Harreß, Karl Georg (1887–1942)

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Karl G. Harreß was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who died in a concentration camp during the Third Reich in Germany.

Early Life and Baptism

Harreß, born March 20, 1887, in Oberlind (near Sonneberg, Thuringia), was baptized in 1912 in Hirschberg (now Jelenia Góra, Poland) after his military service, which had brought him to Silesia, and where he became a Seventh-day Adventist. Harreß received a short theological training at the Mission Seminary in Friedensau in 1913-1914 and worked as a colporteur. During the First World War, whose horrors he experienced, he worked as a paramedic on grounds of conscience. After the war, he worked as a pastor in Lüdenscheid, Hanover, Kassel, Dortmund, Osnabrück, and Oldenburg.[1]

Ministry and Martyrdom

While working as a pastor in the city of Oldenburg, Harreß seemed to have foreseen the catastrophe of World War II. His wife Frieda characterized him as a "sober man" who already in 1939 perceived the catastrophe that was about to befall the German nation.[2]

According West German Union president Ernst Denkert, "on one of the Sabbaths of the Week of Prayer in 1941 three Gestapo officers came to his apartment. Two of them often had come to the evangelistic meetings as spies." [3] Denkert continues that one of the guards had come to Harreß's Bible studies and had reported everything Harreß had said and done. Hence, at the end of one lecture, he was suddenly arrested. In intense interrogation, "Harreß honestly admitted his opposition to the Nazi regime, which he based on the message of the prophet Daniel that no earthly kingdom will last (Daniel 2)."[4]

Cynically they asked him about the difference between National Socialism and Christianity. Brushing aside Brother Harreß's explanation, the Gestapo officers countered with their Nazi ideology, "In Christianity one died for all, in National Socialism all are dying for one." How tragically these words were fulfilled! The people's court

sentenced Brother Harreß to hard labor. He was taken to various camps and prisons.[5]

Harreß was taken into custody and finally court marshalled by the People's Court (*Volksgerichtshof*). In February 1942 he was transferred to the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp, where he was severely mistreated. Already severely weakened, he was tasked with cleaning sidewalks with a toothbrush. The work was so tedious that he collapsed many times. Soon after, he was transferred to the concentration camp of Groß-Rosen in Lower Silesia, which claimed the lives of many victims due to the grueling forced labor in the granite quarry. "Harreß managed to send some short letters to his wife from the camp. One letter reveals that he refused to use the greeting *'Heil Hitler.'"*[6]

In July 1942 an urn containing his ashes was given to his wife. It is doubtful that all his wife's letters reached him. Sources show that in May 1942, Harreß was admitted to the infirmary of the concentration camp, where he died weeks later. The official cause of death was listed as "edema, poor circulation." However, it remains uncertain whether the cause of death indicated corresponds to reality.[7]

The courageous pastor died on July 6, 1942. Harreß was one of the few German Adventist martyrs in the "Third Reich."[8]

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Johannes Hartlapp, "Karl Georg Harreß – Ein adventistischer Märtyrer," *Dialog* (Theologische Hochschule Friedensau) July–September 2014, 8.

2. Daniel Heinz, "Harreß, Karl Georg," in "*Ihr Ende schaut an…": Evangelische Märtyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Harald Schultze and Andreas Kurschat (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2. ed., 2008), 297.

3. E. Denkert, "The Third Angel's Message," *ARH*, August 7-14, 1975, 3.

4. Daniel Heinz, “Faithful unto Death: The Legacy of Adventist Martyrs in Europe,” in *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination on the Old Continent*, eds., Stefan Höschele and Chigemezi N. Wogu (Möckern-Friedensau: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020), 234.

5. Denkert, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 3.

6. Heinz, “Faithful unto Death,” 234.

7. Heinz, “Harreß, Karl Georg,” 297.

8. Ibid.

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