

Biography of Rudolf Necker
Translated by Elvire Necker

* March 3, 1896 in Kulm, Bessarabia
+ April 16, 1982 in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

Something from my Biography

I was born March 3, 1896, in Kulm, Bessarabia, and attended our village school from 7 years of age on but only during wintertime, 3 ½ - 4 months a year. Two teachers had been employed, 1 German and 1 Russian. We learned reading, writing, arithmetic, also some geography. Mostly we had religion and learned Bible verses and songs by heart.

It was not always easy for me in my life. In 1910 when I was 14 years old, we lost our dad through a threshing accident. I experienced that the road of widows and orphans is not a splendid one. In 1914 WWI started, which hit us especially hard. Right away with the first recruit of horses our 2 horses were taken. My brother had to join the Russian ranks Sept. 1, 1914, and I on Aug. 8, 1915. Our ailing mother remained alone on the farm with the 15-year-old sister who had to work on the railroad every day. It was a sad time, both of us doing military service, our 15-year-old sister almost no day off slave work, and our mother sick. In January 1917, our sister fell ill and died. It was an indescribable heartache for all of us, but especially for our mother alone at home. Feb. 24, 1918 I returned from the war in good health. But how did it look at home? Everything had disappeared from our farm. The Russian army had occupied the farm and at times had taken up 40 horses there. Everything was broken and in addition, the inflation came. All our savings became nothing. While those who had stayed home had enriched themselves, we instead had become poor.

But we did not lose courage. My brother and I still were with our mother. We bought 2 horses for 2.000 rubles, a wagon, and a harness. This is how we started. February 15, 1920 I married my wife Ida nee Sperling. From then on we started to prosper, but it was not all together good. During the years 1921-1923, I had to do service in the Romanian Army in the fall. In those years, our harvest was not very good. Because both my wife and I had learned to work and save money, we soon had saved some. So we built a shed for the chaff, 8 Faden long. In 1925,

the harvest was especially poor. But as many people were out of work, we decided to tear down the old stables and build new ones. And this is what we did. In 1925 we built a stable, 20 Faden or 44 meters long. It was not easy for us. Already in 1922 I paid my brother his share of the farm for a sum of 49,000 ~~L~~Lei. In 1925, we bought 3 ½ dessjatin land from my brother's brother-in-law.

The early years we worked ourselves almost sick because you could tell that for those who did not go all out, their farm deteriorated. Because prices were very bad, you could not employ the necessary workers and so you had to work yourself from 4 o'clock in the morning till 10 or 11 at night in order that your farm would not fall back. During threshing time, even more work was done. For this reason we decided to open a general store, especially as there was only one store for the 4 kilometer-long village with its 1,770 people, and that even in the lower part of it. We firmly decided to open a store. So in 1927 I sold my horses and farm implements in order to have some cash and October 1, 1927, we opened the store.

In the beginning, it was hard. We had to learn everything, but soon it improved. Our number of children increased, and soon we were envied and competed with the community store. We were laughed at, but in 2 years ~~time~~ the village co-op had to close. And because we human beings are prone to always want more, I decided to immediately open another store with my brother-in-law Johann who had worked at the village co-op. After a year, I, my brother-in-law Johann, and my brother Andreas bought the community dairy also. But too much is not healthy, this I experienced, too. I had loaded my head with too much. After 2 years I realized that I was not happy and that I had too much work to do. I also saw how people were envious. So I decided to hand over one store to my brother-in-law. We soon came to an agreement and he paid me 5,000 ~~L~~Lei every month. After a year, we also handed back the dairy to the community.

In 1934, we built a house. It again cost a lot of work and much money. In 1935, we plastered it with cement, and tiled and painted everything. For some years everything went quite well. In 1933, I bought 15 dessjatin land from Nathanael Rauter and in 1938, 12 dessjatin from Johann Schuetz, Kalatschowka. In addition, during the years 1933-1938, I bought 1 ½ dessjatin from David Boettcher and 3/4 dessjatin from August Hass. Until 1938 we faired quite well. From 1939 on, times were worse again.

In 1934, we built a warehouse of 15 meters.

In 1935, a sheep barn of 16 meters length.

In 1935, a well.

In 1933, a big cellar.

In 1938, the farmyard wall, off the street, of 44 meters was replaced, plastered with cement and supplied with an iron gate

In 1936, a barn of 20 meters length.

When war broke out in 1939 between Poland and Germany, we in Bessarabia were not happy either. Just like during WWI, we Germans were the ones again who -were guilty of everything. Hitlerites, we were called. Also among us Germans, relations were not good. One gave the other grief and often nobody knew why. The Romanian government tormented us from all sides. Under 40 years of age, everybody was drafted. Also horses, wagons, and harnesses were seized without consideration. Injustice was so acute that it was crying to heaven. A small farmer had his only carriage taken away mercilessly, but from another who had 8-10 horses and 3-4 wagons, nothing was confiscated. I, too, was not spared.

I have to go back once more to the year 1933. Because my brother and I, we each had a general store, we did not have much cattle. But each of us still had 16-17 ha of pasture land. So other farmers' cattle grazed on our pasture. Then when you asked for a fee for this grazing, right away they would scream: get your own cattle. Well, we did not let that be said too often. We decided to buy sheep, i.e., the Moldovan longhair sheep. We drove to Tschemischlia, 40 km. from us, to a Moldovan village. The first time we bought 101 sheep. We were not lucky with them because they were infected by a disease (pocks). Half of them died. But we did not give up. We continued buying sheep until each had a flock of 170-180 sheep. Then the screamers got big eyes and again screamed because we bought so many sheep. There still is a lot to write about these screamers but it takes too much paper and time. Now because I had sheep and had rented out my land for half the crop, I never had enough feed. So I either had to sell the sheep or work my land myself. And because the family no longer had a mind for the store, taxes were so high, and the children were growing up, we decided to slowly work the land ourselves.

So in fall of 1938, I bought a team of horses. Now I had 4 horses. I worked together with Georg Kugele, the farmer who had worked my land. I still left him 15 ha to sow. When the Romanian government started to confiscate things, they took 3 of my 4 horses, also a wagon and a harness. Now I was left with just one

horse. That was in 1939, October 1st. But I still had 14 ha corn on the fields. I had to employ workers for the work. Georg Kugele, who had rented my land for 12 years, helped me a lot, this way I still could bring in my crop. In 1939/1940 I had to buy horses again. When work on the fields started in spring, I had 5 good horses. And because we still had the store and not enough horses, I had to work together with G. Kugele again. So we sowed all the land but with little enthusiasm because you never were sure when you would be called up for duty. Such it went till June 28, 1940.

And now the Russians came. We waited intensely what they would bring us. As a matter of fact, we were glad to get rid of the Romanian yoke. But those of us being better off, soon discovered that conditions were bad for those having or owning property. The 16 bigger farmers soon had to show up at city hall where our assets were registered. And former shepherds were employed as mayor and village elders. They had to manage the village. Every day, new orders were given out. All grain was to be delivered on a heap, you had to thresh and plow all on the same day. You hardly had threshed the grain when you had to deliver it, 60% of your barley and 40% of your wheat, whether you had wheat or not. The Russians refused to hear any complaints. What you did not have, you were supposed to buy, but where could you buy when nobody had any? So we longed for the day when we would be rid of the Russian horde.

On Sept 28, 1940, the first group of women left; Oct. 3 the second; and on October 6 we men all left—196 wagons left. It was on Sunday Oct. 6, 1940. It was very hard to say good-bye to everything. To this day, I cannot understand how that was possible. Oct. 9 we arrived in Galatz. There we had to part from our very last possessions. Our luggage was sent away in Galatz at the harbor. Horses and wagons were taken from us at camp. We stayed at camp in Galatz till Oct. 19. On Oct. 19, we took the ship and arrived the evening of Oct. 21 in Brahowo. On the evening of Oct. 26, we took the train from Brahowo and arrived Oct. 28 at Werneck Castle. There we stayed till Feb. 3, 1941. On Feb. 3, 1941 we drove to Waldhorst/ Litzmannstadt. From there, most were resettled. Only I and a few other richer farmers stayed till April 24. From there we came to Kosten. In Kosten, we stayed till June 3. From Kosten we were brought to Pinn and from there we were resettled June 18, 1941. Everybody wondered where we would end up and what our new home would look like. I, my brother Andreas, N. Selcho, D. Roloff came by bus to Lubin. There teams were provided, ready to take us on. We were loaded on big estate wagons to be brought to our goal. When we arrived in Kriewen, that

was the name of the village, the overseer by the name of Otto Pfeiffer welcomed us at the gate and awaited us. Right away he led us into the cow, pig and horse barn and commented, here it is good to live. Then we went into the house which had 4 rooms and a kitchen. And when we were standing in front of the house and looked around, the overseer asked us: How do you like it? He received the unexpected answer: Not at all, and we are not staying here. That he could not understand, that we would not like a farm with 260 morgen (62 ½ ha), with 18 cows, 5 horses and 28 pigs. But my co-patriots did understand me. However, every time somebody visited us, we had to suffer ridicule and remarks like: Just like at your place in Kulm it looks here! It is always like that: Damage and loss is followed by ridicule. That also happened to me.

The same day, the Resettlement Committee came. They, too, were astonished that I did not want to accept this farm. And so it remained. I was installed as administrator with a salary of 60 RM [Reichsmarks] a month, of which 9.25 RM were deducted. It was a ridiculous salary. All other family members were not paid at all in spite of the fact that my wife did all the housekeeping work. It almost seems impossible, but it is the truth. Such was justice in Hitler's Reich! So I remained administrator till 1943. On March 8, 1943 I was lucky and was transferred to Schönzell to a farm of (650 morgen) 162 ½ ha with 55 cows, 16 horses, and 45 pigs. Here it was really good. I had a bookkeeper by the name of Shurkowsky, an overseer by the name of Sobinsky, very good and conscientious people. All the other workers were decent people. Full time employed, I had 15 men and 10 girls, and in addition 12-14 women who usually worked only half a day. Two of the girls did housework, Antonie in the kitchen and Pelagia as maid. They were sisters, both were hard working and decent. Antonie was especially intelligent. She looked after us very well. She was a very good cook and baker and a great friend of the poultry.

On Jan. 20, 1945 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, altogether unexpectedly, we received notice to flee (evacuate). It was an inexpressible shock. You did not know where and how to start. Then at 10 o'clock at night an order came for me to report next morning at 7 at the police station for "Volkssturm" services (a kind of lay military service). I was drafted as trek leader. So we left with the trek at midnight and arrived Jan. 21st at 5 o'clock in the morning in Kriewen at the police station. There I had to say good-bye to my family and all the others. In all, I had taken 6 teams with 13 horses, 2 teams for me and 4 for refugees who had come from Russia and had lived with us in Schönzell since March 1944.

In Kriewen, I, together with several others, received our marching equipment: a gun from the time of the deluge with one cartridge and 40 rounds. We were sent off with this equipment to Altboyen to the railroad station. We 17 men were to protect it. We were led to the area, instructed how to act, and from where the enemy might attack. We, all older men, looked at each other and said, we are lost here.

The morning of Jan. 23, 1945, we received rations for several days. From this we realized how serious the situation was. At 9 o'clock the same morning, the telephone rang. The commander was called and he returned with a happy face. He told us that the "Volkssturm" was dissolved and everybody could return to his family. This is how we had to say good-bye to our beautiful Warthegau. On my farm, I left behind 55 cows (35 of them dairy cows), 95 pigs, 7 colts and 2 old horses. A lot of grain and seed potatoes also remained on the farm.

Then we took the train to Guben. There we wanted to hand over our weapons to the police. But we fared badly. The officers got very excited when they saw us. What business is this? Where do you come from? Who speaks German? When I answered that we are all Germans and everyone speaks German, I was called inside and asked where we came from and what we wanted. Again I explained that we had been taken into the "Volkssturm" in the Warthegau, that we had been dismissed, and now wanted to hand over our weapons. Then I was scolded: you are starting a revolt in the city. Get your stuff together and go where you came from. Because they did not trust us, a police man accompanied us to the SA [Sturmmabteilung, or storm troopers] office. There all men of the "Volkssturm" were brought together for further service. Five days later, we were dismissed there, too. This is how I came to flee with the trek from Donaten. Most of the time I was with G. Kugele. When we arrived in Zossen, I found my oldest daughter who had been in the service of an estate proprietor. Feb. 7, 1945, I found my family in Luckenwalde. We had to stay in Luckenwalde for 2 days, then the order came to continue to Hannover. But when we were in Brandenburg, the order was changed and we had to return to the district of Teltow. This is how we ended up in Ahrensdorf, district of Teltow on Feb. 12, 1945.

I reported to the mayor that we had arrived with 7 wagons, 15 horses and 40 people and that the district director had ordered us here for accommodations. Then I found lodgings with the local farm leader Paul Krause. On June 28, 1945, we had to move to Gustav Stoof. We worked for the farmer for food. It was an inexpressible hard time for us homeless ones. Here in the province of

Brandenburg, we worked till March 28, 1946. And because the people here were indecent and avaricious to us refugees, most tried their luck in other provinces. On Feb. 11, 1946, I too set out with another colleague by the name of Emil Selcho to Stuttgart and fetched the entry permit to Wuerttemberg for several people. With many difficulties, because we had to cross the border illegally, we happily returned on Feb. 28, 1946 to our temporary home.

Then on March 28, 1946, we said good--bye to Ahrensdorf, which had been our home for 13 months, and moved on to the unknown. At the border to West Germany we were registered and deloused. April 4, 1946, we arrived in Heilbronn. There we had to stay in the freight train for 4 days as there was no more room in the refugee camps. On April 8, 1946, we arrived here in Gronau, but it seemed we did not better our situation. None of the 6 families arriving here with us found entry into a home. None of the locals wanted to accept anybody into their home. Everything had to be ordered. In some respects, we improved our situation not much, but nonetheless we were glad to be here. Why, I will tell later.

Now something about our life in Gronau. When we arrived, everybody had to wait several hours before anybody could enter a door. And we did not rejoice when we were assigned to an empty room where the floor had been partly ripped out. With a sneering grin our hostess remarked: we have no beds but when you sleep on the floor, you have more room. We were not treated like human beings, and it continued the next day. We men approached the mayor who gave orders to receive furniture from different people. But what did we get: old rotten, miserable filth. It almost rendered your heart. If the people had known or believed how we had lived in our old home, they would not have offered us these things. The reason why I write this is for later generations to see how we fared and how we were received.

Gronau 1946

I would like to relate an experience. We are now living in Gronau but I am not happy because in my opinion there is no work here. Only after 6-7 weeks did I find work at new building constructions for a salary of 85 Pfennig an hour. There I worked till Sept. 1, 1946, then again I had no employment.

Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada December 1954

I would like to continue with our experiences in Gronau. Approximately 8 years we lived there. On April 8, 1946, we arrived in Gronau and on April 9, 1954,

we left Gronau. These 8 years were especially hard. Conditions were unbelievably bad. Food supplies were so low that those who have not lived through this will not believe it. There were 4,000 grams bread, and 50 grams of fat a person, meat and potato rations I cannot remember, very little for sure. For us homeless ones, times were almost unbearable. With money you could not buy anything while local landless people always received something from acquaintances or relatives.

As mentioned above, we were accommodated at a maker of gravestones by the name of Gesswein in an empty room of 11 square meters and a kitchen with 3 square meters. This is how we lived for 27 months. The following day after our arrival, our oldest daughter Irma became very ill with pleurisy. We asked our landlady whether it would be possible occasionally to buy milk for our sick daughter. But she refused, while at the same time her 4 dogs were fed sandwiches, cake and whole milk under the table as much as they wanted while we ate potato peels and would have been happy if there had been enough of them. Maybe somebody who reads this, considers this unbelievable, but you can believe it, I do not write lies. And later on, when we no longer were with this family, we helped them for nothing in the hay and grape-gathering season. If you love those who love you, what special deed do you do? Tax collectors do the same.

Gronau was a challenging place for us. We were led into the deep, it almost could not have gotten any deeper. This happened to us who at one time had a model farm, a general store and a sheep-breeding business. I am not saying too much when I mention that we stood at the top of our village. In Poland, too, we were the leaders of a village. Several pud (1 pud = 16.38 kilograms) grain was ours in Bessarabia and in Poland some thousand zentner of grain (1 zentner = 50 kilograms). We brought 600 000 Lei to Germany and now we are housed in a corner and are hungry. I am not writing this to boast or to show what we once owned but we say with Job: the Lord gave it and the Lord took it away, the name of the Lord is to be praised. Many of our experiences were like Job's. Job cursed his day of birth. We too often nearly despaired. To top all this misery, I became ill and had to go to the hospital where I stayed for 11 weeks.

In 1947, the doctor pronounced me unemployable and for this reason I received 26 RM a month support. My wife, our son who still went to school at the time, and I were supposed to live on this. It was hardly enough for bread. After 27 months, we received different lodgings in the community house which consisted of 3 rooms, a kitchen and a hallway. Here we stayed for almost 5 years. On May 30, 1953, totally unexpectedly, we were ordered to city hall.

I would like to return once more to the year 1951. It was on March 3, 1951. I had returned home from getting some wood from the forest, rather tired and depressed. Here immediately a letter was handed to me from Pastor Becker, USA, who at this time worked in Stuttgart in the immigration office. This letter had been passed on to Brother Hommel who was asked to notify all Bessarabian Germans of a very favorable opportunity to immigrate to America. We took that notice to our compatriots in Gronau and Prevorst, and as a result 7 families were willing to emigrate. There was big excitement among the Bessarabian Germans. In July 1951, we were called to Stuttgart for registration. At the same time, however, the Bessarabian newspaper, Mitteilungsblatt, announced that the Bessarabian organization, Bessarabian Hilfskomitee, planned emigration to South America to the country of Paraguay. Now you were drawn to and fro. You did not know which was the right thing to do. Pastor Baumann and several other men travelled to Paraguay to negotiate with the government and to get to know the climate and conditions there. At the same time, Brother Hommel visited the U.S. and Canada. For us Bessarabian Germans, that was a hard time. The bad thing was that immigration to America had already been set in motion while discussions with Paraguay had only started. Actually Paraguay was preferred over America. This is how it came about that 300 families who had been registered for immigration to the U.S. changed their mind. Therefore no Bessarabian Germans were invited anymore to the U.S. After Senior Pastor Baumann and his men returned from Paraguay, all those formerly registered for the U.S. were asked again whether they really wanted to go to the U.S. or not. In March of 1952, we were called to the immigration office in Hanau for examination purposes. In general, the investigation took 14 days. At camp, many families were separated because everybody over 21 years of age had to hand in his own work application. This way it often happened that singles were finished in 9-10 days while families with several people stayed 14 days or longer. Most had problems with their blood, some with the lungs, and others had other problems. That is how it was with us, too. At first Arnold's blood was deficient, then my lungs gave problems. I had to provide an additional x-ray picture. I think it was March 21, 1952, that very day our daughters Irma and Alma received their visa to the U.S. So they returned home the next day and sent it to me per special delivery. The following day we were told to return home for 2 weeks. Exactly after 2 weeks I alone was called back. A physician explained to me that my application was all right and that I could continue. But now my family was not present, and I could not make decisions after

my own volition. When I went to the camp director I was told to return with the whole family in a week. On April 14 we came back to camp in Hanau for the second time. But now everything was different than 2 weeks earlier. The consulates worked very slowly. You felt there was something not right. On the 10th day, that was April 24, 1952, in the morning, we were told the quota (for immigration) was full and everybody had to evacuate camp immediately. Then a revolt broke out, that was scary. There were 800 men in camp.

At home our daughters awaited us because we wanted to emigrate together. But when they heard that we had not received our visa and that camp was dissolved, we were in shock because that meant separation for us and that was not easy. I don't know, was it the 28th or 29th of May, 1952, at 5 o'clock in the morning when our daughters said good-bye to us and travelled to Bremen to the collecting camp. From there, they were to board ship June 17, 1952 to start their journey to America to the unknown. That was no trifle especially as conditions had worsened between the East and West. Nobody understood us, especially the locals.

At camp, we were told that most likely in August or September of the same year the second quota would begin, and that all the separated families would be favoured above others. But it never happened. In the meantime, our nephew Albert Necker and his family went to Canada. In December of the same year, he brought over his mother and sister. Now new plans and castles in the air were made, because we had agreed that if it is God's will, we would try everything to stay together. Humanly speaking, it looked almost impossible, but for God it was a trifle. New writing started and it was stated that Canada would be better for us than Illinois, USA. But how to get there? To our human mind it looked impossible but with God nothing is impossible. And exactly after one year, our daughters were in Canada.

Now a lot had been achieved already from which we could see that it was God's will to proceed this way. Our faith was taxed even more. In August, our daughters sent in another application for us. After a month it was returned with the remark, that it was outdated and a new one had to be submitted. In September, another one was sent in. In October, we received our entry permit. So in November, writing started with Bremen (shipyard) and Karlsruhe (immigration office) ~~started~~. In November, we received notice to appear in Karlsruhe January 11, 1954 for health tests. Now we awaited this decisive day with great anticipation because health-wise, it did not look very good for us. The last week before Christmas, Arnold had developed a bad knee. Joint effusion the doctor called it.

And my lungs did not look very good. We doubted very much whether our wish would be granted and what God would say to all this. The middle of March we were notified from Karlsruhe to send in our passports for our visa which we then received March 21, 1954. Now we were happy that all roads for our emigration were clear. Our time between Jan. 11 and March 21 was very difficult for us because at the tests Jan.11, we were told that the result would come in a month to know whether we would receive the visa. Then after we had received it we had to get in contact with Bremen. I think it was April 2 when we received notice from Bremen that our ship would depart April 13 and that we had to be at cCamp in Bremen April 19 by 4 in the afternoon.

Now the long-awaited hour had arrived and we had to finish off a lot. The household had to be dissolved in order to do last minute purchases with the money. That was not easy. Only the one who has experienced a similar thing can understand it. On Thursday, April 8, we sent off our large baggage to Bremen, and on April 9th at 7 pm, we had to say good-bye to Gronau, which had been our home for 8 years, and all our dear acquaintances. April 19 at 9 am, we arrived at camp in the hostel in Bremen. Here, too, several things had to be settled. Then April 13, 1954 at 5 pm, we left camp. With several buses we were brought to the harbour. Right away, we boarded the ship, which then left harbour at 8 pm. All emigrants' faces showed the seriousness of the hour and many an eye became wet because you knew that most would never see their relatives or acquaintances in Germany again. It was not easy to leave our "Vaterland" and move to a foreign country.

Now we were on the ocean and before you realized it, it was dark and Germany disappeared forever for most of us. In general, the journey was good. The first 4-5 days, the weather was wonderful. Then it became rather stormy and rainy. April 23 at 6 pm, we arrived in the harbour of Quebec, and April 24 at 5 pm, we left the ship. At 8 pm, we continued by train into the uninhabited mountainous new world. The first 2 days we were not very happy as nothing but rocks and deserted forests passed in front of our eyes. April 27 at 5 pm, we arrived at our goal, at the railway station in Medicine Hat where our daughters, relatives, and other Canadians, i.e. Rudolf, Heidinger and Schwandt welcomed us.

Departure to Germany

1940

October 6th departed from Kulm, Bessarabia

9th arrived in Galatz

19th departed from Galatz
21st arrived in Brahowo, Yugoslavia
26th departed
28th arrived at Werneck Castle
December 1st naturalization celebrations
2nd received naturalization papers

1941

February 3rd departed from Werneck Castle
4th arrived in Waldhorst/ Litzmannstadt
April 24th departed from Waldhorst
25th arrived in Kosten, Warthegau
June 3rd from Kosten to Pinn
June 18th settled on the farm