

Opa's Life
written for his grandchildren Carmyn, Daniel, Lisa, and Amandah
by Elvire Necker-Eberhardt

Albert Necker

* **December 24, 1922** in Kulm, Bessarabia, today Pidgirne, Ukraine¹
+ **September 1, 2015** in Calgary, Alberta

Opa was born at 11 o'clock in the morning of Sunday, December 24, 1922 in Kulm, Bessarabia, the third child of **Andreas Necker** and **Sara, nee Leischner**. He had two older sisters, **Elsa** born June 1, 1919 who had died of measles on March 9, 1921, and **Alma** born January 3, 1922 who had died of so called "Gichter", a children's disease with high fever and spasms on January 19, 1922. The first sister had lived 1 year and 9 months and the second only 17 days. Alma and Opa were born the same year, so-called "Irish twins".

As both the older girls had died before Opa was born, he really grew up as the oldest child of the family. Important for his character development was not only the fact that he was the oldest child but also that he was the only boy among all girls. The Necker family had 2 more girls after Opa; **Hilma**, born March 10, 1926 in Kulm, Bessarabia who died of leukemia at 23 years of age on December 23, 1949 in Ludwigsburg, Germany, and **Emma**, born August 16, 1928 in Kulm, Bessarabia. As the only boy, Opa often was teased of being spoiled and favoured in his family. He did not agree with this. He believed his parents were quite strict, even more strict with him than with Hilma and Emma but he always knew he was loved.

¹B.W.Huey, The German Settlements in Bessarabia, Carrboro, NC, 2016, p. 454. See bibliography for full reference.

Opa's family was Evangelical-Lutheran at the time, so he was baptized as a baby on December 31, 1922² when he was just one week old.³ It seems in Kulm children were baptized quite early although to be baptized at this early age is unusual in the Lutheran church. Being baptized this young, usually happened to sick children, the so called "Nottaufe" (emergency baptism) as Lutherans believe you should be baptized before death. All Necker children were baptized by a "Küsterlehrer", the sexton-teacher. Kulm did not have its own pastor at the time, so one of the teachers, the "Küsterlehrer", was in charge of church functions.

Opa's parents were really remarkable people. His mother's family, the Leischners, had been among the founders of Kulm. **Sara**, Opa's mother, grew up in an all girl family. She was the fourth of five daughters. Opa's grandmother⁴, **Karoline Leischner** had died when Sara was only 18 years old. Her father, **Daniel Leischner**, died April 13, 1922, the year Opa was born. In Bessarabia, the custom was that the youngest son inherit the family farm, so Opa's dad, **Andreas Necker**, being the oldest, had to find his own farm. His brother paid him out his part of the inheritance⁵ but only in 1922, i.e. 4 years after he had founded his own family. It may be presumed that at first the young married couple lived on the paternal farm. We only know that a few years before Opa's dad could buy his own farm, and his brother Rudolf had gotten married, they had moved to and lived in one room on the Leischner farm. Here Opa, Hilma, and (probably also) Emma were born. Then in 1927 a farm became available, a so-called "half farm", meaning the farmyard was half the size of an original settler farm. Andreas Necker's farm yard measured 20m by 250m⁶. It carried the "Wirtschaftsnummer 53", i.e. farm yard # 53. Here Opa's dad became quite a wealthy man even though his health had been ruined in WWI during his Russian military service. Sara had to care for a sick husband, a big farm,

² His godparents were Rudolf and Ida Necker, and Theophil and Klara-Johanna Weiss.

³ Of Opa's sisters, Elsa was 8 days, Alma 16 days, Hilma 19 days, and Emma 31 days old when they were christened.

⁴Karoline Leischner nee Graumann, born Jan.5, 1879 in Kulm, died June 6, 1914 in Kulm.

⁵I.e. 49 000 Lei, see Rudolf Necker's biography, p. 4 and 38ha of land.

⁶Kison, Hilda, Ortsfamilienbuch Kulm, Bessarabien von 1815-1940, p. 264.

and as a business woman. She was a gentle, caring, considerate person. For sure she was an excellent cook, having to prepare special dishes for her ailing husband. She even cooked for the pastor for a while as nobody in the village was willing to accept that job. Her faith meant much to her. Tante Emma remembers how at her death the whole room appeared to be filled with a special presence, even the nurses in the hospital mentioned this.

Opa's father, **Andreas Necker**, was much loved by his family and a well-respected man in the community of Kulm. A report of his personality is found in the "Heimatbuch der Gemeinde Kulm"⁷:

"Andreas Necker: This beloved and esteemed church curator was born 18 December, 1892 in Wittenberg, (Bessarabia). Soon afterwards, his parents moved from Wittenberg to Kulm, where they would take up farming. In his younger years, Andreas had a difficult time under the strict regimentation of his father. He married Sara Leischner (born 25 April, 1896). This marriage produced three⁸ children.

He was an industrious and honest person and, as a result, was elected as church curator in 1928, at the young age of 34. He occupied this position for 9 years to the complete satisfaction of the community. For another 3 years, until the Resettlement, he served as a church elder. He was also a member of the Bessarabian Consistorium⁹ for some years. In 1944, I visited Mr. Necker when he was in bed with a severe illness. Fully aware that his life on earth would not last too much longer, we were able to strengthen ourselves through prayer, firmly believing in our Lord Jesus Christ. At 52, he had to leave us. How willing he would have been to remain down here with us to experience the end of a terrible war. Soon after, Mr. Necker died and rests in foreign soil in Wartheland.

(Widow Sara Necker and her two remaining children found a new home in Canada By D. Wölfle¹⁰.)

⁷P.65f, translated by Allen E. Konrad.

⁸ The actual number is five. The first two children died in infancy.

⁹ The church council for all Lutheran churches in Bessarabia situated in Tarutino, Bessarabia.

¹⁰ Written in 1968

Opa's father had a hard childhood. His parents had left Wittenberg (another Bessarabian-German village), when he was very small and subsequently built up a farm in Kulm. But in 1910 when Andreas was 18, his father was killed in a threshing accident. The following year, in 1911, his 7-year old brother Albert died of unknown causes. Then August 1st, 1914 WWI started and one month later he was drafted into the Russian army. He served as Russian soldier for 3 years and 2 months¹¹ in Turkey under terrible conditions and inadequate food supply. As a German in the Russian army, he could not fight against the country's main enemy, i.e. Germany. Three years into this war, on October 25, 1917 the Russian Revolution started¹². Czar Nicolas II and his family were murdered and the country was cast into unbelievable chaos. WWI officially ended Nov.11, 1918. Russia, however, withdrew from any war activity already on March 3, 1918, i.e. 8 months earlier with the Peace of Brest-Litovsk. According to his "Wehrpass" (service record book) of 1943 Andreas Necker was dismissed from his military service in November 1917. So he was at home 5 months before Russia retired its troops and got married in Kulm on May 18, 1918. His brother Rudolf had returned in February of 1918¹³. The Russian army had dissolved itself before the armistice. From then on the Bolsheviks/ Communists ruled Russia. During this turbulent time in Russia, Bessarabia, however, was taken over by Romania and from 1918 on, Bessarabia became part of the Kingdom of Romania. When Opa's dad returned from the war, he was a man of poor health. Opa remembered him only as a sick man. He died of stomach cancer at the age of 52 which most likely had been caused by starvation he endured while in Russian military service. Opa was too late for his funeral in Sinnigen, near Kosten in the district of Posen, Warthegau¹⁴ where they had received a Polish estate after Resettlement from Bessarabia. Opa, a German soldier at the time, was too far inside Russia to make it on time for the funeral in Poland. In a way it was a blessing that Andreas Necker died at this date because six weeks later on January 21, 1945, Opa's mother and sisters fled ahead of the approaching

¹¹See his declaration on 16.10.1943 in his "Wehrpass", p. 12. Therefore he must have left the Russian Army in Nov. 1917.

¹²Russia used the Julian Calendar. According to our (Gregorian) calendar it would be Nov 6th.

¹³See Rudolf Necker's biography p.1.

¹⁴Today Smyslowo or Zmyslowo, district of Koscian, Posnan.

Russians. How could they have cared for a dying man under the conditions on the flight in a horse-drawn wagon at minus 20 degrees temperature and during several weeks on the road? The accompanying 2 Polish farmhands left them after the first stopover, and from then on, these 3 women had to fend for themselves.

Opa loved and admired his dad a lot. He remembered how he played “train” in the house with his children. Andreas Necker must have been a remarkable man. As mentioned before, his parents had come to Kulm from the Bessarabian-German village of Wittenberg when he was a small boy. It was sometime before 1896 because his 3 younger siblings were all born in Kulm.¹⁵ Two of Andreas’ siblings died fairly young, Justina at age 16 in 1917, and Albert at age 7 in 1911, so Andreas really grew up only with his brother Rudolf. In 1910, when Andreas was just 18 years old, his father, Christoph Necker, had been killed in a threshing accident at 45 years of age. So within 7 years, Andreas had lost his father, his brother, and his sister, and in addition he had been fighting in Turkey.

During the time when Andreas and also his brother Rudolf served at the war front, Russian troops had occupied their farm at home and totally ruined it. When the two brothers returned home, they first of all had to rebuild it. In 1927 Andreas Necker bought his own farm from Daniel Isaak who emigrated to Penticton, BC. Opa and his mother could visit this family after they came to Canada. This Isaac, then Necker, farm plot was right in the middle of the village, straight up from the church in the “obere Reihe”, the upper row of houses. Kulm is situated on the side of a hill, and so Opa’s family farm was quite steep but it had a very good location. The whole village was 4 km long, therefore to live in the middle of this village was quite advantageous, especially for their business with a general store. Kulm’s growth had forced the farms to be divided up many times. Half a farm, like the Necker farm, was still a good size farm plot. Then in 1928 Andreas tore down all the old farm buildings and erected his own house and one after the other of the necessary farm buildings. To this day “A N 1928” is carved into a stone at the bottom of the stairs leading into the house and some of his buildings are still standing. Later on Andreas also bought the adjacent one quarter plot “Kison” farm¹⁶ from Tante Gertrud’s relatives who also emigrated to Canada. This was supposed to become Opa’s farm after he grew up and carried the Wirtschaftsnummer 54 (farm yard # 54).

¹⁵Rudolf *3.3.1896, Justina *12.11.1900 and died 14.2.1917, Albert *23.1.1904 and died 29.1.1911.

¹⁶It had been built in 1840, see Sara Necker’s notebook, p. 2.

Andreas owned 73ha¹⁷ land, i.e. 53ha arable land, 17.5ha pasture and 2.5ha vineyard. That much pasture land was needed for his great number of sheep, often a herd of 170-180¹⁸ sheep. Andreas together with another farmer (Ferdinand Bohnet) had enough sheep, even Karakul i.e. Persian lamb sheep, that these 2 together employed their own shepherd. For Bessarabian-German conditions, Andreas Necker was considered a wealthy man. In 1940, at Resettlement, when all Bessarabian-Germans had to leave their country, Opa's dad also handed in a sizeable amount of cash money to the government authorities.

Besides his farming enterprise, from 1929-1939 Andreas also owned a general store. In the beginning the goods were kept in the living room. Eventually a separate But as Andreas was quite sensitive to people's opinion, and when he heard them call it "Hühnerstall", (chicken coop), he tore it down and the living room again stored the merchandise. Opa remembers too how his dad bought his supplies from Jewish dealers in Tarutino. This later on was frowned upon by the Bessarabian-German Nazis. Opa's dad though had a good relationship to Jews. Often the Necker customers were unable to pay for their goods. Kulm had very poor people. So their debt would be entered into a booklet during the year and at harvest time these amounts would be settled with the debtor's harvest yields. Now-a-days people would take out a loan from a bank and pay back the bank. According to this custom, however, Andreas also had to act as banker as well as storing all these goods when he received them in the fall until they were sold. In October 1940 when the people of Kulm left at the beginning of harvest, not all people had settled their account. We still have a little booklet containing lists and lists of names of debtors to Opa's dad. The yearly turnover of the Andreas Necker general store was 700 000 - 800 000Lei¹⁹. A card of advertisement of the Necker store also survived. One side shows a smiling child with the caption: "I am glad and happy because my mom buys from Andreas N e c k e r in Kulm". The reverse side shows a crying infant with: "My mom does not buy from Andreas N e c k e r".

¹⁷On the "Fragebogen zur sippenkundlichen Erfassung der Schwaben im Ausland" 1941, the number entered is 65ha. 38ha he had inherited, 17 ½ ha were from Sara's inheritance. The rest were bought over the years (see Sara Necker's notebook), i.e. 13.5ha from Johannes Knauer and 4ha from Johann Schütz.

¹⁸ See Rudolf Necker's biography, p. 9.

¹⁹See Sara Necker's notebook, p. 7.

In 1932 Opa's dad and his brother Rudolf also owned a dairy in Kulm for a while²⁰. Eventually that proved to be too much work and it was sold again.

The Neckers and Leischners, as well as all other Germans in Bessarabia were descendants of immigrants who had been invited by Czar Alexander I (1800-1825) to come to Russia. They were to populate and cultivate Bessarabia, the land between the rivers Dnjestr and Pruth north of the mouth of the Danube and the Black Sea which Russia had acquired from the Turks in 1812. As the Czar had relatives in Germany and his grandmother Catherine the Great had done the same 50 years earlier, Russia was quite confident of these Germans.

The **Leischners** came from Schachorowa, Poland²¹. They were so called "Kaschuben", an expression for those Bessarabian-Germans who originated in Northern Germany and spoke a kind of "Platt" or "Low German" which distinguished them very much from the South German Swabians. Opa's dad was of Swabian descent and descendants of both these two different backgrounds together were called "Patschker"²² which in jest Opa called himself too. Opa's mother's family can be traced back to **Johann Leischner** (1803-1869), a farmer, who together with his brother Gottlieb was one of the founders of Kulm. He came as bachelor and married **Charlotte Sidon** or **Sido**²³ in 1826 in Kulm. In 1815, 108 farmyards had been assigned for the founding settlement but when 128 families arrived, some farms had to be divided right away. Johann Leischner, however received a full farm with the # 92. So the Leischners were one of the founding families of Kulm.

The **Necker** family originated in South Germany. They had moved before 1730 from Altenstadt/ Geislingen southeast of Ulm to Merklingen northwest of Ulm. From Merklingen, in the early 1800's, the tailor **Joachim Necker** or **Neckar**²⁴

²⁰See Heimatbuch der Gemeinde Kulm, p. 83.

²¹ So in: Heimatbuch der Gemeinde Kulm, p. 10. Schachorowna/ Szaradowo is situated west of Schubin in West Prussia. According to Burkett W. Huey, The German Settlements in Bessarabia, p. 63. Schubin/ Szubin is south-west of Bromberg/ Bydgoszcz.

²²"Patschker or Batschker" was a moccasin-type pigskin pair of shoes, see Heimatkalender der Bessarabiendeutschen, 1985, p. 142, also Heimatkalender der Bessarabiendeutschen, 1986, p. 40.

²³Charlotte Sidon/Sido was born 12.5.1808 in Broschnitz, Poland and died 11.11.1875 in Kulm, see Kison, Hilda, Ortsippenbuch, p. 175.

²⁴The name is sometimes spelled "**Nekher**" during their time in Germany.

emigrated with his family to Neu Sulzfeld in Poland. Through the Napoleonic wars in Europe, farm land was made available in Poland and invitations were sent to prospective settlers. We do not know specific reasons for the Neckers leaving Germany but a farmer's life promised to be more productive for bringing up a family than a tailor's, and economic conditions were not good in Germany. Here in Neu Sulzfeld, Poland in 1807, one of the sons, i.e. **Johannes Necker** married **Anna Barbara Widmer**. They had 3 sons there. Life in Poland however was not what Johannes Necker had expected. So when Czar Alexander I sent out an invitation to come to his newly acquired Bessarabia, he and his family moved on. Russia promised many privileges to these prospective settlers, i.e. free land and farming implements, free building material for a little house, no taxes for 10 years, freedom to practise their faith, unhindered use of the German language and best of all, all German males would be exempted from any military service for "ewige Zeiten", i.e. for all times. With these promises who would want to stay behind?

Some time ago **Mateusz Neckar** from Wroclaw/ Breslau in Poland contacted us, inquiring whether we possibly could be related. It seemed so likely since his last name was Neckar, like our name had been spelled at times. His family (grandparents) had also come from Neu Sulzfeld²⁵, where our Neckers had been before they moved on to Bessarabia, and in addition, there were many Johannes Neckars among his forefathers, just as this first name is so prevalent among our early Neckers. However in comparing his DNA and Bernie's, a relationship does not seem the case. Bernie's, i.e. our DNA, belongs to the R1b haplo group and these Polish Neckars are assigned to the 12a1b haplo group.

We are also not related to **Jacques Necker (1732-1804)**, the French finance minister under Louis XVI and during the French Revolution. This Necker family had come from Küstrin in Northeast Germany and had settled in Geneva, Switzerland. Jacques had become a banker there and later was called to Paris to hold the important position of a finance minister. However, Jacques Necker had only one daughter, Germaine, later Baroness von Staël. So there are no male Necker descendants, i.e. name carriers, from this family. Opa was quite surprised, though, when he saw a "Rue Necker" street sign in Geneva.

For seven generations the Neckers lived in Russian Bessarabia. Then, as related before, after the Russian Revolution, in 1918, the Romanians occupied our country. Therefore, although both were born in Bessarabia, his dad was born in Russia, but Opa was born in Romania. Bessarabia belonged to Romania for 22

²⁵Neu-Sulzfeld now is called Novosolna, and is a suburb of Widzew in the district of Lodz.

years. But in June 28, 1940 the Russians reclaimed and occupied Bessarabia again. At this time Russia and Germany had not entered any martial activities yet. The so called “Ribbentrop-Molotov” treaty was signed between Hitler and Stalin which allowed all Germans to leave Bessarabia and resettle in Germany if they so wished. “Heim ins Reich”, (home to the German Vaterland) was the motto. To be sure, the Germans of Bessarabia had no longer any connections to their country of origin, but if this was to be a true homecoming, they should have been brought back to South Germany. Instead, after some time in different camps, Bessarabian-Germans were settled in Poland in the so- called “Warthegau” and “Westpreussen” which Hitler had acquired by starting WWII. So 3 ½ months before Resettlement, the Kulmers and all Bessarabian-Germans lived under Russian rule again, i.e. from June 28 until early October 1940. Then they had the choice to stay under the Russians/ Soviets or be resettled in Germany. Everyone of the 93,000 Germans of Bessarabia left. Before they were accepted into Germany though, they had to prove their pure German-ness, i.e. birth certificates had to be provided four generations back to demonstrate that they were not descendants of Jews. We still have these documents, or they can be acquired from offices in Germany. This way, it is relatively easy to establish our family roots far back. From these documents we know, our Neckers are 100% German.

The 3 ½ months until the “Umsiedlung”, i.e. “Resettlement”, was organized, a German and Russian commission lived in different Bessarabian-German villages to assess the German assets to be left behind. In Kulm one of these commissioners, Dr. L. Pielen, lived with Opa’s family. A letter from him to Opa’s dad has been preserved, relating conditions in Kulm after all the Germans had evacuated the village:

“Dear Comrade Necker!²⁶
22,1940

Written December

Because I let you wait to long for my promised letter, do not think that I have forgotten you or the people of Kulm. It is because due to a 3½ month absence, such an abundance of urgent work awaited me that I could write next to nothing ... especially since I wanted to present a detailed account. I was overjoyed with your letter and Wilhelm Weiß’s card, especially that all of you got to Germany safely and now find yourselves safe and sound in the camp.

Now I would like to try and relate to you essentially what happened after you departed from Kulm. When the convoy left Kulm on 6 October, I was in bed sick. I

²⁶ In: Heimatbuch der Gemeinde Kulm, pp. 173 - 175, translated by Allen E. Konrad

laid around a few days and then up and at it again.

I heard from Comrade Kutter that you were thoroughly searched, after which all Kulm folks crossed the Pruth River bridge safe and sound. Naturally, we were very happy over this bit of news. Kutter and Paul were detailed somewhere else. Kutter went to Neu-Dennewitz and Paul first to Reni and later to the Dobrudscha to handle Resettlement. Moskaliuk and I remained behind in an abandoned village. We figured for about 8, but no more than 14 days. Maybe it was lucky for us that we would not know that our stay would last 5 weeks. We were despondent. It was simply desolate. The first day, we worked late into the night to get all our documents in order. Departure was set for 15 October, and, shortly before the deadline, it was extended 8 days. We began to figure that we would be stuck there until Christmas. Then a long period of rain set in and we were cut off from the outside world for 14 days. So we got some books from comrade Treichel's house in order to keep boredom from overtaking us.

The fate of the dogs was pathetic. Each dog faithfully sat by the door of his respected master, often until he was lean as a skeleton. Dear Comrade Necker, your dog was our constant companion. Whether we drove to Tarutino or through the village, he was always with us. No stranger dared enter your yard. We were protected very well. We took good care of it and would have preferred to poison it before our departure, if only we had some poison. We turned it over to the good hands of Reinhold and Anna (that is Radion and Anna Doscha). They promised to care for it as if it were their own. Comrade Treichel's dog, sick with yearning for his master, was well cared for by Ignatow.

In regard to provisions, things did not go any better for us than for the dogs. When we recall the fabulous courses we shared at your table, we were finally to comprehend the difference between Germans and Russians. As the last Germans left the land, shortages were prevalent, if not even starvation. During the 14 days of our boarding, mealtime consisted of 3-4 eggs and dry bread. If you consider that our food was served by some of the filthiest Bulgarian women, you can imagine that we often got up hungry. Everything was caked with filth so that we always had to take along a cloth in order to make things clean. There were no knives, plates and glasses. Everything got missing within 2 days after the German departure. It was not until shortly before our departure that we came to know that the thieves were none other than our Russian counterparts Antonow, Scholtonosow, and Ignatow. Those Bulgarians who remained behind and possessed more than 1 suit or 1 pair of shoes had to give them up. Suddenly, after 14 days, a Russian female cook appeared. Then there was borscht and cooked chicken daily. Most of the chickens were only half

plucked and cleaned out, so that it was really more fit for the dogs. We lost a few pounds in those weeks. Later on, we would go to Tarutino twice a week, whenever possible, to eat until satisfied in a German club room and at a clean table. Only Ignatow, the most decent of the Russians, sometimes brought us bread, butter and honey during the darkness, when no one would notice. We always said, "How fortunate that at least our German brethren were saved from this."

The recording of property with the Russians turned out to be most difficult. After negotiating for several hours, agreement for the quantity and price of the cattle left behind came relatively fast, but that was not the case with the buildings. For instance, the Russians bid 40,000 lei for all your buildings, only one 20th of my assessment. Afterward, I received instructions from the chief authority to provide substantial under-evaluation. Your brother's buildings were simply nationalized (that is to say, expropriated without compensation). Thereupon, we refused to be partners to such shabby tricks and declined to consider any further negotiations. Daily, after 5 weeks of what amounted to 4-5 hours of negotiations, it came to a point where both assessments on the list were yielded to. It was the same way with the grain. You know how cautious and uneasy I was concerning grain assessment, because I bore the responsibility of answering for all which was left behind. The Russians wanted to honour only 50% of my assessment. We needed 2 weeks just to negotiate the grain. When, on my proposal for 20 farms, which the Russians could select, the grain was measured again, the result surpassed the amount by 20% of my own estimate. The other side wanted to deduct 40% for contamination. But we did not give in, and so, on the last evening before our departure, the Russians signed our figures willy-nilly. It was a battle of nerves unequalled. The Russians tried to get us to give in through alcohol and every trick possible. To some extent, the transactions were so intense that we had to break off negotiations prematurely to keep from beating up these bandits. Dear Necker, when I am putting all this down in such detail, I am doing so that you and your fellow men may never forget what would have awaited you. I realize that times will come when you will think back on your Bessarabian home with longing. But keep this in mind too, it isn't the Bessarabia anymore as you remember your home, instead today it is Hell, a place where misery, misfortune and hunger prevail.

You can imagine how happy we were when the order for our departure finally came. In those 5 weeks, we learned to understand even better than before your yearning for the German fatherland. Shortly before our departure from Kulm, we were yet to experience an earthquake which, in Kulm did only minor damage, while in some localities (Albota, Kischinew) destroyed a greater part of the buildings.

How relieved we were to have German territories once again under our feet as we boarded our ship. The weather was fine and we had a very good trip back home. After about 100 days, I was again returning to my wife. After 8 days sick-leave, it was right back to the usual work in full strength, especially at the university where I had to take over some lecturing for my senior colleagues. My comfortable family life did not last very long before the military claimed me. More than likely, I won't be able to visit you in the camp. Should the opportunity arise though, rest assured that I will keep my promise and see you. With gratitude I think back on your sincere hospitality which I enjoyed in your home. Soon I will send you the pictures I took in Kulm. They should serve you and your family as a solemn reminder of your old homeland when you once again settle on your own piece of land as Warthegau farmers. Please greet all Kulm comrades, especially W.Weiß, Treichel, Erdmann, and also my close associates Roloff, Leischner, Vogel and Nath. Selcho.

It would please me to hear something from you soon. I would especially request that you share with me the things relative to your new place, when you settle in, and send me your address. In one way or another, I will then be able to be there with you.

I wish you, dear comrade Necker, and your family a happy Christmas time and may the New Year bring to you and your family a lot of good things and God's blessings.

May you be able to begin farming on your new land real soon and may you experience all the best. In this spirit, I sincerely greet you and all those dear to you.

Yours, L.

Pielen"

The Kulmers left their village in October 1940 by horse and wagon leaving everything behind that generations had built up. Then a boat on the Danube brought them to tent camps in Yugoslavia. From there they moved on and found shelter in different locations, one was in "Schloss Werneck"²⁷ in Upper Bavaria, another in Waldhorst close to Lodz in Poland. During this camp time, the whole village population was still together, then when the actual settlement started, people dispersed as they received their own farm.

²⁷Schloss Werneck had been a psychiatric clinic with about 700 patients, but in 1940 shortly before the Bessarabian-German Kulmers arrived, all of them were killed by the Nazis under "Aktion T4".

Opa's family was farming again from the Fall of 1941 on land of the estate Sinningen (Zmyslowo today), district of Kosten/ Koscian, near Posen/ Posnan in the then Warthegau. It was not their land though. Like all other Bessarabian-Germans the farms they were resettled on had been taken away illegally and by force from Polish owners. Andreas Necker's farm included a manor-house, even called "castle" (Schloß) to live in, and the former owner's brother-in-law now was employed on the farm. How could anybody be happy under conditions like that! Opa never wanted to return to visit this place where so much injustice had reigned before. Andreas Necker did work this farm, to the best of his knowledge, though, as if it was his own. He repaired the castle and a barn and even installed a new water pump, all at a cost of 13,000RM²⁸. But on Dec. 3, 1944 at 7:30pm, he died at only 52 years of age. According to his death certificate the causes of his death were: stomach cancer, emaciation, and heart failure. Most likely he was buried in Kriewen, district of Posen in Poland on the then Lutheran cemetery²⁹. Andreas Necker was a born-again Christian. In the before mentioned "Ladenbüchlein"³⁰ we find the entry: "16 September 1925. Kommt her, ich will erzählen.(Come, I want to tell you)... Andreas Necker". This was the usual way of announcing one's conversion experience. We know that he was one of the so called "Stundenleute", or "Gemeinschaftsleute", Pietist lay people, who met in homes for prayer, Bible study, and singing and who usually knew the date of their conversion. These people were sincere followers of Christ whose personal faith meant much to them besides being the most dedicated (Lutheran) church members. Tante Emma remembers how he expressed concern shortly before his death that none of his children were converted to Christ yet. She also tells how her dad paid for her girlfriend Charlotte Bohlender's kindergarten fee as Charlotte's own father was not able to do so. Andreas Necker also paid for their maid's, (Olga Wittke, later Bich) wedding and provided some furniture for her new home. How generous! He lived his Christian faith. He played the tuba in a village band. Andreas Necker also had passed the very valued Russian Language Exam at one time but we do not know any more about that.

So Opa grew up in a loving Christian family in the German village of Kulm in then Eastern Romania. At home and with his friends and relatives, the language

²⁸See Sara's Notebook, p.3.

²⁹ See Andreas Necker's death certificate in the appendix section.

³⁰p. 14.

of communication was German, mostly the Swabian dialect even though his mother spoke the so-called “kaschubisch”, a low German dialect. At school, of course, Romanian was spoken, and as Russian farm workers were employed on the Necker farm they had to be addressed in Russian. Therefore Opa grew up being fluent in these three languages and 2 dialects. This later on was of great advantage to him. Opa was not very fond of school though. Learning at a village school desk and also one year in a private boys’ school in Tarutino³¹ did not interest him, “Fussball” was the great attraction. However he often talked about the Tarutino boarding school, and how he had learned table manners there. Soccer and friends were very interesting to him; he also did not care for duties in their general store. Therefore at age 15, after confirmation and after having finished school, his father gave up the store and Opa and a farm hand worked the family land. Before this time his father had rented out his land as he was not able to farm himself. Opa liked farming very much. From an early age, Opa was good with plants, later on his garden was his great pride. Imagine a 15/16 year old teenager managing a farm! Inconceivable today!

Then June 28, 1940, the Russians invaded Bessarabia and a Russian-German treaty earmarked the Germans for leaving their home. It may seem hard to leave one’s home, but during their three and a half months occupation, the Russians had behaved in such a way that all Germans considered it a privilege to leave. Preparations had to be made for leaving Bessarabia and resettle in Germany. How fortunate for Opa’s family to have him during this time because his father’s ill health did not allow for much help. So when Opa was 17, all Bessarabian-Germans left their homeland.

It has to be mentioned that while in Kulm already, Opa liked **Erna Wölfle**. Being in the same class in school helped a lot and also that her brother, Immanuel, was Opa’s friend. Tante Emma remembers how she and her sister Hilma would tease him for his pretenses to visit Immanuel. Already when they were very small, probably kindergarten-age, while playing wedding, Opa would be the groom and Erna the bride, a foreshadow of what would come! With Resettlement in October 1940 however, relations were severed when all Kulmers were farming over a wide area in the Warthegau.

As mentioned before, from Bessarabia the Kulmers were brought via ships on the Danube and German trains from Yugoslavia to “Schloss Werneck” in Bavaria, a former psychiatric hospital whose 700 patients had all been exterminated by the

³¹The so called “Knabengymnasium”.

Nazis shortly before the Kulmers arrived. It may sound rather glamorous to live in a castle, but to house 1711 Kulmers plus 142 people of the Bessarabian-German village of Romanovka³² all together in one castle had its challenges.

After about a year in Bavaria and also some months in camp in Waldhorst close to Lodz, Poland, Opa's family was resettled on the estate Sinnigen (today Smyslowo/ Zmyslowo), district of Kosten/ Koscian, near Posen/Posnan in the so-called Warthegau. As mentioned before, this estate included a manor house, even called "Schloss" (castle). Opa could not enjoy all this for very long though. He was sent to an agricultural school in Kosten for the winter semester 1941/1942. Here he did really well. In every subject, Opa received the final grade "gut", the second highest grade, in Sports even "sehr gut" (very good). For behaviour and cooperation, for which you are also graded in German schools, he received "sehr gut" also.

As Nazi-Germany had started the war with Russia June 22, 1941, a young man like Opa was conscripted into the German army also. This happened in March 1942, when Opa was only 19 years old. Before he had to leave, his mother cooked Opa's favoured meal, but nobody could eat anything. Then for 3 months Opa received a military training in Germany, after that he was stationed close to Orel or Oryl in Russia for 6 weeks. The German army had penetrated Russia this far! It is only 326 km west of Moscow³³. Here Opa learned to attack tanks. A tank had to roll over them then a magnet with explosives had to be attached onto the tank. All this happened in midsummer in temperatures of 40 degrees C, while the soldiers wore full uniform and often gas masks. In his first active day, Opa experienced how the comrade next to him was killed. Understandably, Opa was very homesick in the army. Military rations with mostly turnip soup did not help much either. Opa would cry in pain and frustration. During his three years as German soldier, Opa was at home on furlough only 2 times, once after being on retreat in the Ukrainian Pripyat Marshes, when his horse had torn off his shoe, and he continued on socks without his horse for days. After this ordeal, he was taken to a military hospital in Germany, and there his mother and Erna visited him. The second furlough he received in December of 1944 for his father's funeral. As related before, he was so far inside Russia that he missed it. At this time he could stay some days with the rest of his family. That was their last time together for almost 8 years. January 21, 1945 his mother and sisters fled from the Warthegau and ended up in what was later West

³² Heinz Fieß, "Die Rückführung der Volksdeutschen", Göppingen, 2015, p. 218f.

³³ Roughly the distance from Calgary to Medicine Hat.

Germany. When the German Army surrendered May 8, 1945, Opa was taken prisoner-of-war by the Russians. At this time nobody knew where everybody was, not even if anybody was still alive. Opa often talked how as soldiers sometimes they were so tired that they fell asleep while marching. They did not dare sit down for fear of falling asleep instantly and then being surprised by the enemy. In the German army, Opa mostly served as messenger, he never had to shoot anybody. During his time, all of which he spent in Eastern Europe fighting the Russians, Opa also often had to translate for his superiors and their captured Russian POW.

During the final 2 months of the war, Opa's division was awaiting capitulation on the Polish peninsula Hela, north of the city of Gdansk. Secretly they hoped the Americans would unite with the Germans to attack Russia, even fliers had been dropped with this message. When the Russians reached them May 9, 1945, his general and Opa as translator drove on a jeep into war captivity. This was the last of any glamour for a long time, though. Opa was a POW in Russia for almost five years. The first 3 months in Russian captivity, Opa spent in Deutsch-Eylau, Poland. They were placed in tents, 4 men to a tent. Then freight trains brought them to Minsk in Belarus or White Russia, there were 45 soldiers in one freight car. The POW camp in Minsk was set up for 500 Germans. They all stayed in one long barrack, 60 feet long and 4 feet in the ground. Only in the middle aisle you could stand upright, the sides held bank beds. Food was scarce but Opa had the good fortune to be employed in the kitchen. A Romanian was the chef of the kitchen. He was sent home and because Opa knew Russian and Romanian, he took over his place. Imagine, Opa with absolutely no prior knowledge of cooking became chief cook for 500 POWs. He not only cooked but also baked and had to get all supplies for his people outside the guarded camp. For sure it was the simplest of food and never enough for the young men. Mostly they had "Kasha" (Russian barley porridge), "Borsht" (cabbage or turnip soup), with very little meat. Many Germans died of starvation during this time, but Opa in the kitchen survived! He told how one time later when they already received some wages, he bought a 2kg loaf of bread and ate it all in one sitting. Here in Minsk, under these conditions Opa spent 2½ years. The German POWs were to rebuild what their army had destroyed in the war. Their free time was very limited, but nonetheless they had some entertainment. Opa played chess even with his Russian captors. At Christmas they were allowed to celebrate church services and their guards attended them too and listened to their German Christmas carols. Opa sometimes was asked to cook for Russian officers but one of them, a Mongol, did not appreciate the boiled potatoes Opa had prepared. He threw them right on the floor. Russians apparently only like fried potatoes. POW

camps were always guarded and their inmates worked outside the compound under guard but one time Opa and a friend got out and spent an evening with some Russian girls who had invited them. When they did not show up in camp at roll-call the whole camp was under alarm. They were believed to have deserted. Then when Opa and his friend appeared at camp early in the morning, his friend was severely punished and transferred to a stricter camp but Opa, being acquainted with some of the guards, got off scot-free.

After 2½ years in Minsk, Opa was transferred to a camp in Dnipropetrovsk in the Ukraine. Here conditions were somewhat better. Opa worked in construction there. Again the Germans were supposed to rebuild Russia, i.e. work for the Russian state but at the same time their guards saw to it that the POWs took material from the construction sites for their, i.e. the guards', purposes. Opa recalls how one guard's whole house was erected of such stolen material. Opa himself once transported a complete window frame under his clothes for his Russian captor. When the house was finished, nobody asked how this could have been accomplished.

As POW for 2½ years, Opa did not know where his family was. He wrote to the Red Cross and his mom wrote there too. This is how they found each other. Only the name and a POW number was put on any correspondence. March 4, 1947 Opa's family received notice that he was still alive and somewhere in Russia in captivity, then May 5th his first 25-word card arrived³⁴. Imagine after 2½ years! What joy that must have been! Tante Emma was the one chosen to reply. She would be exempt of any chores the whole day, just to put together 25 words in reply. 25 words was the maximum allowance for a card. Then November 27, 1949 Opa was released. Only 3 weeks later his sister Hilma died of leukemia. Her funeral took place December 26, 1949. She was buried on the cemetery in Gronau, district of Heilbronn, next to the church there. However, in 2001 no trace of her grave could be found any more.

After his discharge into West Germany, Opa was 27 years of age and his girlfriend Erna Wölflle had ended up in Lübars near Magdeburg in East Germany. You needed a permit and a good reason to cross the border between East and West Germany. So a telegram was sent telling of her friend Hilma's death and the permit was granted for the funeral. Erna never returned and spent the time before her wedding on March 31, 1950 with her brother Ernst in Bad Hersfeld. Opa had already tried to get married in the Warthegau. He could not stand the thought that he and his family lived on an estate and in a castle while his bride had to work so hard on her parents' farm. Due to Opa's call-up it did not take place. Actually this marriage had

³⁴See the text of his cards in the appendix.

been decided in Bessarabia already. One time in Kulm, Erna's mother found them together while her parents had been absent. Opa said, he had neither proposed nor was he even sure of his choice. Erna's mother, who was very outspoken, told him then and there: "Des oine sag ich dir, wenn du sie sitza lasch, breng ich sie dir ins Haus. (I am telling you, if you don't marry her, I will bring her home to you)". To be sure the wedding party now in 1950 was very small. Only her brother Ernst attended from Erna's side. He also paid for her dress. The celebration took place in Opa's Uncle Rudolf's 3-room living quarters.

Now Opa was married but had no profession nor any property to fall back on. As married couple, Opa and Erna lived in an unfinished attic room in the "Armenhaus" (poor house) of Gronau. Opa's mother and Tante Emma lived in one room on the floor below. Erna got a job processing tobacco, and Opa in underground engineering laying sewage pipes. Later on he could switch to the Wertz company, making plywood. For that he was trained on a special machine and got paid like a learned carpenter. Then Bernie announced his arrival. When his time came, Opa brought Erna in a taxi to the hospital in the 30km distant Marbach and the next morning at 6am, Monday, February 26, 1951 Bernie was born. Opa did not see them till Saturday when he took them home by bus. When Opa arrived in the hospital to pick them up, the nurse knew right away which baby he came for. She couldn't believe how much Bernie resembled his dad. On the way home in the bus, Erna was afraid Bernie would suffocate under the blankets. Erna kept a diary of Bernie's development³⁵. He was an exemplary baby, the joy of his parents, his grandmother, and Tante Emma.

Then unexpectedly, a letter arrived from Erna's uncle Gottlieb Woelfle from Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan inviting them to emigrate to Canada and take over his farm. Erna's grandparents, and all her father's siblings had come to Canada in 1927 already. Now Opa and his little family was to join them. The decision to emigrate was not a hard one to make. In 1952 Germany did not show much future promise. Opa's Uncle Rudolf encouraged them too to this step. Before leaving Germany, Opa and Erna visited Erna's parents for 2 weeks in East Germany while Bernie stayed in Gronau, West Germany, with his grandmother and Tante Emma. As Opa did not have a permit, he went separately and secretly over the border in East Berlin to East Germany, but they could return to Gronau together.

So preparations for emigration were made. The Atlantic crossing took place in the former military boat "Beaverbrook", where men lodged separately from their

³⁵See at appendix.

children and wives. The parents were terribly seasick, not so 1½ year old Bernie. The trip continued by train from Quebec City to Maple Creek, Sask. Then on June 10, 1952 the Albert Necker family arrived on the Gottlieb Woelfle farm in Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan. At this time Onkel Gottlieb was married to his cousin Hanna Woelfle, who really had devised the plan of Opa's coming to the farm. She had been a former professor in Odessa, Russia and out of fear of the Russians had left Europe to marry her cousin who was 10 years younger and so found herself in a totally different environment and life style. She never really found her way in Canada and later on returned to Germany.

Opa helped bring in the crop and assisted with the threshing but then there was not enough to do on the farm and Opa had to earn money to repay Uncle Gottlieb Woelfle for their trip. So the little family moved to Medicine Hat and Opa worked in the Medalta Pottery. After about 4 weeks though, he was let go. Then he worked on the railroad and was home only over weekends. Fortunately for Opa, during this time, an alcoholic kiln operator at Medalta Pottery was dismissed and the company recalled him. Now it was winter, and he worked in a warm environment again. In 1954/55 the company closed however; then Opa worked in the Medicine Hat Clay Products.

January 1953, Opa brought his mom and sister over to Canada. In those days you had to give guarantee for immigrants. This was very serious business as Canada did not have a pension system in place either. Nonetheless, now the family was together again. Opa's mother looked after Bernie and Opa, Erna, and Tante Emma worked to earn money. In the beginning the whole family lived in rent in a basement suite consisting of a kitchen, a bathroom with only a shower, and 2 bedrooms. Soon enough money was saved to put a down payment for a 2story older house. For sure saving money was very important, often a pig's head was bought which provided meat for a whole week. They also raised some chickens which was possible in the city then. These were the good old days! As their house stood close to a shifting hill, the city moved it to another location where it still stands today. In his time at the Medalta Potteries, Opa committed his life to Christ during evangelistic meetings at Memorial EUB church. Opa had been a heavy smoker for decades but now he wanted to quit. He related, how he was almost overtaken by the temptation to smoke. At work, he would hasten his rounds at night, then run to his Bible, and read a few Bible verses to gain strength to resist the urge to smoke.

In the late 1950's Opa bought a grocery store, the "Altawana Groceries" which Erna was to manage with Opa's assistance. Later on he admitted never really having helped in the store. By this time he had become a partner with Otto Woelfle and

Arnold Necker in the “Necker and Woelfle Construction” company. When it was obvious that there were too many bosses in that enterprise, Opa founded his own business, the “A. Necker Construction” company. This company was quite successful. Their buildings are easily to be detected today, all having a receded entrance with the front window and a planter.

In 1968, Opa’s mother developed a blood clod in her arm. The arm had to be amputated to alleviate pain but a week later she died. Then in 1970, when Bernie wanted to move to Calgary, Opa sold his company to Ernst Schorr, Pastor Henry’s dad, and the whole family moved to Calgary.

In Calgary Opa went into construction again. One of his companies was the “Stepper and Necker” company and the other was “Neccon”. Both did very well. This was a time of hard work but brought financial success. Some rental properties were acquired too. Socially the Neckers found such good friends in the Salem church which had become their church home. Many hours they spent with them, also on trips to Israel, the (former gold) mines in Montana, and at the so-called White House hotel in Desert Hot Springs in California. The joy of Opa’s and Erna’s life were their grandchildren though, Carmyn, Daniel, and Lisa. Many memorable weekends were spent at the cabin at Gull Lake, also taking them to music lessons, gymnastics, confirmation classes, or Sunday School.

At only 53 years of age, Opa officially retired. Now he had time to put all his energy into building the new Salem church in 1974 and help Bernie erect the church gym in 1984. It could have been a life living happily ever after, had it not been for Erna’s illness. Sometime in her youth in Bessarabia she must have come in contact with diseased sheep. It is all a mystery, as nobody else in her family contacted this sickness that later on in her life produced symptoms like liver cancer. For a long time that was the diagnosis. By the time the true cause was discovered, it was too late for her to be flown to Toronto were specialists for this type of illness might have helped her. On their 38th wedding anniversary, March 31, 1988, Erna died. All during her suffering, Opa was an exemplary caregiver, often providing astonishing nursing expertise. Also during Erna’s many hospital stays, Opa would visit her daily.

Now Opa was alone for almost 3 years and quite lonely at times. His friends tried to interest and connect him with different ladies. One friend had suggested me as possible partner but he seriously considered this possibility at a Christian retreat in Germany. He was sitting next to my girlfriend, and as she asked him to bring greetings to me, Opa got the idea to get in touch with me. So one day in fall, Opa delivered his greetings over the phone. We talked long distance - Calgary - Medicine Hat - for a whole hour before I realized how much this would cost. Then next time,

January 1, 1991, we met for the first time and Opa proposed right then. He was ready for this relationship so quickly but I was not. We even postponed our first wedding date because of me but August 18, 1991 we were married in the chapel of the Medicine Hat Bible School. God gave us 24 years and 2 weeks together. I was so grateful for my instant new family. You accepted me right away - thank you, although it must have been quite difficult for you to see a new lady in Opa's environment and life.

I treasure the trips Opa and I could take together - 3 times to Bessarabia, even saw Opa's old home in Kulm. Several times we travelled to Germany with Christian retreats thrown in. We were in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Switzerland, Alaska and many times at the Germans from Russia convention in the USA. Also we spent many winters in Arizona but in his last years, Opa preferred Cuba during the cold Canadian winters. Opa liked to do our gardens in Calgary and Medicine Hat, and for some years we also did the flower beds at church.

Opa was the most generous person I have ever met. It was an honour for him to pay for others and how many of his dollars went to charitable organizations or needy people!! He did not like to be asked to do something but he often volunteered, especially to cook or to repair something. One of his generals in the German army one time had said to him: "Necker, Sie sind doch zu allem zu gebrauchen, schneiden Sie doch meine Haare! (Necker, you are so handy in all things, cut my hair)", and he did. Opa really was very handy. Unbelievable, how many things took shape under Opa's hands. He also would never leave a task unfinished. Whatever he started, he saw through, how valuable that is! Opa had quite a sense of humour, how much we laughed together! He did not like play-acting or pretending though. He thought it was wrong for instance to pray in a play. This characteristic might be the cause for Opa's so-called "Neckerblick" (Necker glance). He thought it was not natural or genuine for him if he smiled when he did not feel like it, so he rather showed a serious sometimes even unfriendly face. Maybe that is a trait of the Bessarabian-Germans anyway. On early photographs you do not ever see anybody of our people smiling. But I will never forget Opa's smile when he saw Daniel at the hospital and also when Lisa brought her "Banausen" (as Opa called the Stanescu kids) to his bed during his last days. You could see how happy that made him.

All his life Opa was quite athletic and in good health. The week before his big stroke, he still ran up many stairs, better than a young person. Just rheumatism plagued him sometimes "when the weather was changing". He did have a small heart attack in 2003 at which time it was discovered that some of his arteries were clogged. At 82 years of age Opa underwent a triple by-pass operation. It was hard so see him

afterwards with 20 tubes protruding from him. The year before his death he had a pinched nerve which was incredibly painful. He could not dress or wash himself for months. During Opa's last 8 or 10 years macular degeneration restrained him somewhat. The last 3 years he could not drive any more. Fortunately he had learned to use the computer and so could keep on reading the Bible in big letters there. Macular degeneration seems to be in the Leischner family, besides his sister Emma, a Leischner cousin in Germany, Emma Stickel nee Rauter, suffered from it also³⁶.

A week after Opa's big stroke when he could not speak, swallow, or move his right side, the doctors told us that he would have to move into a special care home. That was very hard to take. Then after a few more days, when Opa was slipping away, we had to decide that Opa would no longer be on life support. That seemed an impossible decision to make although all his life Opa had said that he did not want to be kept alive artificially. Then the 13th day after his stroke, in the morning at 7:15am on Sept.1, 2015 Opa went to be with his Lord. I am so grateful for the way it all went, and that Opa did not have to suffer long. As a POW in Russia, Opa had been so hungry and only survived by the grace of God and now when he could not swallow any more, it must have come back to him. But God took Opa to a much better place. Actually Opa had been ready to die, in 2003 before his by-pass operation. He had encountered death many times in his life. Now God had given him 92 years, 8 months, and 7 days.

C.S. Lewis once said, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind". This we really believe Opa is experiencing now..

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³⁶Leukemia, of which Opa's sister Hilma died, most likely came from the Necker side. Harald Unterseher died very young of this disease too. Harald's mother Mathilde, nee Necker was Andreas Necker's (Opa's dad's) cousin.

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