The Story of Luise Stumpp Bader from Alexanderhilf, a Grossliebental Village

by Michael Bader (michael.t.bader@gmail.com)

Previously published in the Heritage Review

In 1962, 25 years after she had left the village of Alexanderhilf, Luise Stumpp Bader was allowed to return from Russia and was re-united with her family in Berlin, Germany.

In 1965, nearly three years after her release, Luise and her brother, Dr. Karl Stumpp, co-authored a paper under the initials K. St. and L. B. for the *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland*, which was published the following year.[1] Despite the passage of more than 25 years, Luise recalled vivid details of her life — some, no doubt, deeply painful to revisit, and others simply impossible to forget. I suspect the reason that initials rather than full names were used was because of the fear of retribution for family still living in Russia. In the paper, she did not use the name of her husband, herself, her brother-in-law, or other family members. Her home village in South Russia was referred to as German village A. In 1999, 23 years after her death, and 17 years following the death of her brother Dr. Karl Stumpp, further details and family names were revealed in the book *Erinnerungen an die deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa* (Memories of the German colonies of the Grossliebental District).[2] Surviving members of Luise's family were contributors to the chapter regarding Alexanderhilf. In the Alexanderhilf chapter, under the heading 'Reprisals', Luise's story was retold by her descendants, and family names were added. Drawing on both the 1966 and 1999 versions, Luise's story and the fate of the village of Alexanderhilf can now be fully recounted.

Luise's life story began in the village of Alexanderhilf, one of the Grossliebental colonies (attachment 1 see map of Grossliebental colonies, Homesteaders on the Steppe, page 60). Luise and her brother Karl, were the children of Jakob Stumpp and Katharina König. Jakob passed away in 1918, leaving Katharina a widow. Luise married Karl Jakob Bader, a teacher from Alexanderhilf. They had two children; Robert born in 1924, and Erwin born in 1928.

Following WWI, the Russian civil war, the famine of 1921, and dekulakization in 1928-1929, virtually all of the Alexanderhilf farms were collectivized by 1930. The communist government sent officials to tell the German farmers how to run the collective farm. Often, these people came from big cities and had never seen how farms were run and knew nothing about the care of livestock. In the first several years of the collective farm, the taxes to the communist regime were so high that the collective farm had no fodder for the horses. Because there was no fodder, the Russian officials told the Germans to feed the horses straw over the winter, and the result was that more than half of the horses died.[3] In 1930, because there were no horses left to do field work, a meeting was held in Alexanderhilf to discuss the recent local communist administrative decree that all cows were to be made available for field work. The women of Alexanderhilf protested, they thought the cows would no longer be able to produce milk if they were taken away for field work. Karl Jacob Bader, Luise's husband, spoke to the women who protested and used all of his powers of persuasion to get them to understand that it would be in the best interest of all, even if the decree did not make sense, to allow the cattle to be used for field work. However, following this meeting, a report appeared in the newspaper stating that Karl Bader was inciting the women against the decree. A communist supporter mischaracterized what Karl had said and turned his words against him stating that Karl Jacob Bader "stirred up" the people in revolt. Karl was arrested and sent to the Odessa prison. Records show that Karl, along with his brother Eduard Jacob Bader, who was also a teacher in Alexanderhilf, were arrested on March 23,1930, and sentenced on July 30, 1930 to three years hard labor in Archangelsk. It is likely that Eduard also participated in the women's protest as he was arrested on the same date and received the same prison sentence as Karl. After serving his sentence, Karl was able to

return to teaching, but not allowed to return to Alexanderhilf. So, he decided to teach in Archangelsk. In 1934, Karl was permitted to return to his home village of Alexanderhilf to bring his family to Archangelsk. That year, his wife, two sons, and his mother-in-law, Katharina Stumpp, the wife of Jakob Stumpp, moved with him to Archangelsk.

The Letter

Approximately 5,400 miles west of Alexanderhilf, South Russia, is the city of Wishek, North Dakota. In 1935, Christian Jacob Bader, a 47-year-old farmer married to Johanna Bader, lived five miles southwest of the city of Wishek, North Dakota. Christian was born in Alexanderhilf and came to America in 1913, the only child of Jakob Christian Bader and Johanna Göhring to emigrate to America. Christian Jacob Bader came from a large family including three siblings and five half-siblings. In February 1935, Christian received a letter from Karolina Bader Graf, his half-sister, and her husband Friederich Graf who were living in Alexanderhilf. The letter was published in the *Wishek Nachrichten*, a German American newspaper, and appeared in a translated version in the book *We'll Meet Again in Heaven*.[4] This letter is one of thousands that were sent from Germans living in South Russia to their relatives in America.

28 February, 1935

Wishek Nachrichten

Alexanderhilf, South Russia

29 November, 1934

Dear brother and sister-in-law,

I've written you earlier but received no answer. I am forced to turn to you, and to all the other uncles and their children for help because the need here is so great. My husband is sick, and with our three children we are homeless, and with no help. I am very ashamed, dear brother and sister-in-law, to have to write to you for help, but see no other way. We are completely ruined, and so that my children don't have to starve, I turn to you for help. We were sent to Siberia. Me and my husband Friederich. As an invalid, incapable of work, he was sent back to our home, and I went home with him too. For as long as we were in Siberia, two and a half years, our children were put in the care of strange people. You can imagine from that how great our need was there. Our sister Louise also asked me to give you her warm greetings, and to write you that she is also in great need, and asks you, if possible, to likewise please help her. My husband, my sister, and I, and our three children all give you affectionate greetings. The children now go to school. Our brother Carl, recently got his wife, born Louise Stumpp, and the mother, to take them to Archangel, where they will live.

Karolina Graf

Dear brother Christian and sister-in-law,

Karolina Graf who wrote you this letter was not able to send it because she has been sentenced to 1 1/2 years punishment. I am alone here with my three children and ask you for help in this great need. We wait with longing for help and thank you a thousand times in advance. We pray to God that this letter comes into your hands. Warm greetings from me and my three children.

Friederich Graf

The Editor of the *Wishek Nachrichten* added the following sentences*: The above letters were handed to us by Christian Bader. We just can't imagine such need. Whoever is able to give aid to the Alexanderhilf*

Bader's family, should do it soon. Quick help is double the help. Christian Bader informed us that each should give to him as much aid as possible, and that he will then quickly send it on to those in need.

In the letter, Karolina pleaded for help from her half- brother Christian Jacob Bader and his wife Johanna Bader. She also appealed to her uncles, aunts, and their children in North Dakota. In 1927-1928, Frederich and his wife Karolina were one of eight families in Alexanderhilf that were dekulakized.[5] Dekulakization most likely occurred because of their refusal to participate in collectivization. All of Karolina and Friederich's possessions were taken away and they were sent to Siberia. After several years in Siberia, they returned to Alexanderhilf, and were taken in by relatives. Some of the 8 families that faced dekulakization were allowed to live in Alexanderhilf to face internal exile, but others were sent north to Wologda and other locations, and were never heard from again. After these 8 families had faced dekulakization, a letter from Alexanderhilf written in 1929 in *Der Staats Anzeiger*, discussed the collectivization process: "In 1928, there had been only 17 members, however, in November 1929, there were now 220 members, 87% collectivized".[6]

In addition to assistance for her family, Karolina requested help for her sister Louisa and their brother Carl (Karl)and his wife Louise (Luise) Stumpp, their children, and the mother-in-law who would be traveling to Archangelsk to live. Karolina wrote that their children were in school, so it is likely that they were younger children. However, older children of those who faced dekulakization were not allowed to attend secondary schools or universities. They were sons and daughters of the kulaks, and like their parents were treated by the government as "enemies of the people".

After writing the letter, Karolina was arrested and sentenced to 1 ½ years in prison, for reasons that remain unknown. Karolina's letter was almost not sent; but Frederich Graf took the letter that Karolina had written and added several more lines with a prayer that the letter would reach Christian Jacob Bader in North Dakota. This letter, in contrast to the letter that Karolina had written in the past, did get through. Now, Frederich and Karolina and their family waited in Alexanderhilf to see what the response would be from the Freundschaft in North Dakota.

When this letter was written, North Dakota along with the rest of the nation was in the midst of The Great Depression. Headlines from the February 21, 1935 *Wishek News* read: "North Dakota Relief Hits New High". In December 1934 roughly 34 % of the people living in North Dakota were receiving human and drought relief aid through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.[7] It is hard to imagine that the Freundschaft could offer anything, given that many farmers and their families were enduring hardship and poverty during the Great Depression. Review of subsequent issues of the *Wishek Nachrichten* did not find any more letters from Alexanderhilf.

Life in Archangelsk for the Karl and Luise Bader Family

In 1934, Luise and Karl Bader and their children had relocated to Archangelsk. Their children Robert, now 10 years old, and Erwin 8 years old, attended school. Karl was a teacher, and Luise worked as a cleaning woman at the school because the salary that Karl earned was not enough to live on. In 1937, Luise was allowed to travel by train to visit family living in Alexanderhilf. As she was leaving Archangelsk, Karl told her that he feared he might be arrested again in the near future. If he were to be arrested, he told Luise that he would send her a telegram to tell her that he was ill.

Luise Bader arrived in Alexanderhilf and she noticed that arrests were starting to take place. During the time period from 1930 to 1944, according to information from the *Repressions list for the Village of Alexanderhilf*, a total of 91 people were arrested.[8] The list included teachers, doctors, carpenters, accountants, editors, and the school director; however, the majority of those arrested were simply hard-

working German farmers. Of the 91 who were arrested, 57 men were executed. Many of the others were never heard from again.

While in Alexanderhilf, Luise received the telegram she had been dreading, from her husband Karl. She immediately returned to Archangelsk and was met by her mother, her children, and Eduard, brother of Karl. They informed her that Karl had been arrested.

The Arrest

In Luise's words, "Several days following the arrest of Karl, there is a knock at the door. We had to open the door and there were two policemen standing there. They came in, forbade us to speak German to each other, and announced that my brother-in-law Eduard had been arrested. Then I was told that I also was being arrested. I wanted to say good bye to my boys but it was not allowed. When I reached the prison, I was put in a solitary room. Tormenting thoughts prevented me from sleeping. How will my children fare? Only later did I find out that in the morning they were horrified to learn that their mother was gone and that their grandmother had suffered a stroke from shock as to what had happened during the night. At night I was taken to the NKVD in the Tschenyi Voron (Translated from Russian means "Black Crow"). I was taken first to a room where there were 10 women. There was 1 German woman in the room and we lived in great fear, only spoke to each other in whispers, and were allowed to sleep for only a few hours. Those were restless hours, because you could always hear the keys turning to unlock and lock the doors. That meant that we were being taken away for questioning. Everyone was afraid of that. During the day we were not allowed to touch the bed. A guard was always watching us through a small window. The knocking language that the inmates used to communicate with each other was also eerie. But we never answered because as Germans we were terribly afraid."

The Interrogation and Sentencing

"After a month, I was taken to the interrogation room where there was a man sitting behind a table. I was placed on a stool without a backrest and not allowed to cross my legs; my hands were on my knees. I had to remain in this position and then the interrogation began. The first accusation was espionage. They said that I had reported to Germany about the poor treatment of prisoners, about starvation, about the arrests. I was tormented with this question for a whole day. I was supposed to make a confession. But I couldn't and didn't want to because it simply wasn't true and I didn't want to tell a lie. Then on the second day there was another accusation. They said that my husband had read forbidden books and newspapers and spread anti-communist propaganda among the population and agitated against Stalin. This also was not true and I could not confirm the accusation. When I fell asleep from tiredness, I was shouted at: Don't sleep! When I was taken away to eat twice a day, I heard the man say to the man accompanying me: be careful that she doesn't fall asleep while eating. On the third day, a new accusation came that on the train on the way back to my home village, I had recounted to other passengers how bad things were on the collective farm, how the population was starving. I said: how can something like that happen, there was no famine in 1937 and as everyone knows – the population had enough to eat back then. They said that I agitated against the high prices in the store in the shopping line. But none of this was true and so I could not confess and did not want to tell the untruth. So, I had to sit for two nights and three days without being allowed to sleep for a minute Finally, I was so tired that I unconsciously wrote the document. This ended the interrogation, I had "acknowledged my guilt" and I was taken back to prison. There I fell into a deep sleep. When I woke up I couldn't at first say; was I dreaming or was it just a coincidence? A deep feeling of remorse overcame me. Now I had written an untruth after all. I later saw my brother-in-law and told him what had happened. He said "Calm down; we are men with education and we have done the same thing". They also had broken down and confessed to things that they had not done during interrogation. So, on August 9, 1937, I was sentenced to 10 years of forced labor on the basis of my "self-confession".[9]

Prison Life

What follows is a summary of the next twenty- five years of Luise's life. For the complete story, readers are encouraged to consult the Heimatbuch article, *"The Fate of a German Russian Family".*[10]

"We were to be transported from a collection camp the next day. A group of women and many more men were now put together. We first took a ferry, and then began a march through the forest in snow and rain. As we did not reach the barracks we were supposed to and the night broke, we had to spend the whole night standing there. The next day, after a long day's march we reached our destination. There were two barracks with wooden beds stacked on top of each other. Bald and bare, they stared at us. Thankfully, I had a coat and used this as a blanket to keep warm. The next day, work began. Paths were built and barbed wire was laid around the large work area. A pastor's wife was one of the women that came with us, she could not stand the strain for long and died soon after arriving, just as others began to die also. My first assignment was to wash the laundry of the workers and also of the deceased. After a while I, along with another German woman were transferred to the administration. Here we had to look after the administrative staff. Many times, food was stolen by the "Urki" or "Blatnyje". (The English translation for Urki is thug or thief, Blatnyje means type of social network). They were a special type of people in the camps. They were criminals that even the camp administrators could not deal with. They were feared and no one could force them to work. They played cards and enforced their demands everywhere. They robbed the new arrivals in the camp or demanded their tribute when a camp inmate received a package from his loved ones. They demanded meat from the cook at the expense of the other camp inmates- and got it. A mysterious group of people, incomprehensible to us, under whom the other camp inmates had to suffer. In the camp, the alarm was raised at 5 am. At 7 am the individual groups were taken to the work site by the respective brigadier, who had guard dogs with him. Felling the trees was particularly difficult in the winter months, because the trees fell deep into the snow and had to be pulled out with great effort. Weakened people often did not manage it. But because the allocation of bread depended on the norm achieved, these poor people received less and less bread and often had to be supported on the march to the camp. In the morning, they were found dead in their sleeping quarters. The mortality rate was high. The dead, frozen bodies were "stacked" in a barn and then taken away all at once. We never found out where the bodies were taken. Here, I also saw horses screaming with hunger so loudly that one shuddered; they gnawed on the tree bark so loudly that one could hear if from far away. Several years later, from this forest camp we were driven into the forest to a new camp. Here we also saw German prisoners of war. In this new camp I was assigned to the camp as a guard – it was a responsible position. In 1947 my 10-year prison sentence was coming to an end. When I asked about the village administration of my hometown, I was told that everyone from Alexanderhilf had been deported, but they didn't know where. When I asked about my husband, I received the news from Moscow that he had been banished to a silence camp for 10 years. On August 9, 1947 I was released and had to leave the camp."

Regarding her experience in the prison camp, Luise stated "Here, perhaps a quote from Molotov, when he spoke at the All-Russian Congress on March 8, 1931, is appropriate: "We have never made a secret of the fact that we use the labor of healthy and able-bodied prisoners for certain projects. We have done so in the past, we are doing it today, and we will continue to do so in the future".[11]

The Fate of the Village of Alexanderhilf

Luise completed her 10-year sentence in 1947 and during this time WWII had ended. She did not know if her husband or children or mother were still alive, or if they were alive where they were living. Luise was told that residents of her home village Alexanderhilf had been deported, but was not told where they had been sent.

Survivors and eyewitnesses reported that the village of Alexanderhilf was evacuated on March 29, 1944. For further details regarding the Alexanderhilf Trek, the reader is referred to two journal articles.[12],[13] On June 29, 1944, exactly three months after they left their homes, they arrived in Grenzhausen (now known as Slupca, Poland). Barely two weeks after resettlement, all conscription-eligible men were ordered to report to the district center in Konin for military examination and enlistment into the German Wehrmacht. A fully loaded train of men conscripted into the German army departed from Grenzhausen. The entire community—wives with children, parents, and siblings—bid farewell to those leaving. There were many tears and sorrow, as everyone understood where they were going. Many of them—nearly half—never saw each other again. They perished in foreign lands on distant battlefields. Once all the men had been conscripted, only the women, children, and elderly remained.

With the approach of the Russian army, on the night of January 21, 1945, some of the resettled Alexanderhilf residents caught the last train from Grenzhausen and on January 23, arrived in Potsdam, Germany. Unfortunately, on June 25, 1945, the majority of the Russian Germans who lived in the Soviet occupation zone near Potsdam were loaded onto trains at the Potsdam station and were forced to return to Russia. This occurred because under agreements made at the Yalta Conference held in February 1945, Russian citizens living in Germany and other parts of Europe were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union.[14] To prevent them from refusing or hiding before being sent back to Russia, they were told that they were being taken back to their home villages on the Black Sea. Most did not believe these words, but some of the older men wanted to return home as quickly as possible and therefore fell for this deception. After half a month, the transport crossed the Russian border, and at the point where the train was supposed to turn south towards Odessa, it instead continued directly eastward towards Central Russia. After more than one and a half months of a grueling journey in overcrowded cattle wagons, on August 15, 1945 the Alexanderhilf refugees were brought to Tajikistan (Central Asia), in the Molotowabad district, which was 3 km from the Afghan border. The nearly two-month-long journey from Potsdam to Tajikistan was filled with immense difficulties, many deaths, and countless misfortunes. The very next day after their arrival, they were assigned to nearby Russian collective farms for work on cotton plantations and had to be in the fields by 6 a.m. The children were placed in Russian or local kindergartens, where they were ostracized and mistreated because they were Germans and did not understand the Russian language. Their mothers only saw them at night when they came home exhausted from hard labor. From that point on, they were all exiles and were treated as traitors to the people. Very difficult years began, and many of the Germans did not survive these times. Alexanderhilf was not alone in its suffering; similar harrowing accounts echo throughout the stories of other German Russians who were forced to flee the Black Sea region.

But even sadder and more difficult was the fate of the other part of the Alexanderhilf community—those who failed to reach Germany and tried to flee by cart or on foot after the evacuation order was issued, only to be too late. As sad and difficult as it was, all the refugees had to turn back and return to Grenzhausen and the surrounding villages. On the night of January 20, 1945, they left Grenzhausen, and on January 25-26, they returned, but by then they had already been plundered, beaten, and robbed. The only things they had left were the clothes they were wearing. Almost all of them had their personal documents and family photos taken away. They were told that they would never need these again in their lives. Many were beaten so severely that they could barely walk. The elderly, the sick, and children were particularly affected. During the return, there was complete silence—only the sobbing of women and children could be heard. No one could comprehend what had happened to them. The most terrible thing, however, was still ahead. When they arrived back in their homes, they found them either burned down or completely looted. Those who were lucky enough to still have a roof over their heads now had to share it with many other refugees. Food was scarce, and hunger set in. Shortly after, the arrests of men began. They were accused of being enemies of the Soviet Union, fascists, or collaborators. Many were deported

to Siberia, never to return. Families were torn apart, and despair spread among the people. Women were left alone with their children, struggling to survive in the harsh winter conditions. Alexanderhilf emigrants were sent to western Siberia, such as Omsk, Tomsk, and Novosibirsk, as well as the cold region of Krasnoyarsk Krai, and even further to the east to forced settlements in Irkutsk, or to the Arctic cities of Dudinka and Norilsk. By the 1960s most Alexanderhilf compatriots lived in five settlement areas: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Siberia and the Krasnoyarsk.[15]

Karl and Eduard's Imprisonment

Luise had last seen her husband Karl and brother-in- law Eduard in 1937. Along with other teachers, writers, scientists, doctors, and clergy, Karl and Eduard's arrest and imprisonment was an attempt by Stalin to silence the "intellengentsia": those he perceived to be enemies of the state. To this day, Eduard's fate remains unknown. When she was released from prison in 1947, Luise was told that her husband Karl had been banished to a silence camp for 10 years. The Russian authorities would not say where this camp was located. Following the end of WWII, as part of the Allied policy of denazification, the Soviet army of occupation set up ten special camps. Most of those imprisoned were members of the Nazi power apparatus, but there were also Soviet citizens and Russian emigres that were imprisoned. Because inmates were not permitted to have any contact with the outside world, these special camps were also called "Schweigelager" or "silence camps". Silence camps, unlike labor camps, did not impose forced labor. According to survivor testimonies, what proved most demoralizing was the relentless monotony and the complete absence of purposeful occupation. The catastrophic hygienic conditions, lack of food, medicine, clothing and heating fuel led to illness, starvation, epidemics and a high rate of mortality.[16]

Robert Bader

Following Karl and Luise's arrest in Archangelsk in 1937, their sons Robert and Erwin lived with their sick grandmother in Archangelsk. In 1939, they were allowed to return to Alexanderhilf with their grandmother. At that time, Robert was 15 years old and Erwin was 9 years old. Life continued and they heard no news regarding their parents. A severe blow to the village of Alexanderhilf came in February 1943 when 22 young people were drafted into the German Wehrmacht. Robert Bader, at the age of 19, was one of those 22 men from Alexanderhilf. The new recruits were taken to Holland for training. But after just a few months, they were deployed to the Eastern Front in the Poltava region, where a major Russian offensive was underway. Barely a month or two passed before the first death certificates for these fallen boys arrived at the homes of their parents. But unfortunately, the awards and letters of praise sent to the parents could not replace their sons. In total, over half of those who were drafted were either killed or wounded.[17] Unfortunately, Robert Bader was among those who perished.

Katharina Stumpp

Luise's mother Katharina Stumpp had returned to Alexanderhilf in 1939 with her grandsons Erwin and Robert. Unfortunately, in 1944, she was caught up with the other Alexanderhilf villagers during the evacuation of Alexanderhilf and was deported. She died in the autumn of 1945 in a small settlement near Molotovabad, Tajikistan.[18]

Luise's life from 1947 – 1962

On August 9, 1947, Luise was released and was told to leave the camp. The Soviet administrator advised her to go to the Altai region, an area along the southern border of Russia with Kazakhstan. He told her that there were many Germans living there. She was given an ID card, and 150 rubles for food and a train ticket to Kirov. After she reached Kirov, she and a Volga German woman traveled together on cattle cars by rail, another distance by truck, and eventually arrived in Sokino, 2500 km from the prison camp. For

the next 6 years, she remained in this area, first working as a maid, and then a housemaid and nanny for a German family. She was not allowed to leave the village and reported to the authorities every month. In the 1950's, she began looking for relatives. Finding lost family members was not easy, as there was no search agency for the special settlers. However, following Stalin's death in 1953, restrictions eased somewhat and German families that were banished to Russia began to find one another by word of mouth and by letters. Luise found a niece who lived in Zelinograd, Kazakhstan and after 3 years of asking, Luise was finally allowed to stay with her niece. She lived with her niece until 1956, and then went to stay with relatives in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. She remained in Dushanbe for the next 6 years. During this period, she discovered that her son Erwin was living in Germany and began exchanging letters with him. She also learned of the deaths of her son Robert and her mother, Katharina Stumpp. Luise attempted to obtain a permit for family reunification but her first application was rejected, and subsequent applications were also rejected.

In Luise's words, "I had become so tired and weary that I wanted to give up my efforts. But everyone encouraged me not to give up, to keep fighting. And so I did. A Tajik woman lived near our home and she was in the party leadership. This woman stood up for me. And so the day came when I received the message from the local administration and the German embassy in Moscow that my departure had been approved".[19]

It was likely a combination of efforts on the part of her son Erwin, the Tajik woman, and her brother Dr. Karl Stumpp that led to her release. In 1958, despite the promise that the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev would help bring about the re-unification of German families, over the next 5 years only 633 individuals out of 150,000 applicants were granted visas.[20] Luise was among the fortunate few.

Erwin Bader

Erwin returned with his older brother Robert and grandmother Katharina Stumpp to Alexanderhilf in 1939. Robert was called up to serve in the German Army and died in battle in 1943. After his death, Erwin was alone without immediate family; his only known surviving relatives were his grandmother and other distant Stumpp/Bader relatives living in Alexanderhilf.

To uncover further details regarding Erwin's life, review of his EWZ records (Attachment 2, EWZ record) was crucial to help fill in the knowledge gaps of Erwin's life.[21] The Einwandererzentralstelle (EWZ) was a Nazi government agency established in 1939 whose purpose was to process ethnic Germans who were resettled into Nazi-occupied territories. EWZ records included personal and family information, ethnic backgrounds, and racial purity determination. Erwin's EWZ processing took place in specially designed railroad cars, called the EWZ Special train.[22] The train was long, consisting of various railcars: a photo studio with a dark room, railroad cars filled with typists recording personal details for the EWZ forms, carriages designated for medical and "eugenic" examinations, and finally, a room featuring a table and a Nazi eagle, used for the Naturalization ceremony. Erwin's EWZ form was completed on Special Car number 27.

The portions of Erwin's EWZ record that were available for review included the Short Form, the Festellung der Deutschstämmigkiet (Determination of German Ethnicity), and the Einbürgerungsantrag (Naturalization Application).

Information obtained from the Short Form showed that the date of application was June 6, 1944, and the EWZ number assigned to Erwin Bader was 924726. Erwin was born in Alexanderhilf on April 27, 1928. His religious belief was Evangelical Lutheran, his occupation was wheelwright apprentice. A wheelwright was a specialist who made and repaired wheels, especially wooden wheels for carts and wagons. He most likely apprenticed under Wilhelm Bader or Theodor Esch; two wheelwright master craftsmen who

worked in Alexanderhilf.[23] His nationality was previously Russian, verified by a Russian passport. Erwin was single, his father was Karl Bader, born in Alexanderhilf in 1898, his mother was Luise Stumpp, born in Alexanderhilf in 1899. Both parents were verschleppt (taken away). Erwin was currently staying in a Youth Hostel in Posen, on Margarethe Strasse, number 36. A photograph of Erwin was attached to the form.

Information obtained from The Festellung der Deutschstämmigkiet provided the names of Luise's parents, Jakob Stumpp and Katharina König. Karl Bader's parents were not included in this document. All, including Erwin, were determined to be of 100% German ethnicity.

One of the most important portions of the EWZ record was the Einbürgerungsantrag or Naturalization Application. More details of Erwin's life emerged: Erwin and his family's language was German; he attended school from 1935 – 1942 and obtained a 7th grade education from Russian and German schools (Alexanderhilf and Archangelsk). Erwin had not belonged to any political party or club, had no military service, no awards, and had no criminal activity. In regard to the question "Names of Relatives Living in the Reich," Erwin did not list any relatives residing in the Reich.

In the next portion of the Naturalization Application was the following statement: "I certify under oath that all of the information I provided about myself and my family members is true and in particular declare under oath that I am not aware of any facts that give rise to doubt about my family members' German-blooded ancestry especially Jewish ancestry. I have been expressly informed that my naturalization can be declared invalid and my naturalization certificate can be withdrawn if I have provided incorrect or incomplete information about myself and my family members, any previous convictions, or pending criminal proceedings". A designated space for the applicant's signature featured Erwin Bader's signature in his own handwriting. Results of the biologic and ethnic testing revealed no concern, Erwin was given a grade III determination, which meant that he was suitable, the proposed determination was that he was Naturalized.

Section 12 of the Naturalization Application provided a timeline—a detailed account of Erwin's whereabouts from his birth up to the date of his application in 1944. Erwin was born in Alexanderhilf in 1928 and lived there until 1934. From 1934 – 1939 he lived in Archangelsk. He returned to Alexanderhilf in 1939 and completed his schooling in Alexanderhilf in 1942, obtaining a 7th grade education. After completing his education, he became a wheelwright apprentice. On March 21, 1944 Erwin left Alexanderhilf for Resettlement into the Reich. He reached Posen, Warthegau (currently Poznań, Poland) on April 9, 1944, 19 days after he left Alexanderhilf and several days before his 16th birthday. From April 9 – April 23, 1944, Erwin stayed in a Transit camp in Posen, Warthegau. From April 23 – April 30, he lived in Welenu, Wathegau (currently Wieluń, Poland). From April 30-May 3, he was in Kalisch, Warthegau (currently Kalisz, Poland). From May 3 – May 6, he was in Sunbrück, Warthegau (currently Opalenica, Poland). All of these villages were captured by Germany in 1939 during the invasion of Poland. Distance wise, these villages were located within a 25-to-125-mile radius of Posen. (Attachment 3, Google map showing Poznań, Slupca, Potsdam, Berlin). It is uncertain why Erwin was in these smaller villages, he may have been working as a wheelwright apprentice and traveled with a master craftsman to these smaller villages in the Warthegau. From May 6 until the date of application June 6, 1944 he was living in a youth hostel in Posen at Margarethenstrasse 36.

The EWZ record confirmed that Erwin left Alexanderhilf on March 21, 1944 and arrived in Posen, Warthegau on April 9, 1944. A critical piece of information is that Erwin did not travel with the other Alexanderhilf villagers who left on March 29, 1944. They arrived in Grenzhausen, Warthegau - about 70 km east of Posen- on June 29, 1944. Why was Erwin allowed to leave Alexanderhilf eight days earlier than the Alexanderhilf villagers? Turning back to events surrounding the evacuation of Alexanderhilf, it is

known that with the approach of the Russian Army, Alexanderhilf villagers pleaded to leave for Germany. However, the German government did not permit the villagers to leave. Survivors of the trek wrote that the “bigwigs” and rulers were allowed to leave for the “Dry West”, ahead of the ordinary Alexanderhilf villagers. Erwin left 8 days before the Alexanderhilf villagers, but he was not a “bigwig” or ruler; perhaps his occupation as a wheelwright apprentice may have provided him special status which allowed him to leave Alexanderhilf before the village was evacuated. Wheelwrights were necessary for the Wehrmacht in 1944. Despite Germany’s highly mechanized military, horse-drawn wagons and carts were still used extensively by the Wehrmacht, especially on the Eastern Front where terrain and weather often made motorized transport unreliable. Wheelwrights were needed at both the Front lines and also in the German cities to produce and repair carts and wagons for the war effort.

Regardless of the circumstances of Erwin’s departure from Alexanderhilf, it is likely he traveled by rail from Alexanderhilf to Posen, ahead of the advancing Soviet troops. Most likely he would have needed help for transportation and other costs, but it is not known from whom he would have acquired financial assistance. By all accounts, he was poor. Luise wrote that when Erwin, Robert, and Luise’s mother left Archangelsk in 1939, they had to sell all their furniture to pay for living expenses. His allowance or stipend as a wheelwright apprentice may not have been substantial. It is possible that he may have received financial help from either the Bader or Stumpp families.

At the time when the EWZ document was drawn up on June 6, 1944, Erwin was 16 years old and living in Posen, Warthegau. At 16, he would not have been old enough for conscription into the Army. At the beginning of WWII, the lower age limit was 18 for conscripts. For volunteers, the lower age limit was 17, but was later lowered to 16 in 1944. Near the end of the war, a large proportion of the youngest age class had been induced by various kinds of pressure to volunteer.[24] It is almost certain that, following Robert's death in 1943, Erwin would not have been inclined to volunteer for military service, but he likely would have faced pressure to do so.

From his life in Alexanderhilf, through his travels to Archangelsk and the Warthegau, to his eventual arrival in Germany, no additional details are known. There are many unanswered questions as to how Erwin escaped to Germany. After his EWZ processing confirmed his German heritage, he may have departed for Germany. It remains unknown whether he fled to a specific destination in Germany or if he had relatives there with whom he stayed. In his EWZ document, Erwin did not list any family members living in the Reich and in her life story, Luise did not reveal details about Erwin’s escape to Germany.

Erwin died in 2018 and was laid to rest in Pfullingen, Germany—the ancestral village of his third great-grandfather, Johann Israel Bader. Over two centuries earlier, in 1805, Johann left Pfullingen and journeyed east to settle in Alexanderhilf, South Russia.[25] With Erwin’s burial, the Bader family’s journey came full circle—beginning in Pfullingen, Württemberg, breaking away from Germany to a new life in Alexanderhilf, South Russia, and ultimately returning home to Pfullingen.

The Letter writer- Karolina Graf’s story

What happened to Friederich and Karolina Graf, along with Karolina’s sister Louise is uncertain. Karolina was arrested in 1934 shortly after writing the letter she sent to Christian Jacob Bader and was sentenced to 1 1/2 years imprisonment. Frederich was arrested in 1941 at the age of 57 and sentenced to 5 years imprisonment.[26] Given their family’s dekulakization, imprisonment, and Friederich’s health problems, it seems likely that Karolina, Friedrich, their children, and her sister Louise would have suffered the same fate as the other Alexanderhilf villagers, but there are no details regarding their lives.

The outcome of Christian Bader’s heartfelt appeal to raise money for his siblings and half siblings in Russia is unknown. It is certain that Christian had great empathy for his family trapped in Russia. Another

letter written in 1922 to his friend Friedrich Büber in Alexanderhilf revealed his compassion for his friend facing an uncertain future.[27]

Christian Jacob Bader, half-brother of Karolina, died on March 16, 1967. In his obituary, two children and his half-sister Karolina were his only surviving relatives. His parents and the rest of his siblings and half-siblings had died in Russia. According to the obituary, Caroline (Karolina) was living in Austria.[28] Against all odds, it seems Karolina survived imprisonment and managed to escape to Austria—one can only imagine how she overcame adversity to survive.

Luise Stumpp's Return to Germany in 1962

"After a few weeks I was summoned to the militia and given my exit papers and sent off with good wishes for the journey. My relatives were waiting outside. Beaming with joy, I drove straight to the airport and bought a ticket to Moscow. The flight to Moscow took only 5 hours. The Russian militia were friendly to me and the staff at the German embassy were extremely helpful. Then I took the train to Berlin in a nice compartment. I arrived in Berlin on November 2, 1962. The Russian train staff were extremely accommodating and kept giving me tea. From Berlin we went to Friedland." The Friedland Transit camp was founded in 1945 and has processed over 4 million people arriving in the Federal Republic of Germany. The camp is located near Gottingen, and still remains today as the initial reception center for ethnic German and Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union.[29] "When we arrived there and marched into the camp, the bells rang. We were all deeply moved. I hadn't heard a bell ringing for 30 years!".[30] In the Friedland Transit camp, when deportees returned to Germany from Russia, the bell was rung as a celebration of their release (Attachment 4, photograph of the bell at Friedland Transit camp).

A map of Russia and Germany shows the path of Luise's life from 1934 to 1962. (Attachment 5, Luise's life map from the article Fate of a German Russian family). Luise Stumpp Bader died peacefully in Stuttgart, Germany in 1976.

Luise's story is one of many accounts of courageous German Russian women who endured unimaginable hardship. Falsely accused, she was subjected to torture and spent ten years in brutal imprisonment, surrounded by the constant presence of death. From 1947 until her return to Germany in 1962, she suffered forced relocation and separation from her close family. In the end, she discovered that only her son, Erwin, and her brother, Dr. Karl Stumpp, had survived. The rest of her immediate family had either been confirmed dead or "taken away," never to be seen again. While Luise's story has been preserved, thousands who did not survive remain voiceless. Her unyielding will to live and the hope of reuniting with her remaining family gave her the strength to endure, and ultimately survive, her ordeal.

Epilogue

In Luise's words, "On April 20, 1962, the widow of the above-mentioned teacher (Karl Jacob Bader) received a notice from the Leningrad District Military Tribunal stating that the conviction in 1937 was annulled due to lack of proof of his guilt and that he was rehabilitated after his death".

Endnotes

[1] K. St.u. L.B. 1966. "Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie." In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland* 1966, page 14. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[2] Mack, Eduard. 1999. "Repressalien." In *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa,* page 147. Darmstadt: Weihert-Druck GmgH.

[3] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Kollektivierung der Bauernwirtschaften.” In *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa,* page 143. Darmstadt: Weihert-Druck GmgH.

[4] Vossler, Ronald. 2001. *We’ll Meet Again in Heaven*, pages 240-241. Fargo: Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries.

[5] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Entkulakisierung.” In *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, page 142. Darmstadt: Weihert-Druck GmgH.

[6] “Alexanderhilf.” 1929. *Der Staats Anzeiger,* November 12.

[7] “North Dakota Relief Hits New High.” 1935. *Wishek News,* February 21.

[8] GDO Repressions List Database Project, *Repressions List for the Village of Alexanderhilf*, accessed May 28, 2025, https://www.grhs.org/chapters/gdo/repressionsDB.htm.

[9] K.St. u. L.B. 1966. “Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, page 15. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[10] K.St. u. L.B. 1966. “Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, pages 14 - 19. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[11] K.St. u. L.B. 1966. “Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, pages 15 – 17. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[12] Bauer, J. 1966. “Umsiedlung Der Deutschen Aus Der Gemeinde Alexanderhilf, Kreis Odessa nach Dem Warthegau 1944.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen Aus Russland 1966,* pages 43 – 48. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[13] Bauer, J. 1974. “Resettlement of Germans from the Community Alexanderhilf, District Odessa, to the Warthegau, 1944.” *Heritage Review*, May 1974, pages 4 – 7.

[14] Height, Joseph. 1975. *Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa 1804-1945*, page 413. North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, First Edition, c. 1975.

[15] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Flucht nach Deutschland und Deportation (Verschleppung) nach Russland.” *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, page 164. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[16] Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten. n.d. “1945–1950: Soviet Special Camp.” *Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum*. Accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.sachsenhausen-sbg.de/en/history/1945-1950-soviet-special-camp/.

[17] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Auswanderung aus Alexanderhilf.” In Erinnerungen *an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, page 154. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[18] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Repressalien.” In *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, page 148. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[19] K. St.u. L.B.1966. “Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, page 19. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[20]Height, Joseph. 1975. *Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa 1804-1945*, page 421. North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, First Edition, c. 1975.

[21] Marthaller, A. n.d. “EWZ Index for Miscellaneous Films 7.” *Odessa3.org*. Accessed May 28, 2025. http://www.odessa3.org. Entry: Erwin Bader, 27 Apr 1928, Alexanderhilf, A3342EWZ-AO22 0498.

[22] Adler Militaria. n.d. “Soldbuch / Umsiedlerausweis Grenadier Johann Ruschas Div Nr. 404 SD Special Train SD Signature.” Accessed May 28, 2025. https://adlermilitaria.com/product/soldbuch-umsiedlerausweis-grenadier-johann-ruschas-div-nr-404-sd-special-train-sd-signature/.

[23] Eduard Mack, *Erinnerungen an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, Ravensburg, 1999, page 140.

[24] *Handbook on German Military Forces*. 1945. Accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.lonesentry.com/manuals/tme30/index.html.

[25] Stumpp, Karl. 1982. *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763 to 1862,* page 565. Lincoln: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia.

[26] Mack, Eduard. 1999. “Repressalien.” In Erinnerungen *an die Deutschen Kolonien des Grossliebentaler Rayons bei Odessa*, page 148. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

[27] “Wishek, North Dakota.” 1922. *Rundschau,* January 30.

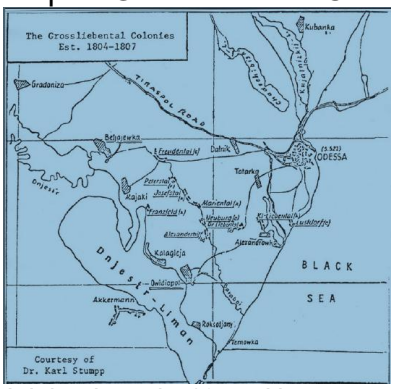
[28] “Last rites held for Christ Bader”, March 30, 1976*. Wishek News*

[29] Museum Friedland. n.d. “Timeline.” Accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.museum-friedland.de/de/museum/timeline/.

[30] K. St.u. L.B.,1966. “Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie.” In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, page 19. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.

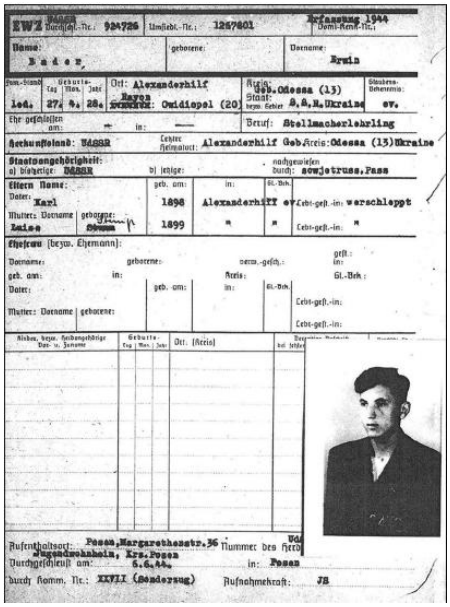
Attachments

1. Map of Grossliebental Colonies



Height, Joseph. 1975. *Homesteaders on the Steppe: Cultural History of the Evangelical-Lutheran Colonies in the Region of Odessa 1804-1945*, page 60. North Dakota Historical Society of Germans from Russia, First Edition, c. 1975.

2. Erwin Bader EWZ record



Entry: Erwin Bader, 27 Apr 1928, Alexanderhilf, A3342EWZ-AO22 0498.

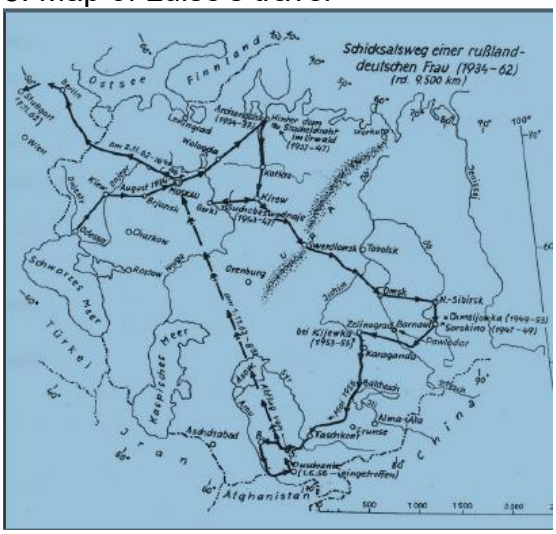
3. Map of Grenzhausen (Slupca), Poznan, Berlin, and Potsdam

https://www.google.com/maps/place/Potsdam,+Germany/@52.4283615,10.9262771,7z/data

4. Photograph of Friedland Camp bell

Museum Friedland. n.d. “Timeline.” Accessed May 28, 2025. https://www.museum-friedland.de/de/museum/timeline/.

5. Map of Luise's travel



K.St. u. L.B. 1966. "Schicksal Einer Russlanddeutschen Familie." In *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1966*, page 19. Stuttgart: The Association of Germans from Russia.