocks the door will be opened. The final inner admonition came through the song lyrics:

*Then will you stay outside, pleading to be let in,
Hands struggling to implore, yet too late it will be,
Wicked, sinner has forgotten, who is actually knocking,
Jesus your Savior is knocking, He knows you, then no more.*

I placed everything at the discretion of this Savior who was knocking: "O Lord, do with me what You want. Take me away from this music band, out of this sinful service, that I may find peace for my troubled soul."

Jesus, my soul's redeemer, heard my pleas. A comrade, who had just ended his military service, came to bid me farewell and we drank two bottles of beer. I became hot and ran a fever to the extent that I was brought to the military hospital for nearly one month until Easter of 1909. It was there that the support of my savior was first genuinely revealed to my poor sinful soul through sicknesses from within and without, with love and travail.

Easter 1909, sick and speechless in the military hospital at Moscow, I was admitted to unit 9 for treatment. In this partition were three doctors and 200 patients, all ill from severe colds. The chief doctor of this unit, whose name was Bähr, did not take my case lightly. When he heard that I was from Lublin he said, "Oh, a warm region. The climate here is not for you." He prescribed wine three times daily before meals. Every week I was questioned and examined and even the medicine was changed so that within one month I was becoming stronger. Then he placed me before the highest-ranking doctor for discharge. As he was examining me he said, "You must first get healthy, and then you will be discharged by the commission."

So back I went to the unit. After several days I noticed on the left side of my face, on the temple, a small abscess. As usual I did not like having defects visible on my face so I popped it open with my finger, then laid my hand under my cheek and fell asleep. Within a few days

I noticed my temple became inflamed. I went to the mirror, observed the swelling, and went on my bed.

When the nurse saw me she screamed loudly, “What is with you? What have you done?”

I explained how it happened. Immediately the doctor was called. He looked at me and presented me to the general practitioner who daily passed through all units. He spoke simply and quietly, “That is an inflammation. Bring him immediately to the third contagious barracks. There his hair must be cut short.” He also ordered ointment for treatment and kept himself at some distance from me.

They promptly followed these orders, laid me on a stretcher, covered me with my coat, and carried me off. After about fifteen minutes I heard footsteps on a bridge. I pulled my coat up and saw a small bridge made of boards over a narrow trench that was about half full of water. Just after this bridge was the so-called Barrack #3.

As I arrived in this barrack a medic introduced himself to me, pointed me to a bed as if to greet me. The people who accompanied me returned to their stations. I noticed in this barrack, since it was termed as contagious, all the service personnel: the intern, the nurse, and two soldiers who fed all the staff and patients in their rooms.

On Thursday the 17th of June in the afternoon I entered this satellite facility. They cut my hair short, as instructed, smeared me with a dark ointment, wrapped me in bandages such that only my eyes were exposed, gave me my evening rations, and laid me down to rest.

The following day I became more familiar with who served in this barrack. The intern was short and young and the first one who aspired to study as a doctor. The nurse was 46 years old. One of the soldiers was Russian; the second was Polish.

On Saturday evening everyone went to bed on time. All of a sudden a loud conversation was audible from the corridor. Someone requested for the intern. Of the two soldiers the Pole said, “He went into the city.”

The person who had just entered remarked back to him, “You are lying! He is with the nurse in the room. Open the door and I will show you!”

Then the soldier saluted, “Your highest Excellency. You are not my superior. I will not open the door!”

Then the officer went through the corridor. I heard something like a hanging lamp, and even a second one, get knocked aside. He was out. I pondered about this incident.

Once the officer went out the intern first came quietly in my room to see if I was sleeping. I was isolated right next to his room as a precaution to monitor my sickness. After him the nurse also eavesdropped. I snored as if I was not all disturbed. The door, however, was kept closed.

Then outside I heard the officer apologizing, "Let me in. I did not do well. We will make amends."

The nurse replied, "Bless you." and let him in. The door was opened for him, he went inside and then the accusations started firing.

The officer posed the intern with the question, "Why do you speak to me informally with the word 'you'? I am older and higher in rank and you allow your conduct to be in this manner?"

The intern answered, "Until now you addressed me with 'you' and I also did the same with you. From today onward it will be different as you wish."

The commotion stopped. Then the intern insisted that they go outside in order to not disturb the patients. They went outside, the officer, intern, and both soldiers. From outside under the window I only heard loud noises. Finally it became completely quiet.

The nurse came again to ensure that I was sleeping. I pretended as if I noticed nothing. Within maybe a half hour after it became quiet the Pole who was on duty came. They were on duty in the barrack until six o'clock in the morning. He came in and proceeded from one end of the corridor through its entire length. On the other end of the corridor was the toilet. Two spades were always standing there. As he took the two spades together and they made a clanging sound it was as if in my conscience someone said, "They murdered him. Now they will bury him."

As he came by the nurse's room she asked him a question. He replied, "We killed him." He left in haste with the spades. She came into my room to eavesdrop if I was sleeping or would ask for something. Just after her the intern came in.

The nurse addressed him sternly, "What have you done? You killed him! This one lies here right next to us and has heard everything. He knows that the officer always comes by here. When they come and start probing with questions, then we will be sentenced to 18 years of forced labor in Siberia."

The intern said, "Just after it happened I came out of my room and went right to him. He is sleeping."

The nurse replied, "Yes, I also paid attention and he is merely acting like he is sleeping. You must realize one thing. He is a German. He is clever. We must kill him also so that he does not tell the truth."

I became extremely terrified.

The entire night in prayer and pleadings, to Him who revealed so much unfaithfulness in me, who I once accepted and praised, and yet I acted so disloyally to Him. Oh my dear children and all who will read these accounts. Imagine, yes just imagine, what that means: "*We must*

kill him also.” Dear children, dear souls, as you read this now from wherever throughout the world you may be, isolated from any help, and if you by yourself were to hear that it was determined that you would be killed, how would you cling on to Jesus?

So the night was short and went by quickly. On Sunday, the 20th of June, in the morning no one came into my room. In the corridor before my door stood a desk where the office commands were executed, and where everyone would always sit and chat. I was on the alert to discover their secrets.

The nurse let them describe how they murdered the officer. The Pole explained, “The officer went over the trench bridge first; the intern hit him on the head from behind; he fell into the water; we immersed him under, and he drowned without ever screaming.” When I heard that then I knew exactly, hearing from a second person, that he was not buried very far away.

From 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM I did not hear the nurse in the corridor. I also did not see her when I went to the toilet, and the intern as well was missing. After 2:00 PM suddenly the door opened. I lay in my bed. In a rush she stood before me, held the medicine glass to my mouth as always and asked, “You probably still have not had your breakfast?”

I said, “No.”

“Excuse me.” she replied, “I went to church and things ran late.”

Not thinking after such nice words I drank out the wine as always. She looked at me. I handed the medicine glass back to her. She provided me with two boiled eggs as I normally received for breakfast. In the bottom of the medicine glass a white powder was apparent. She took the glass, poured wine into it, and handed it back to me once again, “To your mouth.” I took it and drank everything out. She observed me and asked, “Is it bitter?”

I answered, “No.”

She left and then I fell over. A cold rigidity gripped me where I stretched out and could not move my hands or feet. How long this lasted I really don’t know, perhaps about 3 to 5 minutes. Then I became hot. I sprang up, leaned my head from the bed, and coughed and vomited.

I lay on my bed such that I could look out into the corridor. The door was open about half way. When the door is open there is a slight gap by the door jamb and she stood there looking at what was happening with me. When I noticed her there, after I vomited the bitterness of the poison, then I realized what kind of powder that was in the medicine glass. Then I cried out loud, “Nurse!” and again “Nurse!”

She came quickly to me, “What is it Vanka² (*Ivan/Johann*)?”

I asked her, “Why did you give me bitter wine to drink?”

² Vanka is a Russian nickname for Ivan, the equivalent of the German name Johann.

As I said that she yelled back at me, “You are a jerk! I will write a notice about you. You can apologize to me for claiming that I gave you bitter wine.”

I retorted, “Yes, why did you ask me if it was bitter as I was drinking it?”

She disappeared saying nasty words. After this exchange came another episode of frigid rigidity. I laid and sighed to my Savior. Then everything went through my soul, how often Jesus went with me as Savior and blesser, but now it was too late.

This second time the rigidity was much worse and lasted longer and I thought that if it were to grab me one more time then that would be it for me. The fever was also stronger. After the fever I had a couple of minutes of feeling normal. I knelt before my table, confessed my multitude of sins and unfaithfulness, contrasted against such great patience and endurance, goodness and mercy, and in particular the words “*Jesus is your Redeemer*” were reverberating, yet it will be too late.

After the prayer I gave to a comrade who came from another room a letter written for my parents the previous Saturday evening, and three rubles that I still had. I told him, “If I die then write into this letter ‘Your son has died.’ Save these 3 rubles for the postage.” I laid myself on my bed since another phase of rigidity was recurring. But another wonder of my Redeemer was bestowed on my poor soul. The frozen rigidity had quickly ceased such that I could move my hands and feet. My temperature was completely normal. I did not lay long, knelt down again and praised my Savior!

I realized as I remained in the military hospital, that I was appointed to start my commission on Friday the 18th of June but on Thursday the 17th of June I was brought into this miserable barrack. On Saturday morning my doctor from the hospital came and brought me the news that my papers for medical treatment were at the commission and that I was permitted to take leave for one year to recover at home. So I wrote this letter promptly on Saturday evening but because of this delay with the inflammation on my face I did not send it off.

After these great experiences, the Savior overcoming my death by poisoning, I could not give enough praise and thanks to the almighty Shepherd of heaven and earth. For practically four months I did not hear my voice. All medical endeavors appeared to be in vain. That which was supposed to bring me to death brought my voice back again. Oh, I was compelled all the more to praise and thank my loving Redeemer and Savior. Yes, I had the notion that if I would be released from here, that I would reveal absolutely nothing of what happened.

With these thoughts I walked outside. As I came out into the corridor the intern was sitting and writing at the desk. I went back in. He still kept writing. Only God knows what he was writing, but I surmised he was writing a protocol concerning me. Then I did something real stupid. I went by him, then stood still, excused myself, and told him, “You should not write a protocol for me. I am so happy that I have my voice again due to this bitter wine, and if you were allow me to get out of here alive, I will not even tell my parents or siblings what happened last night.”

When he heard that he questioned with great interest, “So then, what happened?”

Then I replied with the foolish answer, “Didn’t you kill the officer?” Oh, only God alone knows what came over me.

“Go to hell!” was his retort.³

I stood there, hoping that I could come to agreement with him. He grabbed the pistol lying before him on the table, but fortunately it was not loaded. He cried out once more, “Get out of here!”

With that I went to my room, gripped my head with both hands and cried afresh to my loving Savior Jesus Christ.

As I left his presence, the nurse astounded, said to him, “Didn’t I tell you that he heard everything and knows all about it!” They decided to exterminate me and reasoned that if they did not succeed, I would surely testify before the chief doctor. “Then we are in agreement. I won’t have him come before the chief doctor again.”

Now I really became truly fearful and angered, however, time passed quickly and along with the time was distress and adversity. They wrote a prescription and sent it off immediately with a carrier. Meanwhile it was determined that if the prescription was accepted, I overheard in their discussion, “Then we will come upon him, give him a couple injections, and then he will be gone!”

Not long after the carrier left with the prescription my prior doctor came to the window from outside with the prescription in his hand and asked me how it was going. Before I could answer him they all came in my room. My former doctor from the hospital stood outside because he was not allowed to enter the contagious barracks. On the previous day, when he gave me the news about my commission and dismissal for one year, he also stood by the same window.

As the nurse came in, the doctor said to her, “You have written a prescription and his temperature or how high his fever is was not specified.”

Right away she brought the thermometer and placed it. The doctor looked at the clock and gave the countdown. She was required to reach the thermometer over to him and he answered, “39.9 degrees centigrade”, and asked if one hour has passed since I insulted the nurse about the bitter wine.

She said, “Yes.”

³ In his handwritten document, Johann indicates the true reply in Russian, but follows it immediately with his own German translation as “Get lost you jerk!”. This apparently reveals his reluctance to use profanity.

He then told her, “Then he could have had a fever over 40 degrees! I could have slapped you in the face for not telling me this, instead of only telling me about his remark of bitter wine. You are not permitted to give him any shots and also no treatment. He was and is healthy, and is relieved for one year to recover. If the inflammation subsides he will ride back to his home. – Vanka (Ivan/Johann), I’m sticking up for you.” With those words my doctor left me.

It was as if I was supposed to stand on that, but the words, “*Cursed is the one who trusts in man*⁴,” went through me and with my whole heart I clung on to my faithful and loving Savior Jesus. All this happened around 5:00 in the afternoon. I was in unrest through pleading and prayer, doubting and in desperation, however, in my trust in Jesus, my all-loving Savior, for some time I could sense pain and yet consolation for my poor soul.

That Sunday came to an end with that blessed support of my loving Savior. I praised and thanked God Jehovah throughout the ensuing night where I, a poor defenseless, abandoned sinner still took refuge in the merciful Redeemer’s heart.

But, but – it went just as well with my four enemies. If I hadn’t discovered what had occurred, then things would not have turned out so bad. But now, oh I regretted it, yet still it has transpired. That night was the worst in my whole life, as I recall, however, not even one of my hairs was damaged.

In the morning I awoke, praised and thanked wholeheartedly my loving Redeemer Jesus Christ for the mellow evening. Yet when the time came for the medicine to be dispensed then things started happening again. I heard the nurse say, “We will not be able to open his mouth with the spoon. We need to use a plate.” I understood that was a tin plate upon which the meat or rice at mealtime was brought to us. I became terribly frightened, as I knew they were coming in just a moment.

Oh, dear children and all who read or hear this. Do not take this as a fable or myth or fiction. This made me break out in a cold sweat and I cried out to God in heaven for deliverance.

In the blink of an eye the door opened. The nurse came up to my bed. The Russian soldier among the janitorial staff of the patients and barrack staff, who also helped commit the murder, followed behind the nurse. The Pole, however, remained standing at the door with the words, “Nurse! Nurse! I will not let you murder this one, because the murdered officer caused me so much horror the entire night. He stood constantly before my eyes and asked me why I helped murder him. And now I should take this one on my conscience as well? I will not go along with it, and if you desire to murder him then I will present you before the chief doctor.”

Oh, how full of thanks and prayer my frightful soul became to combat the unbelief against my loving Redeemer. When I heard the words of the nurse, “*Take a plate since we will not be able to open his mouth with a spoon.*” I then decided to freely give up. The soldiers were to step back and the nurse should administer this prepared drug for poisoning. But instead my

⁴Jeremiah 17:5

loving Savior humiliated me. I did not need to comply and the words of Dichter's song proved true: *"Come adversity, come death, you will still find Him faithful!"*

Yes, the poor murderer stood beside my bed with the deadly poison in a medicine glass, so frozen in shock as if she was in a spell. In this moment there was a noise in the corridor, and with a few steps she was out of my room and dumped the poison into the sink.

I heard the greeting from the chief doctor and the question, "Where is the sick one?"

The nurse answered, "Oh, he is healthy today and doing well."

He looked from afar at me and disappeared. Then the word became true to me again, *"Cursed is the one who trusts in man."* My Jesus is the best friend.

After this failed murder attempt I had peace and quiet until noon. By around noontime I heard talk in the corridor. The intern spoke, "He is still sick and needs to stay here a minimum of two weeks."

Oh, I thought, two weeks. I'll never get out of here. The conversation in the corridor ended. Still in my soul arose afresh doubt and distress – death was and will come. If only my poor soul would be saved.

After about fifteen minutes there was another critical discussion. I heard several soldiers talking. One said, "We have orders to break open the door and to take him out." I noticed the voices came from outside by the end door.

The intern came out and spoke to the nurse, "I will give him over since he told me that if he gets out of here alive he will not reveal anything."

Then one of the soldiers who heard that yelled, "What, you want to take his life? You want to kill him yourself?"

Oh, I thanked and prayed and trusted, from my whole heart, in my loving Redeemer Jesus Christ. I thought surely I will soon be out of the clutches of this murderous band.

Just after the dialogue a sergeant came from outside to my window and asked me, "Are you Hapke?"

I said, "Yes."

The window was open. Since they were supposed to carry me out, the sergeant stationed a soldier there with the words, "Stand here and don't let anyone come to him.", and to another he spoke, "Come, we will consider what we heard from the intern.", and they disappeared.

The soldier at the window tried to speak and ask me questions, but since the door to my room was open to the corridor, they listened to see if I would converse with him. I did not reply to

him. Not long thereafter I heard two slaps on a cheek that resounded and the words, “Whose signature? Come!” After this it became completely quiet in the corridor. The soldier by the window was gone. I lay there without knowing what happened.

After noontime one of the patients, the guy I had given the letter to, came to me and said they arrested the intern. “Two soldiers led him out and a higher officer slapped him twice and told him to come along.” Immediately they forced this patient back out of my room.

That evening before the distribution of medicine a sanitary medic came in to distribute. I took my medicine as always and drank it out. They did not make a sound, nor did I, and went out quietly. This medic was sent in place of the intern.

I rested in peace until June 29. In the afternoon during medicine distribution, after I drank it, an excruciating stomach pain practically tore my bowels. I writhed like a worm and gave up all hope. My life appeared to come to its end after so many evidences of the love of my Shepherd Jesus.

The nurse, with the medic had gone out. The ill comrade gave me his bottle of milk, which I drank and then vomited considerably. The comrade said that I turned blue. I doubled over and the comrade covered me with a blanket. I lay there for a while until I recovered.

After this distressing situation, showing that I still clearly remained in the murderers’ hands, yet through the help of my all-loving Redeemer and Savior Jesus, I ordered for myself His providence for life and death with the song verses:

*Means, you have all means, in resources You lack nothing,
Your deeds are true blessings, Your way is pure light,
Your actions no one can hinder,
Your work no one can stop,
What you desire to do for your children You will do.*

For four days I had undisturbed peace. I strengthened myself in the Word of God with my New Testament. My soul felt Jesus through the power of the Word. In my abased, corrupt, unfaithful heart I prepared myself for the heavenly home.

During the evening of July 3, when the instructions for the following day were read out, I was lying on my bed and listened in. All of a sudden I heard, “The patient from Barrack No. 3 will be released for one year and in the morning he will be escorted to his home. A soldier from the 2nd grenadier regiment of 14th company will escort him.” I could hardly believe my ears.

Then I also heard the nurse interrupt. She asked openly, “Come on, he will die on the trip. What should they do with him underway and be bothered by this? Why don’t we rather give him some quinine poison to drink so that he dies here?”

The medic explained, "Nurse, tomorrow he no longer will be under our service. You are not permitted to give him any medicine in the morning. I will give him breakfast and that's that!"

Oh, how I yearned to see the day when I would depart out of this tribulation. In the morning the medic came, gave me breakfast, and told me that I would be going home. A soldier from my regiment came and accompanied me to my district town. He gave me two days worth of money for food and went out.

Not long thereafter the escort came with an ambulance. I bid farewell to the comrade who I gave the 3 rubles and letter and requested for the letter and money. Then we both went to the nurse and asked for them whereupon she replied, "I already mailed it at the post office."

I told her, "Save it for your burial garment." and left escorted to the ambulance and the ride home.

I prayed to heaven above that my escort should drive me to my regiment and music band for just an hour since it was on the way, however he and the ambulance driver were given strict orders to bring me to the train station in Smolinsk. Had they driven to my regiment I would have explained the whole story to my superior, but this was not possible since I was weak and glad that I was out of there.

I perceived from the conversation of the murderers that the slain officer was from the city of Lomza, Poland and had a wife and two children. I also overheard that on Monday, June 21 his lad came and looked for him. They claimed that he was not even there. That is how far fornication (sin) will take you, so that it demands payment for loans.

After a two-day train ride I arrived at my father's house. As I recounted my experiences, frightening memories went through my heart. I purported that I wanted to report this, but my father talked me out of it with the words, "The officer is dead and you are still sick and weak. They can still drag you to Moscow to testify." Thus I let this story lay to rest.

After one year of rehabilitation I was required to fulfill my remaining five months of service. It so happened that I went to Lomza on maneuvers in late 1910. I had eight days free time since we dealt with the dirigible motor these eight days in non-commissioned officer training and discussed with the officers concerning the motor and the balloon. I asked if there was a wife of an officer who was widowed and if she knew anything about what happened to her husband. I revealed it to my sergeant and explained what happened. He was patriotic and despised higher-ranking officers and told it to another Pole. I remained quiet, which I regret to this day.



Wedding Photograph, February 12, 1911

Johanna Stein (nee Hapke), Otilie Hapke (nee Krüger), Johann Hapke, Adam Stein

In November of 1910 my military service came to an end. On February 12, 1911 I married Otilie Krüger. Joy and sorrow during marriage was not uncommon. The first-born son was named Siegismund and brought us inexpressible joy. In 1914, World War I brought inexpressible suffering.

I was brought once again into the school of affliction. I said good-bye to my dearest one and left with tears and pain opposing my fate. My dear wife cried. I comforted her, since I envisaged the war in a dream. I will survive it, return, and will not find my family. It happened exactly as I had dreamed.⁵

In August we were on the front and were placed on the left flank fighting against the Austro-Hungarians. When our regiment went to fight, it took me four days to drive back and forth to Hrubieszow to get bread. On the night before we came back I heard that two brothers of my comrades had fallen and two were wounded. Once again I saw eternity before me, and no Jesus, no Savior of my soul. I started pleading, confessed to Jesus my unfaithfulness, by setting myself up worthy for damnation in spite of such support, and then lived in this manner.

In the night I was presented with a dream about how I should dress: Put on two layers of fresh underwear and give the old ones to someone else. On the front I would have good protection, only afterwards I would have to run. The time when I would see a skeleton

⁵ This dream came to fulfillment as nearly all ethnic Germans living within Russian borders were deported to southern Siberia. His wife did not return home until 1922. During this eight-year period of deportation his father, step-mother, mother-in-law, son (Siegismund), and two sisters (one pictured in his wedding photo) had all died. Upon his wife's return, Johann asked his wife who the young girl with a tan was always hanging around her. His wife explained that is his daughter Natalie, born November 10, 1914. At the time he had been enlisted in the military at the start of World War I, he apparently did not realize his wife was pregnant.

(death), [beside him in the warm heart and liver]⁶, it would be after the war. I adhered to the dream and revealed it to my comrades.

That day at around 10:00 o'clock came orders to our battalion for reinforcement in open fire. Everything was like dead but the commander claimed, "The command 'forward' is holy."

I neither saw nor heard any shooting. Then a bullet came and fell exhausted two steps in front me. My comrade and I saw it. I thought what will it be like when we come in open fire. We were required to push forward at full speed. When we came closer a bullet hit my comrade Emil Steinke, going through his rolled-up jacket into his ammunition pocket such that he stayed put in his step. The staff sergeant noticed it and said, "Are you done?" He said, "I don't notice anything." The staff sergeant lifted the jacket. It stuck in the reserve ammunition pocket. Yes, there we considered what it is like to be without Jesus in eternity, the poor soul being downcast in the gears of the world and sin.



Emil Steinke and his wife Natalie. Emil survived the war and they had at least four additional children while living in Johann's hometown of Neustrenschin (Streczyn Nowy). These pictures were taken in 1940 during the resettlement of ethnic Germans to Warthegau.

As we arrived at the firing line a storm of "Hurra!" arose on the left flank forward. I remained lying since I found good protection as I had dreamed. There was barrier pile providing good covering. The officer who initiated the Hurra scream became silent. The Austrians attacked ...⁷



*Russian troops retreating from the Austro-Hungarian forces
(Taken from <http://firstworldwar.com/photos/battlegrounds.htm>)*

⁶ It is unclear what he intended by this phrase. This represents a word-for-word translation.

⁷ And that's where his writing ends – in the middle of this battle, but we know he had good protection and as foretold in his dream he would have to run. History records this as the Battle of Zamosz-Komarow fought on the Galician Front [see Galician Battles (1) at <http://firstworldwar.com/maps/easternfront.htm>]. As you can see on this map, this was the first phase of this battle. This phase was the only confrontation the Austro-Hungarians won in the fight for Galicia. The fact that the Russian troops retreated agrees with his dream that he would have to run. A picture of Russian troops retreating in this campaign is shown above.

