

# LÜBBECKE'S OCCUPATION EXPERIENCE



## Introduction

This section explores how the town of Lübbecke in Westfalen experienced the British occupation in the early years of after the second World War. It forms part of a wider study of the Control Commission for Germany in the British Zone between 1945-1949. Sources for this section are listed at the end.

## The choice of Lübbecke

Lübbecke<sup>1</sup> lies in the Wiehenberg hills, surrounded by farmland. It is small. In 1945 the town's population was around 7,000 and, even today, is only a little more than twice that number.<sup>2</sup> There is a small port facility on the Mittelland Canal, but the town is not located near a major road or autobahn junction, and the single-platform station sits on a branch line from Bielefeld. In 1945 there was no telephone exchange. None of this bothered the British occupiers, who could rely on their own transport and communications. They even built a landing strip in the north of the town for the Military Governor's plane. The local population came on foot and some on their bicycles to watch, astounded, as the first plane came into land.

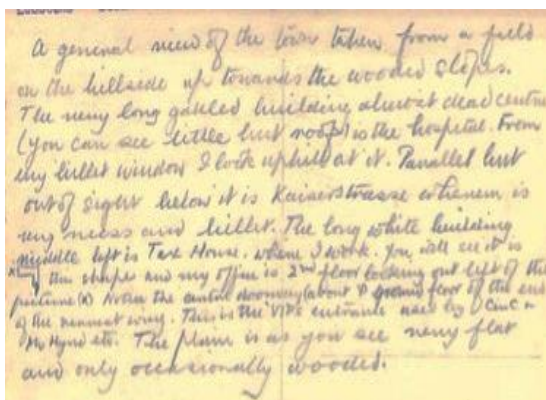


*1 View of pre-war Lübbecke*

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<sup>1</sup> Lübbecke is not be confused with the Hanseatic city of Lübeck in Schleswig-Holstein

<sup>2</sup> [www.luebbecke.de](http://www.luebbecke.de). In 1945 the total population of the Landkreis was 52,208. 19.7.45 Public Assistance (Fürsorge). National Archives File FO1051/374



"A general view of the town taken from a field in the hillside up towards the wooded slopes. The very long gabled building almost dead centre (you can see little but the rooftops) is the hospital. From my billet window I look uphill at it. Parallel but out of sight below it is Kaiserstrasse whereon is my mess and billet. The long white building middle left is Tax House, where I work. You will see it is this shape and my office is 2<sup>nd</sup> floor looking out left of the picture (x). Notice the central doorway (about Y) ground floor of the end of the nearest wing. This is the 'VIPs' entrance used by CinC, Mr Hynd etc. The plain is as you see very flat and only occasionally wooded."

2. Bill Yeadell's describes Lübecke to his wife in England

Although the landing strip has long gone, the town remains remarkably unchanged. There is a ring-road now, but the streets in the centre are almost unaltered. On Lange Straße, the main street, Café Jahnke still sells delicious coffee and cakes, as it has since the 1930s; and the Bürgerpark restaurant is still in business, although the attached cinema is today a venue for social functions. Almost all the public buildings which were requisitioned, first by the German army, and then by the British occupiers are still in use, as are most of the 250 private houses originally requisitioned by the British.

Lübecke was one of a group of small Westfalian towns within a day's driving distance of each other which, between 1945 – 1949, were home to the British Element of the Control Commission for Germany, usually referred to as CCG. The former Kreis (District) Finanzamt provided a large, modern office building suitable to house CCG's senior officials and their secretariat staff; and the handsome former Gauleiterschule, a brisk walk up Wartturm Straße provided a perfect Officers Mess. Moreover, Lübecke was less than ten kilometres from Bad Oeynhausen, where the British Army of the Rhine's (BAOR's) 21 Army Group HQ was based.<sup>3</sup> CCG's Zonal Executive Control Office (ZECO) HQ was located in Lübecke, with most of the other 20 or so functional Divisions spread between the nearby towns of Minden, Bünde, Bad Oeynhausen, Herford, Bad Salzuflen, Lemgo, Bielefeld and Detmold, with hundreds of subsidiary branches dotted among towns and villages throughout the British Zone.<sup>4</sup> By 1946 there were over 450 British units in 120 locations.<sup>5</sup>

There was a local myth that the RAF was instructed to spare Lübecke because the British had already decided to move in there. It is even claimed that the RAF dropped leaflets saying as much, although no such leaflets have ever come to light. Coincidentally

<sup>3</sup> The Control Commission and BAOR, together with the British Air Force of Occupation (BAFO) and the British Naval Forces in Germany constituted the Military Government. The Military Governor was also the Commander-in-Chief BAOR.

<sup>4</sup> 8.1.47 Accommodation problems in ZECO area. National Archives File FO1067/83

<sup>5</sup> 20.8.46 CCG Location Statement. National Archives File FO1032/961

or not, Lübbecke survived the war almost unscathed: only three bombs were dropped on the town, killing 6 inhabitants and damaging 2 shops along the main street<sup>6</sup>.

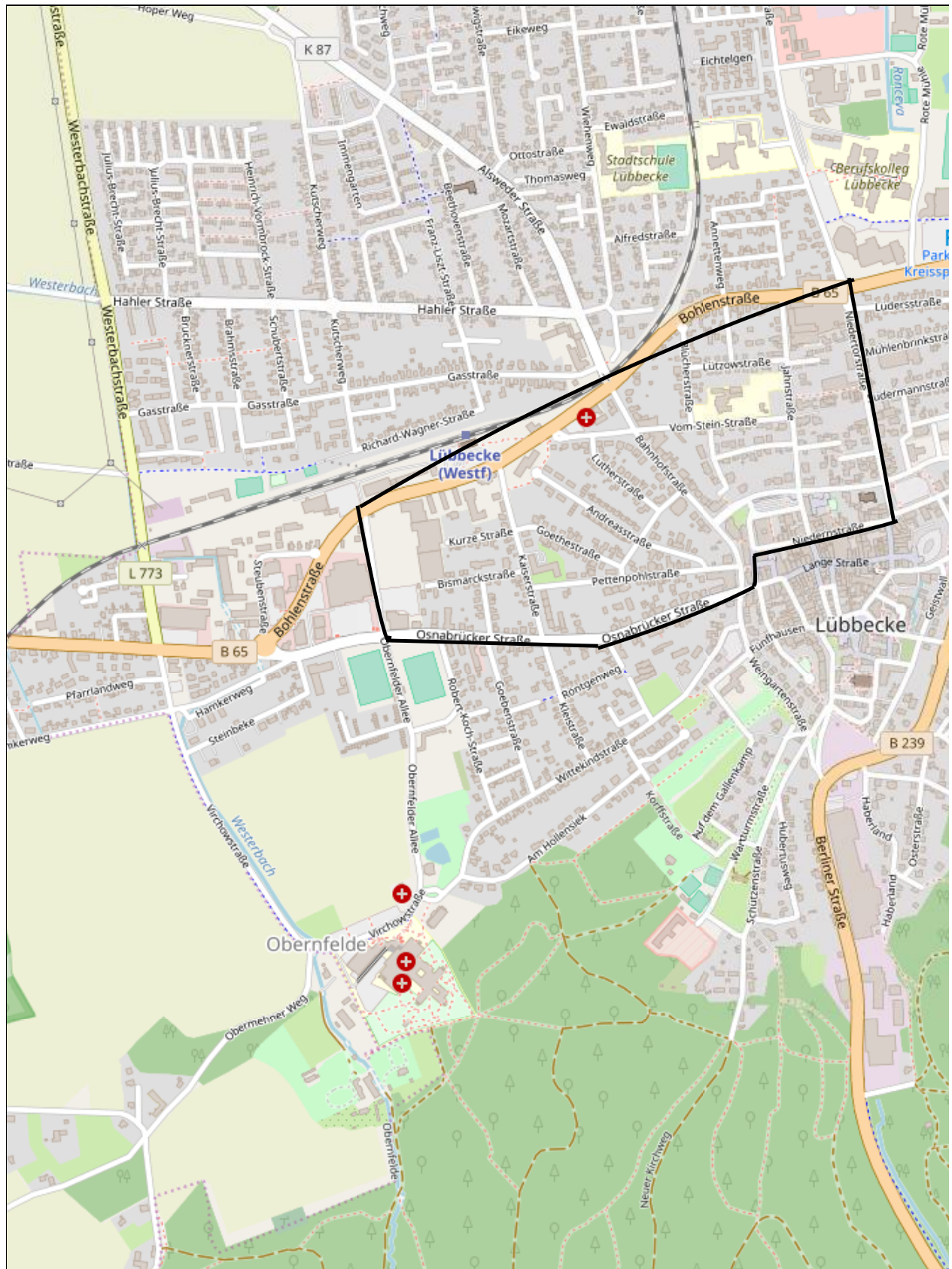
But it was not intended that Lübbecke should become CCG's permanent HQ. In June 1945 the case for Berlin was still under discussion, although the British were not keen, preferring somewhere more central within the British occupation Zone. By October, Hamburg was being seriously considered before eventually being set aside for both political and practical reasons.<sup>7</sup> In February 1946, there were plans for the Deputy Military Governor's office to be transferred to Herford, and other branches to be dispersed to other towns, so that Lübbecke could be handed over to BAOR.<sup>8</sup> In the event, the move did not take place, and the town remained CCG's zonal headquarters until September 1949 when, with Military Government at an end, its residual activities were transferred to the UK High Commission in Wahnerheide.

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<sup>6</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv. Protokollbuch des Gemeinderates der Stadt Lübbecke. Meeting on 27.10.45

<sup>7</sup> It was estimated that the move would require 45-50,000 Germans to be evicted from their homes, and a huge building project would be needed to rehouse them. Berlin signalled that they were horrified at the size and ambition of the proposals, which it was "exceedingly doubtful whether a democratic government either in Germany or Britain would sanction the diversion of resources in this way". National Archives File FO1032/81

<sup>8</sup> 25.2.46 First Key Plan for re-accommodating Main Headquarters CCG. National Archives File FO1032/494



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### 3. Lübecke 2018, showing approximate post-war prohibited area

## Lübecke under the Nazis

Although historically an SPD (Social Democratic Party) town, by 1933 Lübecke was, to all appearances a loyal Nazi town.<sup>9</sup> In the elections in March that year, more than 47% of Lübeckers voted for the NSDAP (Nazi Party), and almost 73% in the wider Lübecke District.<sup>10</sup> Lübecke-born author Walter Seger recounts how the Kreisleiter (NSDAP District Leader), Ernst Meiring had been an ardent Nazi party member since the early 1930s, and had written several times to Hitler and Goebbels, extolling the town's loyalty, and entreating them to visit (they never did).<sup>11</sup> Lübecke boasted an NSDAP leadership training school (Gauleiterschule), built with voluntary donations from wealthy Lübecke residents and local associations. The handsome building overlooking the town at the top of the Wartturm Straße was formally opened on 11 June 1939 to train future leaders in National Socialist ideology. One wing was designated as a Hitler Jugend hostel and, in September 1944, a parade took place here for 16-year olds of the 1928 cohort who had 'volunteered' for war duty. A month later, training courses at the Gauleiterschule came to an end when the Waffen SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler moved in, in preparation for the winter 1944/45 Ardennes offensive.<sup>12</sup> Foreshadowing the British occupation six months later, the Waffen SS Leibstandarte took over not only the Gauleiterschule but also the Finanzamt (Finance Office) in Hermann-Goering Straße (later Kaiser Straße), health offices in Wittekind Straße and the Volksschule am Markt. A military hospital was set up at the Mittelschule in Bohlen Straße.<sup>13</sup>

Nazi activities continued in Lübecke until the end. On 1 March 1945, an NSDAP training evening was held at the Hotel Schluter (Hotel Holland-Moritz) and, a week later, the 16-year olds who had completed their 6 weeks trench-digging duty at the Westfalenwall<sup>14</sup> assembled in the Marktplatz in their Hitler Jugend Uniforms to be presented with certificates of honour. Lübecke women and girls also served at the Westfalenwall: letters and parcels for them could be handed in at the Kreisfrauenschaftsleitung (District Women's Committee) in the Gänsemarkt.<sup>15</sup> Less than 2 weeks before the town surrendered, it was announced that a 'youth dedication day' would be held on 25 March

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<sup>9</sup> After the War Lübecke reverted to its former SPD allegiance, and is still an SPD town to this day.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Seger: *Wiederaufnahme. Lübecke 1933-1945*. Books on Demand, Norderstedt, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Walter Seger: *Wiederaufnahme. Lübecke 1933-1945*. Books on Demand, Norderstedt, 2017

<sup>12</sup> A Short History of Church House Lübecke

<sup>13</sup> Helmut Hüffmann *Kriegsende 1945 in Lübecke*. Presentation to Lübecke Town Council, 4 May 1995

<sup>14</sup> A 50-mile defensive trench line from Ahaus to Wesel, just east of the Dutch border, dug by 40,000 – 60,000 members of the Volksturm, PoWs and forced labourers at the end of 1944 and early 1945 to hold up the Allied invasion.

“Sinnlosen Unterfangen beteiligt, das von den im März 1945 schließlich überrannt wurde, als hätte es die Bemühungen um den Bau des Westfalenwalls gar nicht gegeben.“ (Pointless venture, which was finally overrun by the in March 1945, as if the efforts to build the Westphalia Wall had not existed at all) [www.dorsten-unterm-hakenkreuz.de](http://www.dorsten-unterm-hakenkreuz.de)

<sup>15</sup> Westfälische Neuste Nachrichten 12.3.45

to celebrate the passage of boys and girls from the Jungvolk and Jungmädelsband into the Hitler Jugend.<sup>16</sup>



4. Nazi Parade at the Gauleiterschule<sup>17</sup>

But some townspeople, tuning in to the BBC news from London, already had doubts about the propaganda from Berlin. They had seen the Allied aeroplanes flying unchallenged overhead and concluded that the War was not going Germany's way. One Lübbecke schoolboy describes gazing upwards, stunned by the sight of hordes of bombers droning across the sky in broad daylight on their way to attack some unknown German city; and Bürgermeister Eduard Gerlach recorded in his diary the population's increasing unrest. So when, on 3 April 1945, as the Allies entered the town, the local newspaper published Martin Bormann's call to Germans to fight until the last breath, finishing with the words "Es lebe Deutschland! Es lebe Adolf Hitler!" the appeal fell on deaf ears.<sup>18</sup>

## Arrival of the Allies

One consideration in selecting Lübbecke for the Control Commission headquarters may have been that it had decided not to resist occupation. But it was a close-run thing: Lübbecke's NSDAP Kreisleiter Meiring had arranged for tank barriers to be erected

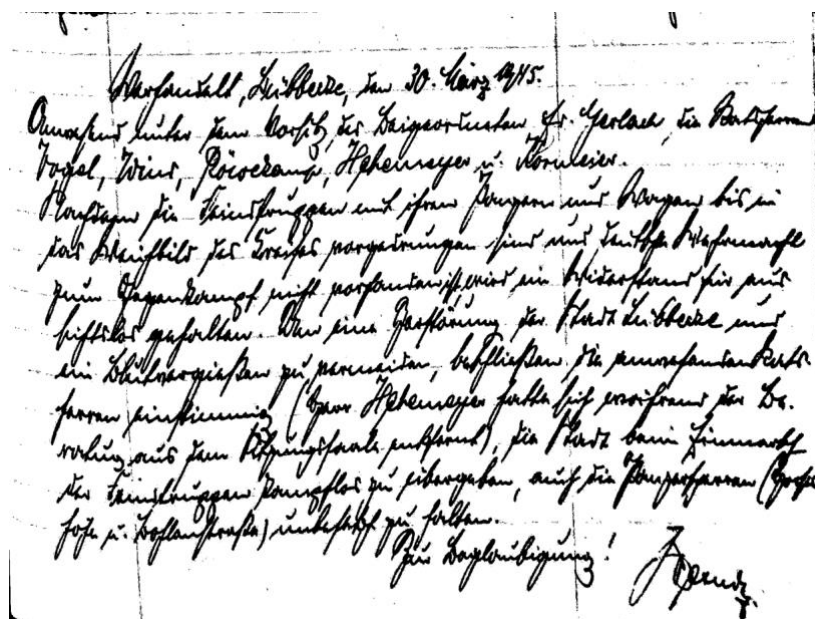
<sup>16</sup> Westfälische Neuste Nachrichten 1, 7, 8, 19 March 1945

<sup>17</sup> Lübbecke Stadarchiv. Permission sought

<sup>18</sup> Westfälische Neuste Nachrichten 3 April 1945

across the roads into the town, and for the local Volkssturm to be armed, ready to face not only the enemy, but also, potentially, a restive local population.<sup>19</sup> However the majority of Lübbecke's councillors viewed resistance as a senseless and dangerous venture with potentially catastrophic consequences.<sup>20</sup>

On 30 March, Kreisleiter Meiring having vanished<sup>21</sup>, the Council met under the chairmanship of Deputy Gerlach and agreed unanimously to hand the town over without a fight.<sup>22</sup> The tank barriers were moved aside, and the Allied troops who marched into Lübbecke along the Osnabrücker Straße on 3 April 1945 met with no opposition.<sup>23</sup> Two years later, the builder Bühnemann, architect of the Gauleiterschule, submitted a bill of 320,95RM to the council for removing the barriers.<sup>24</sup> The record does not say whether or not he was paid.



5. Lübbecke Council meeting minutes 30 March 1945. Original text<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The Volkssturm was a national militia established on Adolf Hitler's orders of on 25 September 1944, and staffed by conscripted males between the ages of 16 and 60 years who were not already serving in any military unit.

<sup>20</sup> In the village of Levern, ten miles northwest of Lübbecke, opposition to the occupiers resulted in the village being shot up and homesteads going up in flames, with deaths on both sides.

<sup>21</sup> Meiring 'turned himself into dust': Helmut Hüffmann: Lübbecke und die britische Kontrollkommission im Jahre 1945. Ravensberger Blätter Heft 1, Mai 1990

<sup>22</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke. Protokollbuch des Gemeinderates der Stadt Lübbecke 25.7.1939-27.6.1946. S165

<sup>23</sup> The British, with US and Canadian troops, formed the 21 Army Group. US troops subsequently departed to their own zone of occupation in southern Germany.

<sup>24</sup> Helmut Hüffmann Kriegsende 1945 in Lübbecke. Presentation to Lübbecke Town Council, 4 May 1995

<sup>25</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke



Lübbecke, den 30. März 1945

Anwesend unter dem Vorsitz der Beigeordneten Fr. Gerlach, die Ratsherren Vogel, Wind, Röwekamp, Hebemeyer und Kormeier. Nachdem die Feindtruppen auf ihren Fourgons und Wagen bis in das Waichbild des Kreises vorgedrungen sind und deutsche Wehrmacht zum Wagenkampf nicht vorhanden ist, wird ein Widerstand für aussichtslos gehalten. Um eine Zerstörung der Stadt Lübbecke und ein Blutvergießen zu vermeiden, beschließen die anwesenden Ratsherren einstimmig (Herr Hebemeyer hatte sich während der Beratung aus dem Sitzungssaal entfernt) die Stadt beim Einmarsch der Feindtruppen kampfflos zu übergeben auch die Panzersperren Horsts Höhe und Bohlenstraße unbesetzt zu halten.

Zur Beglaubigung!

Present under the chairmanship of Deputy Fr Gerlach and Councillors Vogel, Wind, Röwekamp, Hebemeyer und Kormeier. As the enemy troops on wagons and cars have penetrated the outskirts of the town and German Wehrmacht is not present to fight, resistance is considered to be hopeless. In order to avoid the destruction of the town of Lübbecke and to prevent bloodshed, the councillors present decide unanimously (Mr Hebemeyer having removed himself from the Council chamber during the consultation) to hand over the city without a fight on the arrival of enemy troops and leave the tank barriers at Horsts Höhe and Bohlenstraße unoccupied.  
Authorised copy.

#### 6. Lübbecke Council meeting minutes 30 March 1945, with English translation

There are Lübbeckers still alive today who witnessed the Allies' entry, and who recall the disciplined and even friendly impression the troops made. One eyewitness remembered being given chocolate and chewing gum. It is difficult, now, to imagine how much it meant, then, to be given a piece of chocolate, but a film in the Lübbecke Stadtarchiv shot in the 1960s or 1970s shows an elderly lady with tears welling up more than half a century later as she remembered it.<sup>26</sup> Other luxuries were eagerly sought too, and 'coffee, chocolate, cigarettes, soap' soon became the first words in Lübbeckers' embryonic English vocabulary.

### Establishing control

The Allies' immediate priority was to appoint a Bürgermeister through whom the military authorities would govern, under the principle of 'indirect control' - see later section on relations between Military Government and German civil authorities. Eduard Gerlach was in the town hall at 7am on 4 April and waited there all day, but it was not until 7pm that British military officers arrived. Gerlach was then formally designated Bürgermeister and, under British instruction, signed a public order announcing to the population that Lübbecke was now under British military authority. In the following day's discussions with the military authorities, the interpreter was Frau May Bökamper, the British-born wife of Heinrich Bokämper, a blind music teacher living in Pettenpohl Straße. Local myth has it that Frau Bökamper went to greet the Allied troops on 3 April waving a white flag,

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<sup>26</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke film

but there is no evidence of this, although there were white flags to be seen. Frau Bökamper's interesting life story will be published in a future addition to the website.

A curfew was imposed on the town: inhabitants were prohibited from leaving their houses between six at night and seven the next morning. As there was still a war on, the blackout continued. Weapons, munitions, military equipment, field-glasses and cameras were to be handed in by 5pm the following day (5<sup>th</sup> April). Posters throughout the town warned Lübbeckers that failure to comply with these orders would result in the severest punishments: British troops were authorised to shoot anyone trying to evade the curfew. The blackout was lifted after Germany's capitulation on 8 May and curfew restrictions were also reduced. By June 1945, curfew hours were limited to 1030pm to 5am, and were lifted altogether soon after.



7. 4 April 1945. 'Lübbecke is now under English [sic] Military Authority'

A second order was issued on 11 April, instructing members of the Wehrmacht to report to the town hall for registration. It was signed by the new Bürgermeister, Wilhelm Meyrahn, Gerlach having been promptly removed when his previous NSDAP affiliation became known, although by then his view of the Nazi regime had changed somewhat.<sup>27</sup> Meyrahn was a former councillor and served from April until his death in October 1945.

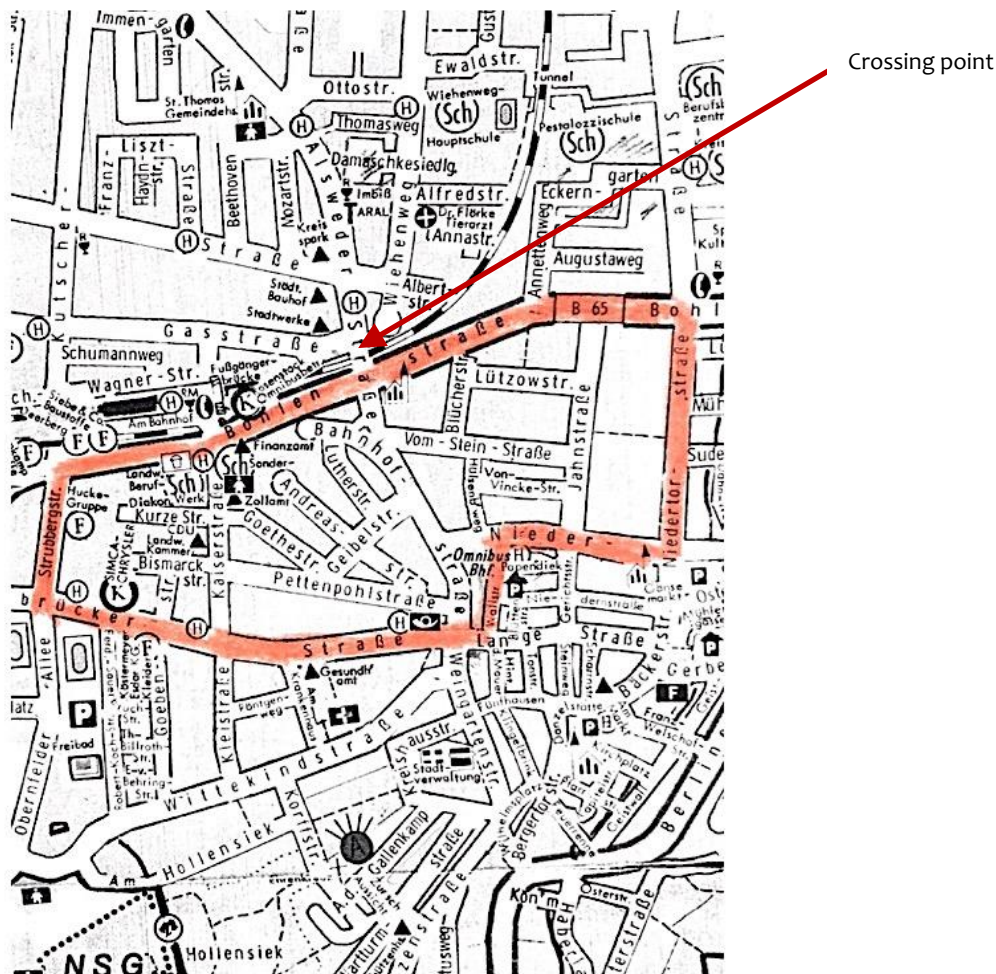
<sup>27</sup> Gerlach's diary on 25 March notes that the promised new defence weapons have not yet been deployed. A week later (2 days before the Allies arrive) he says that the War is lost, so why the madness of resistance? By 21 April, with

Lübbecke was divided into three zones, which were subject to various access restrictions. In particular zone 1, where the Control Commission's main offices were located, was declared a prohibited zone. The city chronicle describes the exclusion zone as follows: east to west from Strubberg Straße to Mindener Straße; north of Osnabrücker Strasse and the Wall; south of the Railway and Bohlen Straße.<sup>28</sup> See map below. Outside the prohibited zone further buildings and residences were requisitioned. By the end of May 1945, cleared of inhabitants, a barbed wire fence was erected around the prohibited area. Thereafter, the only way of reaching the central shopping streets from the north of the town was to walk right round it or else to congregate at the railway crossing on Alsweder Straße and await a lift in the back of a covered lorry, in darkness, until deposited at its southern perimeter. Later, small groups were permitted to cross with a military escort and, in January 1947, things became easier when Osnabrücker Straße, the main road through the town, was reopened to through traffic. From August 1947 onwards, the barbed wire was progressively taken down, and removed altogether at the end of that year.

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Lübbecke firmly under Occupation control, he calls for a halt to “this nonsensical war”; and in June wishes the devil to take the Führer “who is to blame for all this”.

<sup>28</sup> Stadtarchiv Lubbecke Stadtchronik 1945 -1966 S105



8. Prohibited Zone, Lübecke, 1945

Inhabitants of the prohibited zone were evicted, except for the few business people or others, such as doctors and midwives, who could demonstrate that their work was directly tied to the area. The files contain many individual pleas for access. Walter Meier, evicted from 7 Bismarck Straße, and now living in the worsted cloth factory, wrote on 23 June 1945 begging to be allowed to return regularly to look after his five beehives. The Wellpott laundry asked to be allowed to continue operations from their current premises because they provided a service to the military authorities and the cost and time involved in dismantling and reinstalling the machines elsewhere would be inordinate. Herr Kröger, owner of the bakery at 52 Bohlen Straße, stressed the bakery's great importance to the population, and asked permission to enter during the day to bake bread and pastry, which he would then sell outside the prohibited zone. In the end, these and some nine other businesses were given passes permitting them to continue their operations in the controlled zones. Two more, a furniture warehouse and stables, and a dairy farm were permitted to continue for 14 days, during which time they must find alternative

premises.<sup>29</sup> Special dispensation was also granted to the evicted owners of requisitioned houses, who were issued with 'gardening passes', permitting them access to their gardens to collect produce sown before the arrival of British occupants. Moreover, British occupants who were unable or unwilling to cultivate the gardens were required to hand them over to their German owners, who were then entitled to the produce.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübecke D26 Bd1

<sup>30</sup> 12.9.46 Routine Order 84/561. Gardens for British Families. National Archives File FO1005/1875

Subject: Business Premises in Area.

From: 165 Town Major

F.3.

To: Der Landrat  
Der Bürgermeister.

I have this morning received instructions that the following businesses will be carried on within the occupied zone. Entry will be by pass signed by an official and bearing a rubber stamp of the Bürgermeister's office. Specimen of pass required is attached. A duplicate of every pass issued will be supplied to :-

Camp Commandant  
Control Commission

and to  
911 Det Mil Gov.

All passes will be submitted to Camp Commandant's office for approval and countersignature before issue to civilians. Address of office will be given to you on 15th June.

Laundry. 10 Bahnhof Strasse - this laundry will be required to work for the occupying authorities.

Schroeder's Garage Bahnhof Strasse.  
Schroeder's Builders Osnabrucker Strasse  
Electrician Schumacher, Osnabrucker Strasse  
Coffee Mill Trost Niedertor Strasse  
Bakeries If essential for the town bread supply, one or both can work at their bakeries but shops outside the area occupied will be used for sale of bread.

Market (Gardens, Rode, Garten Strasse)  
Nolke Niedermwall }  
Cultivate and collect crops for sale to the public from a store outside the area.

Owner of Stables. 11 Bahnhof Strasse

Bookkeeper Bonaster

The following will be issued with 14 day passes :-

Stock Niedertor Strasse. Furniture Warehouse and stables. Alternative accommodation must be looked for outside the area. It is realised that this is an essential business but it must be moved as soon as adequate accommodation is cleared for it.

Dairy Farm 1 Kaiser Strasse. This 14 day pass is granted to give time for alternative accommodation to be found.

*J. S. S. S.*  
Major R.A.,  
165 Town Major,

Lübecke,  
14th June, 1945.

Copy to: Control Commission

9. Lübecke businesses permitted to continue trading within the prohibited zones

## Lübbecke in April 1945

One of the occupiers' first tasks was to compile a picture of Lübbecke and its inhabitants, first and foremost the Nazi loyalists. A stocktake prepared by the town council for the British on 12 April 1945<sup>31</sup> provides the names, titles and current or previous addresses of nine leading local NSDAP officials:

Ernst Meiring, Kreisleiter	23 Osnabrücker Straße 23: 'gone away'
Gustav Klöpfer, Stellvertreter (Deputy)	5 Osnabrücker Straße 5: 'gone away'
Franz Westerfeld, Geschäftsführer (Managing Director)	30 Geistwall
Karl Stallmann, Hausmeister und Kreiskassenleiter (Caretaker and district cashier)	4 Osnabrücker Straße, now presumed to be at Bahnhof Straße
Karl Bähre, Schulungsleiter (Headmaster)	7 Am Weingarten, presumed to be living at 2 Gänsemarkt with Frau Schubäus
Wilhelm Brühmann, Gauschule Headmaster	now at the Amtshaus in Gehlenbeck
Otto Lohmann, Headmaster	23 Adolf Hitler Straße; <sup>32</sup>
Wilhelm Stoppkotte, Kreisrichter (District Judge)	1 Osnabrücker Straße (Kreissparkasse)
Wilhelm Hehmeyer SA-Sturmführer	13 Bäcker Straße

It was reported that, except for Kreisleiter Meiring and former Gauschulungsleiter Brühmann, who had quit his post and gone to live in Gehlenbeck, no other council officials had left their jobs.

The 12 April 1945 stocktake also reported that 138 French and Russian prisoners of war<sup>33</sup> were 'no longer there', and that the prisoner of war camp had been vacated. But there appear to have been almost 250 internees and forced labourers still living in the town:

14 women in the wool factory

Approximately 60 men and women (families) at St Paulus Guild, Niedertor Straße, plus an additional:

30 men who attended daily

30 men attending daily at the Volksschule am Markt

30 men, women and children in the sick quarters at the hospital

20 Italian officers in the spinning mill Wetzels & Kom

36 Italian officers in the Blase cigar factories<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke File D26. Bd1 12.4.45

<sup>32</sup> Adolf Hitler Straße had hastily reverted to Weingarten Straße, but the previous name is still being used here, presumably inadvertently

<sup>33</sup> 44 French at Osnabrücker Straße and Strubberg Straße, and 94 Russians at Weingarten and Bahnhof Straße

<sup>34</sup> The Italian officers had been German prisoners of war, having served under Marshal Badoglio, who had signed a peace treaty with the Allies in 1943 after Mussolini's removal and arrest.

1 Bulgarian Lt Colonel at 5 Osnabrücker Straße (this is also the address given for NSDAP Stellvertreter Gustav Klöpfer)  
1 Latvian and 1 Russian family in the Gasthof Iden, Lange Straße  
10 Italians and 3 Dutch in the Hotel Wiemer, Langestraße  
“a variety of” Poles and Serbs in private houses

These details are sketchy, to say the least: no names are provided and, in some cases, no gender or nationality either. No figure is given for the number of Poles and Serbs being held. Was this because the council was not in possession of the information? When were they released and repatriated? More research in the Lübbecke Stadtarchiv may provide some answers. During the War, Lübbeckers had been aware of the foreigners forced to live and work among them. An eyewitness remembers seeing French female forced labourers in the town, and describes the ‘listlessly shuffling’ Russian prisoners of war, put to work on repairing the railway network. Herbert Biermann records Polish prisoners of war arriving in 1939 in their “eigenartig viereckig geförmte mützen” (peculiar four-cornered caps) followed by Polish male and female forced labourers; then French prisoners of war in 1940, who were put to work in neighbouring farms. After them came Yugoslavs and Russians and, after Italy surrendered, Italians. In this way, writes Herr Biermann, we children understood where the War was being extended.

In an indication, perhaps, forced labour was accepted as the norm by ordinary Germans, there is a letter in the archives to the British Military Authorities from the Bürgermeister on behalf of watch and clockmaker Friedrich Mormann, whose two ‘eastworkers’ are refusing to work. Herr Mormann has ‘many urgent works’ to do for for the Military Government soldiers, and requests that the British should ‘press the eastworkers to do their duty’. A manuscript note reads simply “No. Russians are not compelled to work for Germans.”<sup>35</sup>

In the little village of Alsweder, just outside Lübbecke, the British interned a group of eminent scientists, including Otto Hahn, Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker, Werner Heisenberg and Max von Laue. The British and the Americans were keen to ensure they did not end up in Russian hands, and wanted them to recruit some of them for their own scientific programs, as well as to encourage them to lead the regeneration of Germany’s scientific institutions. Otto Hahn became the founding President of the Max Planck Gesellschaft in 1948.<sup>36</sup> They were held in well-appointed accommodation in a textile factory owned by a Heinrich Albersmeier. Many years later, Otto Hahn recalled his time in Alsweder, remembering how Herr Albersmeier had believed that the scientists had betrayed Germany’s atom secrets to the Allies.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv. D26 Bd1

<sup>36</sup> 30.12.48 Employment of German Nuclear Physicists. National Archives File CAB122/355

<sup>37</sup> Otto Hahn: *Begründer des Atomzeitalters* hrsg. V D Hahn, München 1979



Lübbecke had been a reasonably prosperous rural town. At the end of 1944, the town's businesses were turning over an estimated RM31m, including:<sup>38</sup>

Industries. The largest of these was August Blase's three cigar factories, with a combined turnover of 15 million Reichsmarks (RM), and there were 4 others with a turnover of over RM1m: a spinning mill (RM2.2m); a paper factory (RM2m); the Barre brewery (RM1.3m); and a pharmaceutical chemicals factory (RM1.2m). Other industries included a distillery, 2 clothing factories, printer, sawmill, and port operator (Lübbecke lay close to the Mittelland Kanal).

In addition to their normal operations, ten of the businesses also manufactured war-related items and employed forced labourers. These were closed down by the British on arrival, among them Blase's cigar factories, and the Wetzel & Kom spinning mill Blase's cigar factories were among them, and the Wetzel & Kom spinning mill;<sup>39</sup>

Small businesses. There were 58 small businesses, covering a typical range of the services to be found in a small country town in that era, including motor vehicle repairers, hairdressers, bakers, slaughterers, saddlers, painters and decorators, tailors, shoemakers, flour millers, builders' merchants, furniture makers and clockmakers;

Shops and services. Lübbecke had 16 grocers, 12 general stores, 6 milliners and handicraft shops, 3 booksellers and stationers, 4 coal merchants, 5 tobacconists; 4 pharmacies/drugstores, 6 carters, 4 gardeners & florists, 4 dentists, 3 doctors, 3 lawyers, 4 tax advisers, 1 cinema and 14 bars and restaurants.

The German public assistance system was still functioning when the Allies arrived, albeit imperfectly. At a meeting with the Military authorities in July 1945, the Landkreis Lübbecke Oberinspektor and Deputy Bürgermeister provided details of the various types and amounts of public assistance provided, and the institutions for disabled and elderly people in the Kreis.<sup>40</sup> It emerged that:

- Monthly assistance payments totalling around 43,000RM were being paid to 810 residents to supplement their social insurance, including Wehrmacht dependents, victims of 1923 inflation, and old age pensioners;
- Over 400,000RM was being paid monthly to some almost 6,000 evacuees;
- The Krankenkasse (Sickness Insurance) was functioning normally;
- No war pensions were being paid;

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<sup>38</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke File D26. Bd1 12.4.45

<sup>39</sup> 17.7.45 Interrogation of Lübbecke Public Assistance Officials. National Archives File FO1051/374

<sup>40</sup> 19.7.45 Note of meeting with Lübbecke Public Assistance Officials. National Archives File FO1051/374

- Invalidity and old age pensions were still being paid by the Post Office, the Landrat having provided funds from a reserve of 1m RM;
- The people of Lübbecke had received little or no assistance from local charities such as Winterhilfe and NSV, or from the Caritas Verband, Innere Mission or German Red Cross.

The main problem for Lübbecke's civil authorities was a major funding gap caused by the lack of Reich subventions, as well, they claimed, as Westfalen authorities' failure to distribute taxes equitably. This meant that, currently, Lübbecke's only income came from a percentage tax on the profits of local industries.

## Food Shortages

Lübbecke's food stocks in April 1945 were estimated as:

- 10 tons of wheat and 15,000 tons of rye, at J Paulus at the canal port;
- 7.5 tons of potatoes, at the Agricultural Businesses Cooperative, Alsweder Straße
- 75 tons of seed potatoes at the railway station
- Livestock: a count on 4.12.44 had estimated: 76 horses; 410 cattle; 16 sheep; and 911 pigs; but the food situation would have reduced this number by now.<sup>41</sup>

At the end of the War, Germans' daily rations were down to about 1220 calories, and by July 1945, concern was mounting about the food situation throughout the British Zone. A survey of 500 families in Dortmund and Bochum revealed that, while in November 1945 there was, at least as yet, no evidence of famine, it was predicted that weight loss due to insufficient calorie intake, and vitamin D deficiency was likely to result in children developing rickets and in increased vulnerability to epidemics among the population as a whole.<sup>42</sup> Faced with severe continuing shortages in supplies, there real fears of a food catastrophe in northwest Germany, in the heart of which lay the Ruhrgebiet, the area which was vital to Germany's economic recovery.<sup>43</sup> Here, there were already 800,000 homeless people, and it was predicted that around a further 200,000 people would have to be forcibly evacuated if the situation did not improve before winter: there was simply not enough accommodation, work and bread for the population.<sup>44</sup> Food rations were then providing adults with, at best, only 1500 calories a day, and often less: in May 1947 the population of Wuppertal could expect only 850 calories a day.<sup>45</sup> Inhabitants from devastated urban areas arrived daily in Lübbecke to barter for food with local farmers, to the annoyance of some, who would like to have banned the so-called "hamsters" from using the railway. A few local farmers were said to have taken advantage of the situation, with pigsties rumoured to be 'lined with bartered Persian carpets'. And some

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<sup>41</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübbecke File D26 Bd1 12.4.45

<sup>42</sup> 20.11.45 Report on nutrition of the East Ruhr population. National Archives File FO1013/1913

<sup>43</sup> Civil Affairs and Military Government in North West Europe 1944-1946. FSV Donnison

<sup>44</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 18.9.45

<sup>45</sup> FSV Donnison Civil Affairs and Military Government North-West Europe 1944-1946. HMSO

of those looking for food did not bother to bargain. In Gestringen, six kilometres from Lübbecke, thieves broke into a smokery and got away with a veritable bounty of 65 sausages, three hams and three sides of bacon.

Lübbecke suffered less from food shortages than those who lived in the bombed cities and Ruhr towns. Most people had gardens with where they could grow vegetables and fruit, and many kept a pig and chickens for fresh eggs and the soup pot.<sup>46</sup> But life was still hard for those who relied on official rations which, even in 1948, provided an unvarying daily menu of maize- and other bread of doubtful nutritional value. Food rationing did not end in Germany until 1 March 1950 (although this was four years before it finally came to an end in Britain). There were beggars on Lübbecke's streets. Children were a particular concern. In order to ensure a minimum level of calories, the British set up a school feeding program to provide every child with a daily bowl of soup. One Düsseldorf schoolgirl remembers being served yellow maize soup pretty well every day. She recalls that the children brought their own bowls and spoons, and that boys always brought large bowls, hoping to get a bigger helping.<sup>47</sup>

New clothes were almost unheard of – occasionally, perhaps, something new to wear at Christmas. Otherwise garments were passed on or made over as children grew out of them.<sup>48</sup> Other items were scarce too. The military authorities in Lübbecke, together with the town council arranged to provide pharmacies with supplies of medicinal alcohol and, when the town ran out of toilet paper, the local manufacturer, Frese, was ordered to make available its stock of 200,000 rolls, originally destined for the German Navy.<sup>49</sup>

With Ruhr coal production in 1945 at only just over 6% of pre-war levels<sup>50</sup>, and oil stocks severely depleted, fuel was in desperately short supply, and there were frequent gas and electricity outages, with no guarantee of when supplies would be restored. The town council designated an area of peat on Isenstadt moor and, in the summer, hundreds of Lübbeckers went up to there to try their hand at peat-cutting. They also raided the Wiehenberg woods for firewood. In an effort to curb this illicit activity, the townspeople were promised that, in time, every household would receive a cartload of wood, although it seems unlikely that this by itself would have put an end to end the practice.<sup>51</sup> Requisitioning scarce fuel stocks by the occupation authorities was, not surprisingly, resented. When 5 tons of anthracite were requisitioned for Schloss Benkhausen, residence of the Deputy Military Governor, it did not take long before a coal store opposite Lübbecke station was looted.

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<sup>46</sup> Walter Seger letter to the author 15.4.2019

<sup>47</sup> Karla Bach in interview with the author, 20.1.2019

<sup>48</sup> Walter Seger letter to the author 15.4.2019

<sup>49</sup> Horst Schürmann's town guide's notes, 2019

<sup>50</sup> Michael Balfour *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria 1945-1946*. Under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs' Survey of International Affairs 1939-46. Oxford University Press 1956

<sup>51</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 7.12.45

## Making ends meet

Like most of the German population, Lübbeckers went to great lengths to secure the necessities of life. Barter was one way. In 1946 the enterprising Emma Goerke opened an exchange shop - Tauschzentrale – at 57 Lange Straße where a wide variety of goods could be exchanged: a winter coat for a radio; a harmonium for a quilt; an iron for a pair of shoes. Or, as the local joke went “my wife aged 40 for two aged 20”. People were encouraged to make the best of what was available. A 1948 Easter cake recipe was published in the local paper, consisting only of rye flour, sweetener, salt and water. The mixture should be fried on the electric cooker when the energy outage period ended. If that succeeded, it could be decorated with turnip jam.

But illicit activity was widespread too: animals were slaughtered; bicycles stolen; dogs and pigs snatched; coal stocks raided and wheat fields stripped. In the final days of the War the entire cargo of a ship in Lübbecke harbour carrying laundry detergent was stolen. Sometimes, whole groups of people were involved. In late April 1945 a shoe store in Alsweder Straße was plundered. British troops intervened by firing shots into the air, to no avail. But many of the plunderers had mistakenly grabbed right and left shoes of differing sizes, so the next day a lively barter developed as people tried to match up complete pairs. Around the same time a ship on the canal near Gehlenbeck was stripped – even the wall coverings were removed. The captains of nearby ships, attempting to stop the plunder, retreated when they were threatened.

The British occupation provided undreamed of opportunities to obtain things that were unavailable to the local population, mainly food, petrol, fuel and cigarettes. The British were forbidden to sell to or barter with Germans, and purchasing goods from them was also prohibited except for certain prescribed items paid for in Reichsmarks at fixed prices.<sup>52,53</sup> But, with the currency almost valueless, Germans were understandably reluctant to accept Reichsmarks as payment, so a thriving black market sprang into life almost immediately, and persisted throughout the early post-war years, only gradually dying out after 1948 as the new Deutschemark began to regenerate West Germany's economy. See Money section in Life in the British Zone.

The black market thrived in Lübbecke as it did elsewhere. Osnabrück market was a known spot, where Helmut Hüffmann, then a Jahn Mittelschule teenager remembers being sent by his mother. He would know who to approach, she told him, because the man would look fat (no-one looked fat in post-war Lübbecke). He would be wearing a large raincoat with voluminous inside pockets, filled with black market goods. If a military jeep pulled up at a private house, the reason was not difficult to fathom,

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<sup>52</sup> 19.6.48 Routine Order 26/369 Relations between CCG and the Germans. National Archives File FO1005/1877

<sup>53</sup> 15.11.45 Routine Order 41/273. Tipping of Germans. National Archives File FO1005/1874

especially if the German resident worked in a British canteen. Witnesses of such raids regarded the person being apprehended as of less interest than the cartons of food that were also removed by the military police. Despite the threat of such arrests, jobs in the Army's kitchens continued to be eagerly sought, and competition was fierce. In August 1945 the Bürgermeister was prevailed upon to request the military authorities to give Lübbeckers preference over evacuees when filling jobs with the Control Commission. The outcome is not known.

Black market activities in Lübbecke seem generally to have involved low-level transactions: food, coffee at 300-400 RM per lb, cigarettes at 4 or 5 RM each, and other items bartered by British troops, purloined from British canteens and kitchens or, perhaps, given to housemaids by British families.<sup>54</sup> Lübbecke does not feature in the monthly reports from CCG's Public Safety Branch, which record a gradually increasing volume of organised, large-scale black market operations. By November 1947, these were thought to have become all-pervasive throughout the British Zone, involving "allied occupation forces, displaced persons, aliens, German professional men, employers, employees, civil servants, farmers, business men, rich, poor, whole, sick, young and old".<sup>55</sup> One concern was that farmers were thought to be selling no more than 60%-70% of their goods in the controlled market, leaving 30%-40% to be bartered or sold on the black market.<sup>56</sup> It seems at least possible that some Lübbecke farmers were involved in this activity.

## Requisitioning

The Control Commission, already almost 9,000 strong in April 1945 and rising to nearly 25,000 by the end of 1946, was clearly going to require a very great deal of accommodation, including a substantial amount in Lübbecke. Requisitioning of both office and residential space was unavoidable. One of the first buildings to be requisitioned was the Gauleiterschule at the top of the Wartturm Straße which, once the swastika on the north wall had been hacked off, and a national socialist wall mural covered up, became the Officers Mess, although the British frequently still referred to it as 'the Gauleiter School'. The wrought iron initials 'HJ' (Hitler Jugend) remained in place and can still be seen above the door of the building's east wing.<sup>57</sup> Once requisitioned, the Germans were presented with a detailed 19-point list of instructions in order to render the building fit for the British Officers' occupation, ranging from deep cleaning the entire building and grounds; to getting rid of discarded items of German uniforms

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<sup>54</sup> 15.12.45 Black Market Report for November 1945. National Archives File FO1005/1839

<sup>55</sup> 24.12.47 Black Market Report for November 1947. National Archives File FO1005/1841

<sup>56</sup> 15.2.47 Black Market Report for January 1947. National Archives File FO1005/1841

<sup>57</sup> The building continued as a British Army military officers mess after the Control Commission left for Wahnerheide in 1950 until, in 1982, it became 'Church House', a training centre and retreat for the Army Chaplains' Department. It was finally handed back to the German Government when the British Army left Germany in 2020.

which had been abandoned in the corridors by the Wehrmacht; supplying beds with clean mattresses, as well as table cloths, ashtrays and even flower pots; and providing daily hot water for bathing and shaving.<sup>58</sup>



10. Gauleiter Schule Lübecke. Relics of the Nazi era

Immediately requisitioned, too, was the former Finanzamt (Finance Office) on Kaiser Straße<sup>59</sup>, a large, modern and well-equipped 2-storey office building, suitable almost without alteration for the offices of the Deputy Military Governor and the ZECO Secretariat.<sup>60</sup> ‘Tax House’, as it immediately became known, had been completed shortly before the War and comprised three long corridors arranged in a ‘dog-leg’ shape. It is said to have been originally designed in the shape of a Swastika, although the original architectural drawings do not reveal a second ‘hook’.<sup>61</sup> One British visitor, remarking in December 1947 on the “endless passages flagged with the names of endless officials”, was prompted to wonder whether quantity rather than quality had guided the selection of Control Commission personnel, a not infrequent criticism also voiced at the time by the British press and in Parliament (see Recruitment section).<sup>62</sup> Tax House remained in British hand long after the Control Commission departed Lübecke. In later years, young Bengt Müller, visiting his great aunt Louisa who lived opposite Tax House at 32 Pettenpohl Straße, was fascinated by seeing the building with all its windows lit up, and British soldiers patrolling the grounds: disappearing round one corner, and re-emerging a few moments later from the other side.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Stadtarchiv Lübecke. D26 Bd 1

<sup>59</sup> Kaiser Straße, formerly Hermann Göring Straße, was one of several roads hastily renamed at the end of the war. Another was Adolf Hitler Straße, which reverted to its earlier incarnation as Weingarten Straße, or Am Weingarten

<sup>60</sup> The Military Governor, Field Marshal Montgomery, was based at Bad Oeynhausen with 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group

<sup>61</sup> Bengt Müller’s research in the Bielefeld archives

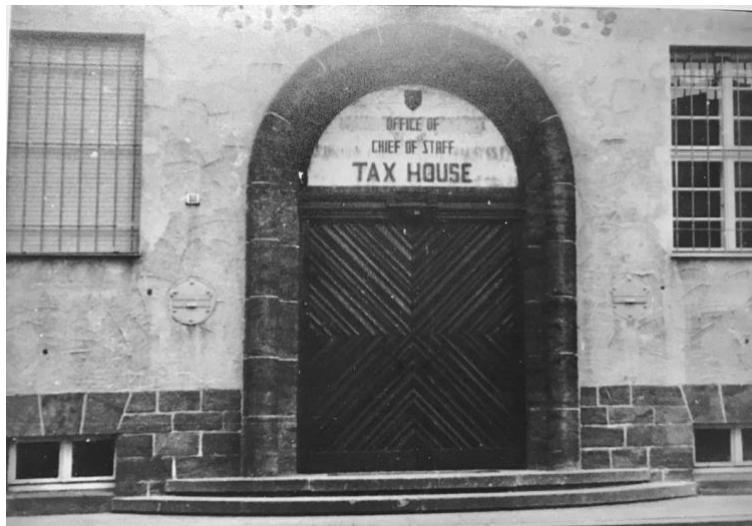
<sup>62</sup> Dame Violet Markham’s Report on the Organisation of Women’s Affairs in Germany. National Archives File FO936/231.

<sup>63</sup> Tax House stood empty after the British left in 1982, and the east wing became a temporary home for handicapped people until it was opened as the new Amtsgericht in 1985, the only change having been required was the installation of a lift. The former British occupants had left no trace except for some original 1930s wall lamps and a number of

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11. Tax House c 1947



12. Tax House main entrance c 1947

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internal and external signboards, retrieved and saved for posterity by the erstwhile little boy who had watched the soldiers marching round the building.



13. 'Endless passages flagged with the names of endless officials...' 'Tax House' in 2016, now the Amtsgericht (Courts)

But even Tax House could not satisfy all the Control Commission's office needs in Lübbecke. In the first few weeks, the British hastily requisitioned property as and when a requirement arose, sometimes giving occupants only a few hours' notice to quit.<sup>64</sup> No. 1 Gänsemarkt and the garage in Bahnhofstraße were requisitioned, as well nos. 20,23, 33 and 34 Osnabrücker Straße, and the Reichspost Office, Kreis Sparkasse, Dresdner Bank and Rhein-Ruhr Bank. Some were used as civilian and military Messes: the Sparkasse's banking hall apparently provided an ideal messroom.

The Hotel Holland-Moritz on Westerwall (formerly Hotel Schluter, venue for NSDAP training evenings) was used to accommodate German 'guests' of the British, including the banker Dr Hermann Abs, who was later to play a key role in reforming the German currency.<sup>65</sup> It was also home to Toc H,<sup>66</sup> where the Anglo-German Club was held, and where CCG families could take their children for tea.<sup>67</sup> Gut Crollage, a country house 8kms from Lübbecke became the Country Club, was another weekend venue.<sup>68</sup> The BürgerPark Lichtspiele in Bäcker Straße, the town's only cinema, was requisitioned and

<sup>64</sup> 12.11.46. Accounting for furniture in requisitioned houses. National Archives File FO1067/34

<sup>65</sup> Hermann Josef Abs (15 October 1901 – 5 February 1994) was a Director of Deutsche Bank from 1938 to 1945, as well as of 44 other companies, including IG Farben. As the most powerful commercial banker of the Third Reich, he was, according to economic journalist Adam LeBor, "the lynchpin of the continent-wide plunder". The Allies arrested him as a suspected war criminal on 16 January 1946, however British intervention got him freed after three months. From 1957–1967 he was chairman of Deutsche Bank, and contributed to the reconstruction of the German economy. *Wikipedia*

<sup>66</sup> Toc H is an international Christian movement which developed from a soldiers' rest and recreation centre named Talbot House founded in Poperinge, near Ypres or Ieper, in Belgium during December 1915. The name 'Toc H' is an abbreviation for Talbot House: 'Toc' signifying the letter 'T' in the signals spelling alphabet used by the British army during the First World War.

<sup>67</sup> WRDY Diaries 1946-1949

<sup>68</sup> WRDY Diary 23.12.48



renamed the Windmill Theatre, after the famous London variety theatre that 'never closed' during the Blitz.

Some of Lübbecke's schools, closed for denazification, were initially requisitioned to accommodate British troops. In the Jahn Mittelschule, christened 'John Middle School' by the British, Nissen huts were erected in the schoolyard to provide sleeping quarters for the soldiers, and the school's gymnasium was used as a dance hall. A former pupil remembers that, far from being upset at the closure of his school, he and his friends enjoyed hanging around the entrance of the 'dance hall' for handouts of chocolate and chewing gum from the soldiers. The Berufsschule in Kaiser Straße (formerly Marshal-Goering Straße) became a BFES (British Families Education Service) Primary School. In 1949, with CCG on the point of departure for Wahnerheide, the German authorities requested the school be returned for use to support the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Service, but it was not de-requisitioned until 1955.<sup>69</sup> Later, schools, as well as most other public buildings were exempted from requisitioning, but in the early days, the British simply took what they needed.<sup>70</sup> By the middle of May 1945, almost all of Lübbecke's public buildings and factories had been requisitioned.



14. The British Primary School, Kaiser Strasse Lübbecke, c 1948

Initially Nissen hut barracks were erected in the schoolyard of the Jahn Realschule – then called Jahn Mittleschule and dubbed 'John Middle School' by British soldiers. Officers were accommodated in Messes, which were established in requisitioned residential properties. More research is needed to establish their locations. As British families started to arrive, however, many more residential property owners began to receive requisition orders, served on them by the Bürgermeister under instruction from the

<sup>69</sup> The school operates today as the Lübbecke Werkstätten. These are workshops for adults with psychological and physical disabilities.

<sup>70</sup> 10.8.46 Appendix A to ZEI No. 36. National Archives File 1067/2

Military Government. The Besetzungs Befehle (Accommodation Demands), written in English and German, specified the date by which their property was to be vacated. These were the houses to be requisitioned for occupation by individual officers and their families. British military and civilian officers were entitled to housing on the basis of rank – the higher the rank, the larger the house – so the properties selected for requisitioning were the best in town. Locals observed that, Lübbecke being built on hills, senior officers lived in the grandest properties on the hilltops while the middling ranks were allocated houses on the lower slopes.

Grandest of all, and prime targets for requisitioning were 'Cross Keys House', and 'Kent House' on the heights of Wartturm Straße. They belonged to August Blase, owner of the local cigar factories and the richest man in Lübbecke. Blase had enjoyed friendly relationships with leading National Socialists and held magnificent parties attended, it was said, by Goering and Himmler, as well as Princess Hermine, the second wife of the former Kaiser Wilhelm II. When the properties were requisitioned Blase requested that a substantial, albeit less grand house a further down the hill at 12 Auf dem Weingarten belonging to a Dr Staiger should be requisitioned by the military authorities for use by himself and his family.<sup>71</sup> But the factory owner's wealth and local prominence cut little ice with the military authorities: he was brusquely turned down, and told that the British were not prepared to make another German family homeless in order to provide a home for him. More likely, however, the reason would have been his Nazi affiliations, because the British did in fact requisition a property at 8 Hohlsieck for Bürgermeister Meyrahn and his family.<sup>72</sup> But not all those whose houses were requisitioned were grand folk. One was Herr Heinrich Bokämper in Pettenpohl Straße, but thanks to his wife May's service as an interpreter they were later able to return to their apartment which lay just across the road from Tax House.

A total of 250 residential properties were requisitioned in Lübbecke for British military and civilian officers and their families. The houses were spread all along the roads of the little town, including most of the prime residential areas. In some roads, like Weingarten Straße, Kaiser Straße and Pettenpohl Straße, almost every house was requisitioned. We know the names of many those who were evicted from a 1948 document in the Stadtarchiv listing those whose properties – over 180 of them – remained requisitioned. More research is needed to establish a full list.

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<sup>71</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv

<sup>72</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv D26 Bd 1. 13.6.45 Letter from Bürgermeister to Mil Gov 911 Det.



15. Requisition Demand for 17 Weingarten StraÙe, 23 May 1945<sup>73</sup>

The British authorities issued detailed guidance to those occupying requisitioned property on the proper care of furniture and fittings, down to whether or not occupiers were allowed to use the owner's piano, but it seems that many evictees had little confidence that the rules would be enforced.<sup>74</sup> Some owners tried to deter requisitioning by making their properties appear unattractive. According to one story, the wife of a Lübbcke industrialist emptied a bucket of excrement over her front steps, and someone who knew the lady believed it was like her to do such a thing, but the story appears to be apocryphal and, in any case, the record shows that the house was indeed requisitioned.

The eviction process varied, depending on how the order was implemented: sometimes impartially and without duress, but sometimes more coercively. In one case, it was said, armed soldiers appeared at 40 Niedertor StraÙe and gave the family owners half an hour

<sup>73</sup> Improved image being sought

<sup>74</sup> Bettina Blum

to leave the house.<sup>75</sup> Equally critical was whether or not the evicted family had alternative accommodation to go to. The family living at 11 Bohlenstrasse went to live with relatives and found their property undamaged when they returned a few years later.<sup>76</sup> But it was not like that for others, who claimed their property and their furniture had been ruined.

Whether the requisitioning process was peaceful or not, occupants were, not unnaturally, deeply unhappy about being evicted from their homes. Historian Dr Bettina Blum, who has made an in-depth study of requisitioning in the British Zone, and has interviewed a number of people who experienced it, believes that it was one of the most important factors influencing Anglo-German relations from 1945 until the mid-1950s. She writes that “losing their home and their very private space to the occupation forces made people feel that they personally and unfairly had to bear the brunt of the hardships of losing the war.” Such feelings were not mitigated by the payment of rent, which often did not cover the cost of alternative accommodation, or by being told that German treatment of local populations in occupied Europe had been far harsher.<sup>77</sup>

Doubly painful for the evictees was that their furniture and possessions had to be left behind, except for a limited and strictly prescribed list of items. Initially they could take only:

- food
- personal clothing
- toiletries and towels
- jewellery and trinkets
- bedclothes
- 1 each of knife, fork, large and small spoon, large and small plate, cup and saucer
- cooking utensils, except that in each house must be left one kettle and one large pot for cooking.

This was later expanded to include beds, mattresses, crockery, glassware and radios. In contrast, Military and Control Commission officials were reckoned to require more than 250 items for their requisitioned homes. The list of items, which the Military Governor described as ‘modest’, included seven types of forks, six types of spoons, five types of knives, four types of drinking glasses and five types of plates.<sup>78</sup> [See Annex B to Life in the British Zone.](#)

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<sup>75</sup> Horst Schürmann, Lübecke volunteer town guide

<sup>76</sup> Walter Seger letter to the author 15.4.2019

<sup>77</sup> 18.4.47 Brief on requisitioning prepared by Regional Commissioner NordRhein/Westfalen. National Archives File FO1030/190 “The Belgian Forces suffered acutely from German requisitioning during the occupation. They were treated without any consideration. They have taken the view, however, that the uncivilised acts by the Germans are no reason for their doing the same.”

<sup>78</sup> 13.3.47 letter from Military Governor to Control Office for Germany and Austria

House owners were instructed to lock away in one room any items of furniture not required by the occupation authorities, and then to deposit all the keys with them.<sup>79</sup> But in the first few months of the occupation, no record was made of the contents of requisitioned houses, nor did the British know (and could therefore not control) the number of keys in the owners' possession.<sup>80</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, many owners whose properties had been requisitioned – or who calculated that they might be – attempted to remove items cover of darkness, or to replace them with items of lesser quality.<sup>81</sup>

Concessions were sometimes made: Lübbecke's Town Major Gedye wrote to the Landrat and Bürgermeister on 8 June 1945 to say that the owners of eleven requisitioned properties in Osnabrücker Straße, and two in Kaiser Straße were additionally permitted to remove cooking utensils and bedroom furniture and fittings (but not carpets, curtains or electric light fittings).<sup>82</sup> And Rudolf Franke, of 15 Kaiser Straße, was told that he could take a desk, a typewriter and table, a round table and 4 chairs, a white filing cabinet, a small filing cabinet and archival material to his accommodation in Ludwig Straße.<sup>83</sup> A week later the Military Government authorised Herr Alvermann to move 34 items of furniture – possibly the entire contents? - from 31 Pettenpohl Straße to 24 Lange Straße, including beds, armchairs, tables, bookshelves and a stove.

But sometimes things got out of hand. The concessions granted to the owners of requisitioned properties in Osnabrücker Straße and Kaiser Straße seem to have encouraged others to take the opportunity to return to their homes and remove items without permission. The German civil authorities appeared to be unable or unwilling to control the situation, and British troops were brought in to restore order. The military authorities, as worried about the civil authorities' loss of control as about the removal of property, summoned the Landrat and Bürgermeister early on the morning of Sunday 10 June 1945, and told them that, until a plan could be agreed that would guarantee that orders issued by the civil authorities would be carried out by the public, all hand-trucks and wheeled vehicles were to be impounded. They were given until 10am the following morning (Monday) to deliver a plan.<sup>84</sup>

A former Nazi labour camp had been prepared to accommodate the evicted townspeople, although those who could lodged with relatives and friends.<sup>85</sup> By the end of the War, a thousand or so evacuees and refugees had increased the town's population

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<sup>79</sup> 4.5.45 Letter from Major F S Gedye to Bürgermeister Lübbecke. Lübbecke Stadtarchiv File D29 Bd1

<sup>80</sup> 12.11.46 Accounting for furniture in requisitioned houses. National Archives File FO1067/34

<sup>81</sup> Dr Bettina Blum

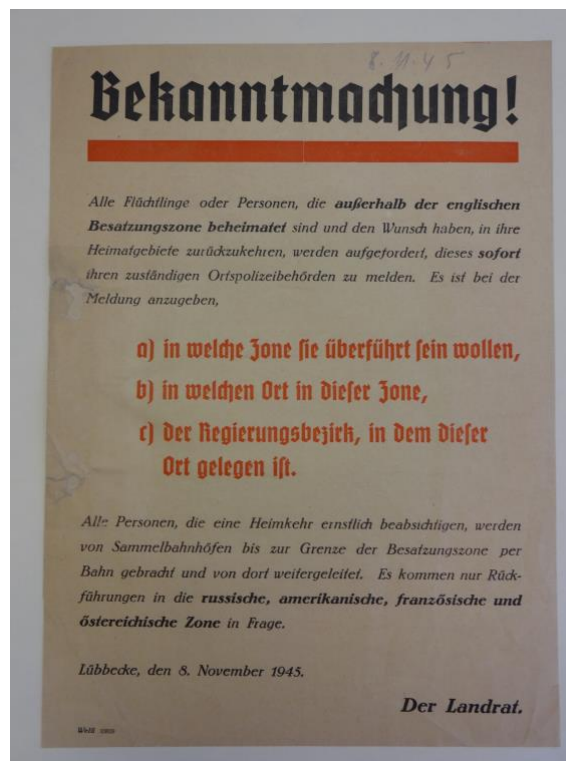
<sup>82</sup> 8.6.45 Letter from Major F S Gedye to Landrat and Bürgermeister Lübbecke File D29 Bd1

<sup>83</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv D26 Bd 1. 11.6.45 Letter from Bürgermeister to Rudolf Franke

<sup>84</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv D29 Bd 1. Town Major's instruction to Landrat and Bürgermeister, 10.6.1945

<sup>85</sup> More research in Lübbecke Stadtarchiv needed to establish where the camp was, and how many people occupied it, for how long

to over 8,000, and there were 24,262 evacuees and refugees in the wider Landkreis (District).<sup>86</sup> These included those who had fled from the Soviet Zone or been ejected from German enclaves in Poland and Czechoslovakia; as well as evacuees from the badly bombed cities of the Ruhr and elsewhere in the British zone. As a result, Lübbecke in 1945 was bursting at the seams. Every last space was utilised: attics and cellars were turned into bedrooms, and people slept on benches and deckchairs. Sometimes the British intervened where they considered the conditions constituted a danger to children's health. In an attempt to avoid making things worse for Lübbeckers, evacuees from the Soviet Zone and from eastern Europe who were unable to stay with relatives and friends were encouraged to leave Lübbecke and return to their home towns, and the British laid on lorries and buses to transport them. But they could not be compelled to leave, and it is not known how many took up the offer.



16. Announcement offering repatriation to refugees from outside the British Zone. 8 November 1945

Lübbecke's overcrowded situation was replicated throughout the British Zone. In 1945, approximately 92% of NordRhein/Westfalen's pre-war German population was living in the remaining 36% of the habitable housing; and accommodation had also to be found for 300,000 miners being brought in to regenerate the Ruhr coal industry, as well as a

<sup>86</sup> 19.7.45 Public Assistance (Fürsorge). National Archives File FO1051/374

monthly 15,000 returning prisoners of war, and over 800,000 refugees, plus 60,000 Displaced Persons.<sup>87</sup>

People were on the move all over Germany. On 17 July 1945 *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* illustrated a report describing a human tide making its way along the autobahn on foot, by bicycle and cart, with a picture of a group of evacuees returning from Lübbecke to their homes in the Ruhrgebiet, having received, in the first post for many months, news that their former homes were habitable again.<sup>88</sup> But the Military Government warned evacuees to remain where they were, as it was unlikely that they would find their former homes habitable. In Essen, for example, only 5% of houses were undamaged, and half of the damaged houses were irreparable.<sup>89</sup>



17. Picnic on the autobahn. Evacuees returning from Lübbecke to their homes in the Ruhr, July 1945

Lübbeckers might have hoped that the British would relinquish their requisitioned properties when the Control Commission moved out in 1949/50, and after housing enclaves had been built to house the remaining military, but in 1951 there were still around 150 requisitioned properties in the town. Successive BAOR units, continued to be stationed in Lübbecke until 1982. One cause of complaint was that some of the requisitioned houses were left unoccupied, prompting fourteen families to invade vacant properties. They were only evicted under threat of arrest.<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere, in Bielefeld, Essen, Hamm, Herford and Bad Oeynhausen there were more serious protests. Measures were then put in place to alleviate some of the problems, including placing a ceiling on further requisitioning, and permitting Germans and British to reside in the same property.

<sup>87</sup> Requisitioning. National Archives File FO1030/190

<sup>88</sup> *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* 17.7.45

<sup>89</sup> *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* 24.8.45

<sup>90</sup> Check with Stadtarchiv whether this event took place in Lübbecke

## Relations between Military Government and the German civil authorities

The formal channel of communication between the British and German civil authorities was between a designated British Officer, the Town Major (Stadt Major) and the Bürgermeister. This was based on the principle of indirect control, under which the German population would receive orders from their own officials. Until local government elections were re-established in October 1946, Bürgermeisters were appointed by the Control Commission. Thereafter, Town Majors were replaced by British Kreis Resident Officers who represented the British authorities at local level but had no direct authority over local councils. Wilhelm Meyrahn, effectively Lübbecke's first Bürgermeister of the occupation period, served from April 11, 1945 (when he replaced the ousted Gerlach) until his death in October 1945.

During these early months it was Meyrahn who had the thankless task of serving Besetzungs Befehle (Requisition Demands) on his fellow Lübbeckers, instructing them to hand over the keys to their properties, and dealing with the many appeals for exemption or special treatment. As we have seen, the Bürgermeister was also responsible for maintaining law and order in the town with an as-yet embryonic police force, and it was above the Bürgermeister's signature that the population had to read the occupation authorities' public orders.

Meyrahn was the recipient of an endless stream of 'housekeeping' demands from the British: items to be provided in Blase's requisitioned property (8 white and 8 blue/white striped waiters' jackets; 8 blue waiters' trousers); or, as described earlier under 'Requisitioning', services to be provided in the former Gauleiterschule, now the British Officers Mess. Some demands were almost impossible to meet, such as the request, in July 1945, to supply a cook for one of the Control Commission's numerous canteens and messes. The previous cook had been transferred to the Officers Mess, and her replacement had proved unsatisfactory. A French or Dutch cook would be preferred, as the British did not have much confidence in German cooking. The files do not reveal the nationality of the eventual appointee.

In the absence of central government at national level, rebuilding local government institutions became a priority. Historically, Lübbecke's council had consisted of a Bürgermeister and four councillors but, under a 1935 NSDAP statute, the Kreisleiter became the sole authority, with the four councillors reduced to advisors.<sup>91</sup> There were early efforts to reconstitute Lübbecke's local council on a democratic basis. The newly elected 14-member town council met for the first time on 11 January 1946 under the

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<sup>91</sup> 30.8.45 CCG Legal Division letter on Lübbecke's town charter. National Archives File FO1060/1151.



chairmanship of Frank Welschoff of the CDU party. Town Major How opened the session, and outlined the Council's tasks, emphasizing that their primary aim should be to govern in the interests of the people of Lübbecke. Above all, they must ensure the participation of the population in the administration, in the spirit of true democracy. He stressed that, although the Council's resolutions would have to be confirmed by the military authorities, their efforts, as community representatives, would contribute to embedding real democracy in Germany again. In response Bürgermeister Welschoff thanked the military authorities for placing their trust in him.<sup>92</sup>

## Meeting the British

Town Major Major How was also a key player in the Lübbecke Anglo-German Club, as was Daisy Martin, Head Teacher of the BFES primary school. These clubs were established early in the occupation with the aim of promoting good relations between the occupiers and the local population. In Lübbecke meetings were held fortnightly at Toc H in the Hotel Holland-Moritz.<sup>93</sup> Germans of all ages could take part in discussions and hear talks and presentations on a variety of topics ranging from fairy tales to cake-making. All discourse was in English, and many Germans attended in order to learn the language. The teenaged Helmut Hüffmann was one of those, and still fondly remembers some of the topics as well as the kindly and energetic Daisy Martin.<sup>94</sup> Helmut's English teacher became an interpreter for the British.

Germans' eagerness to learn English was not generally matched by the occupiers' wish to learn German, although Control Commission personnel were encouraged to do so. Bill Yeadell, a young CCG Control Officer, attended fortnightly lessons at Toc H with a Herr Becher, who had become an interpreter when he was a POW.<sup>95</sup> But Bill was something of an exception: most CCG employees, who were on temporary 18-24 month contracts, learned only a few stock phrases, and relied on numerous translators and interpreters, who were essential to CCG's functions.

British troops and civilians arrived in Lübbecke in April 1945 under strict instructions not to fraternise with the Germans. They had been told that they must "keep clear of them all – men women and children" except in the course of duty. They must not walk out with them, or shake hands, or visit their homes, or make them gifts, or take gifts from

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<sup>92</sup> 11.1.46 Council meeting note. Protokollbuch des Gemeinderates und Stadt Vertretung der Stadt Lübbecke.

<sup>93</sup> TocH is an international Christian movement. The name is an abbreviation for Talbot House, "Toc" signifying the letter T in the signals spelling alphabet used by the British Army in World War I. A soldiers' rest and recreation centre named Talbot House was founded in December 1915 at Poperinghe, Belgium, and branches of Toc H were established in many countries around the world. It was named in memory of Gilbert Talbot, who had been killed at Hooge in July 1915.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Helmut Hüffmann, 25.6.2018

<sup>95</sup> Diaries of WRD Yeadell 1946-1949

them. They must not play games with them or share any social event with them.<sup>96,97</sup> But within a few weeks, the Military Governor wrote to the Secretary of State for War to say that the rules were unenforceable. Montgomery wrote: “We cannot expect [soldiers] to go on snubbing little children. We do not want German children to regard the British soldier as some kind of ogre.”<sup>98</sup> The Government conceded: on 22 June it was announced that it was now permitted to chat and play with German children, and this was extended on 17 July to include adults in public places.<sup>99</sup> On 25 September 1945 non-fraternisation orders were lifted altogether except for the quartering of military personnel with German families, and the ban on marriage with Germans, which remained in force until September 1947.<sup>100</sup>

Official regulations were effectively playing catch up. As the Military Governor’s senior officers and advisers in Lübbecke would have seen for themselves, fraternisation had been widespread almost from the outset. The children of the town certainly did not appear to have regarded British soldiers as ogres. School closures left many youngsters with free time and, out on the streets, they could meet and engage more easily and more often with British troops than their parents could. Some, like Helmut Hüffmann, spent his spare time attending meetings of the Anglo-German Club and getting to know British soldiers, who were a welcome source of sweets and chewing gum. Initially wary, some parents welcomed contacts with the occupiers, who offered the possibility of food and other sought-after items. Helmut befriended a soldier called Albert, who visited his home and brought his parents a tin of margarine. Albert was an ill-educated Geordie miner, but he nevertheless helped Helmut with some words of English. They met from time to time over a period of a year until Albert was posted away.

As photographs of the time show, anti-fraternisation regulations failed to prevent British soldiers and the young ladies of Lübbecke meeting and getting to know each other. Mutual attraction prevailed, notwithstanding differing German and British tastes in beauty: Germans thought English women too colourful, while German women were regarded as too pale and homely.<sup>101</sup> One Lübbecke recollects that the British wives brought “something of the empire” to sleepy Lübbecke. With their lipstick and make-up

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<sup>96</sup> March 1945 Field Marshal Montgomery message to 21 Army Group. National Archives File FO1060/874

<sup>97</sup> The non-fraternisation policy was based on a determination not to repeat the post-WWI experience, when British occupation troops had been billeted with German families and were perceived to have become over-friendly with them, allowing Germans to believe they bore no responsibility for the 1914-18 conflict. The Allies were determined that, this time, the whole German nation should know that they were being held to account for the War and for the atrocities committed in Germany’s name.

<sup>98</sup> 5.6.45 Field Marshal Montgomery to Rt Hon Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War. National Archives File FO1030/289

<sup>99</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 22.6.45, 17.7.45

<sup>100</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 26.9.45

<sup>101</sup> Helmut Hüffmann interview 25.6.2018

they astonished the staid townswomen: make-up was not fashionable in the Nazi era, at least not in the provinces.<sup>102</sup>

According to a contemporary witness, the Jahn Mittelschule gymnasium was used as a dance hall, and became a prime place for soldiers to meet with German girls, as were the basements of some British messes. Returning German POWs were astonished to find that some BDM<sup>103</sup> girls who, only a few months before had marched for 'faith and freedom' through Lübbecke's streets and in front of the Gauleiterschule, could now be seen on the arms of British soldiers.



18. British soldiers and Lübbecke girls, July 1945

Shared interests sometimes brought Germans and British together too. After the War, all weapons, including hunting weapons, were banned, but Wilhelm Knost, the Kreis Schützenmeister (District Hunt Master), was responsible for issuing hunting licences subject to the approval of the British authorities. This bought him into contact with Control Commission officers, many of whom liked to hunt. One was a young Royal Corps of Transport Captain Braggins who, on one occasion, shot more game than anyone else and so became 'Hunt King' for the day. Speaking no German, he had no idea of the protocol surrounding his achievement, but Herr Knost's son spoke a little English and translated, and they later became friends. The Captain was one of those who maintained that there was no need to learn German, on the basis that the Germans could speak English.<sup>104</sup>

Lubbecke was a protestant town, and the townspeople had to share the St Andreas Kirche (St Andrews Church) with the British. Services were supposed to be arranged to accommodate both congregations. Church of England services were held on Sunday mornings at 8, 11.30 and 12.30, and it would seem that German services had to be

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<sup>102</sup> Walter Seger, letter to the author, May 2019

<sup>103</sup> Bund Deutscher Mädel was the girls wing of the Nazi youth movement, slogan 'Glaube und Freiheit'

<sup>104</sup> Bengt Müller interview

squeezed in between these times: Bill Yeadell's diary records rather grumpily that, on one occasion, the service he was attending had to be curtailed when it overran the start time of the German service.<sup>105</sup> British Roman Catholic services were also held at St Johannes Kirche (St John's church) in Niedertor Straße.

## Working for the British

Many Lübbeckers got to know the British by working for them, as cleaners, nursemaids, waiters, gardeners, electricians and drivers, as well as interpreters, clerks and administrators. By mid-1948, there were 115,250 Germans and DPs (Displaced Persons) employed by CCG throughout the British Zone. The military - BAOR, the British Air Force of Occupation (BAFO) and the British Naval Forces - accounted for a further almost 214,000.<sup>106</sup> One fifth of those employed by CCG were Displaced Persons (DPs), who were mainly occupied in administration of the DP camps. Of the Germans who worked directly in support of CCG, over 18,000 were employed as domestic labour, including three and a half thousand as domestic servants of CCG married families, and a further 2,300 in NAAFI and other clubs. There were over seven thousand German clerks, and transport accounted for a further thirteen thousand or more.<sup>107</sup> The German economy was on its knees, so these jobs were greatly prized, because they helped whole families to make ends meet. 'If you had a job [with the British] you could be sure [your family] would be all right'.<sup>108</sup> Wolfgang Krüger, an accommodation officer in Minden, remembers being given gifts of butter, chocolate and other otherwise unavailable items.

Germans employed on physical work received additional rations, the amounts varying depending on the type of job and how the work was categorised. For example, long-distance truck driving was categorised as 'moderately heavy', or 'very heavy' if it also involved two nights absence from home. Gardening was considered 'moderately heavy', along with plumbing and pipe fitting. The difference was significant: for example, Car Organisation workers on 'heavy' rations received a third more than those on 'moderately heavy rations'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> WRDY diaries 1946-1949

<sup>106</sup> 30.6.48 Germans/DPs employed. National Archives File FO936/1026

<sup>107</sup> 30.6.48 Number of Germans/DPs directly employed by the forces of occupation and the Control Commission for Germany (BE). National Archives File FO936/1026

<sup>108</sup> Helmut Hüffmann, 25.6.2018

<sup>109</sup> 22.4.48 CCG Food & Agriculture Division instruction. National Archives File FO1069/51

Weekly ration	Normal ration Grms [to be completed]	Moderately heavy ration Grms	Heavy ration Grms
Bread		1500	2500
Cereals		500	750
Potatoes		2000	3000
Meat		200	300
Fat		100	150
Sugar		62.5	62.5
Coffee		25	50

19. Additional Rations for German Car Organisation Employees 4.11.47

Those employed by the CCG Civil Labour Organisation were also provided with working clothes, including a great coat, boots, leather jerkin and a jersey. These must have been welcome items during the first bitter post-war winters.<sup>110</sup> Jobs in British canteens and kitchens offered particularly attractive opportunities for obtaining food supplies, sometimes illicitly, as described elsewhere, but working alongside each other also provided many Germans and British with their first opportunity to get to know each other as individuals, and some Lübbeckers still recall the experience.

German women were valued for their housewifely skills, and were taken on by British families as cooks, housemaids and nursemaids. Their work was essential to the lifestyle of Control Commission officers: cooking and cleaning the requisitioned houses in which they lived and looking after their children enabled the parents to pursue their social activities. But few could speak the other's language, and many British wives came from modest backgrounds with no experience of employing domestic staff. Some of the German girls were only in their teens and living away from home for the first time, while many British wives were themselves not much older, and were living in a strange country without family support. The results were mixed.

Some families became very fond of their German maids, particularly the nursemaids. Jocelyn Matthews-Hoyle has the fondest memories of her nanny, Lieselotte, who lived with them at 15 Kaiser Straße, and who became almost like a sister to Jocelyn's mother. Liesel was a refugee from Stettin in the Russian Zone, and had lost both her parents, so she became part of Jocelyn's family, remaining with them for eight years and eventually returning to England with them.

Other British families did not cope so well. Bill Yeadell's family at 17 Weingarten Straße was one of them. His diaries are peppered with references to 'maid trouble: Girda ill... Wilma out late... Girda wants better paid job...'. Bill's highly-strung young wife was

<sup>110</sup> 24.12.47 Clothing scale for Civil Mixed Labour organisation. National Archives FO1051/487

suffering gynaecological problems as a result of bearing four children in less than six years – children who were clearly a handful - and was simply unable to manage the succession of young German girls they employed, none of whom seemed to be happy to work for them. On several occasions the CCG Civil Labour Office was brought in to sort out disputes.<sup>111</sup>

CCG devised many different categories of domestic servants, each with strictly regulated monthly pay rates. These ranged from cleaners who earned £1 10s, to housemaids, parlourmaids, kitchenmaids and nursemaids earning £2 15s, to qualified cooks, housekeepers, governesses, nurses and gardeners at £4 - £4 5s. The highest paid were males – chefs, valets, butlers, grooms and drivers, who received £6 10s.<sup>112</sup> ‘Domestics’ could be asked to work up to ten hours per day with one day off per week.<sup>113</sup>

Prized above all were English translators and interpreters, without whom CCG would not have been able to function. Every public notice, instruction, letter and requisition demand issued by the British in Lübbecke had to be issued in German as well as English, and all incoming correspondence had to be translated from German to English. Interpreters were required for every meeting between British and German officials, as well as with business people and individual townspeople. In the early days, as we have seen in ‘Establishing Control’, arrangements were sometimes ad hoc. Frau Bokämper in Pettenpohl Straße was one example, but even those who worked for CCG at the highest level had often fallen into the role by chance rather than design. In 1946, Rudi Lederer, a young British Army Officer of Austrian extraction who happened to be bi-lingual, was ordered out of the blue to interpret for a meeting between the Military Governor, General Sir Brian Robertson, and the then unknown Konrad Adenauer, and ended up with a job for life.<sup>114</sup>

I was summoned by my Commanding Officer: “Do you speak German?” I replied “yes sir.” “All right, you will join the Commander-in-Chief’s train tonight. He’s on his way to Hamburg where he’s to meet a bunch of Germans and he needs an interpreter.” I said “Sir, I don’t know whether I can do that.” He said “Can you speak German or can’t you?” I said “Yes.” He said “Off you go”. .... I was presented to the Commander-in-Chief and Military Governor, Sir Brian Robertson... [who was meeting] Dr Adenauer and a few of his collaborators – the idea was to start re-floating the British zone of Germany as a democratic institution, with local government, schools, transport, roads, everything. They sat there for 2-3 hours – and me standing to attention behind the General’s chair. And when it was all over – I was half dead – he said to me: “All right, you

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<sup>111</sup> Bill Yeadell’s diaries 1946-1949

<sup>112</sup> £1 in 1945 = approximately £42 today. Pre-decimal currency was denominated in Pounds, Shillings and Pence (£sd)

<sup>113</sup> Guide for Families in BAOR 1949. IWM

<sup>114</sup> Rudi Lederer went on to work for the EU and interpreted at many high-level meetings between British Prime Ministers and leading German and French politicians. He died in 2004

can stay with me.”<sup>115</sup>

20. Rudi Lederer becomes a CCG interpreter in 1946

English skills were much in demand, even for ordinary jobs. In Minden, a young ex-POW had learned some English before being released by the Americans and, no other work being available, applied to the British Kreis Labour Office who assigned him to work as an accommodation officer, organising furniture for requisitioned properties. He remained with the British for six years.<sup>116</sup> Eighteen-year-old Christopher Sholl's mother gradually improved her knowledge of English in conversations with the British military who were then accommodated in her parents' house, and ended up acting semi-officially and then officially as a de facto interpreter.

## Back to school

Like other schools in the British Zone, Lübbecke's schools had been closed immediately after the occupation in order to 'eradicate the Nazi spirit' which had infused the teaching of young children. Nazi-era regulations had to be scrutinised; school books had to be rewritten; and new teachers had to be hired.<sup>117</sup> But gradually, schools in Westfalen were reopened, starting with four junior classes of the Herford Volksschulen in August 1945. Lübbecke's Volksschule and Mittelschule re-opened in October 1945, although Mittelschule classes had to be taken in the afternoons at the Stadtschule am Markt, because the premises were still being occupied by British troops.<sup>118</sup> Returning school pupils were surprised to find that their new teachers appeared much older than those who had previously taught them. These were the teachers who had been ousted by the Nazi régime and brought back when NSDAP loyalist teachers were thrown out in their turn. But many schools were also short of the most basic equipment. Hüllhorst community school near Lübbecke was allocated only three slates between the twenty-three children enrolled for the 1948 Easter term.

The British were keen to encourage friendships between British and German schoolchildren, and for German children to experience something of the British education system. One of the Anglo-German Club talks Helmut Hüffman remembers was a report of the visit in 1948 by girls from the Lübbecke Aufbauschule to St Martin-in-the-Fields Girls School in Tulse Hill, London,<sup>119</sup> which had been organised by the head teacher of the Lübbecke BFES Primary School, the indefatigable Daisy Martin, in what must have

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<sup>115</sup> 20.2.2002 Interview with Rudi Lederer. *Living Memory* Susan.Roberts@cec.eu.int

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Wolfgang Krüger

<sup>117</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 10.7.45, 28.8.45

<sup>118</sup> Lübbecke Stadtarchiv. Protokollbuch des Gemeinderates der Stadt Lübbecke

<sup>119</sup> The school was founded by the parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields in 1699 and relocated to its present site in Tulse Hill, south London, in 1928. *Wikipedia*

been one of the earliest post-war school exchanges. The party, led by their teacher Frau Hanna Goldmacher, arrived at Liverpool Street Station at 8 am Sunday 9 May 1948.<sup>120</sup>

The girls were:

	Age	Staying with ...
Renate Schumacher	17	Jeanne Archard (?)
Elizabeth Büscher	17	Doris Bolton
Christiane Eichholz	17	Rosemary Fletcher
Sylvia Sonnenann (?)	17	Jean Machin
Ursel Korte	17	Doris Payne
Ingrid Nolte	17	Olive Bastian
Margarita Thauen	16	Joan Siddaway
Lydia Scholöwerk	16	Joyce Gurd (?)
Grisela Kroczek	15	Irene McCarthy
Margarete zur Lippe	15	Dawn Escott
Hildegard Fricke	16	Ursula Baggott
Hilderuth Heidsick	16	Pauline Holding

The girls were taken on many sight-seeing, cultural and educational expeditions during their hectic three week visit, including St Martin's-in-the-Fields Church; the Tower of London; St Paul's Cathedral; the Houses of Parliament; Westminster Abbey; the British Museum; YWCA Headquarters; a Lambeth Borough Council Meeting; Ballet; and the *Taming of the Shrew*. They also had a picnic in Kew Gardens and an outing to Windsor. On Friday afternoon 28 May the German girls entertained the School with music and dancing, and on Monday 31 May the school gave a farewell party to the visitors with games and a St Martin's Pageant in the Hall followed by tea in the Gymnasium. When they left that evening to return to Germany each girl was given a photo of the Tulse Hill School, and they in their turn gave St. Martin's a book of photos of Lübbecke and their School.

## Entertainment

Entertainment was in short supply for Lübbeckers in the early post-war years. The requisitioned Bürgerpark Lichtspiele (cinema), renamed the Windmill Theatre, was available to the local population only on a limited number of days each week but, with the German film industry moribund, the main diet on offer consisted of pre-Nazi era films, such as the 1930 travelogue *Mit Büchse und Lasso Durch Afrika* (With Rifle and Lasso through Africa), shown on 10 November 1948.<sup>121</sup> More appealing, maybe, were the British and American films shown on other days of the week, and enterprising schoolboys like Helmut Hüffmann had no problem finding a friendly soldier to take them in.<sup>122</sup> He remembers particularly seeing a Rita Hayworth film – was it perhaps *Gilda*, also watched by Bill Yeadell on 18 November 1946?<sup>123</sup> According to the testimony of one

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<sup>120</sup> St-Martin-in-the-Fields School Record, Minet Library, Lambeth. I am grateful to Sarah Paterson, Curator at the Imperial War Museum, for this information.

<sup>121</sup> The Windmill Theatre in London famously never closed during the Blitz

<sup>122</sup> 29.7.46 Policy on mixed audiences National Archived File FO1068/15

<sup>123</sup> WRDY diaries 1946-1949



Lübbeckerin, secondary school pupils of the Wittekind Gymnasium were also shown documentary films about the concentration camps, although it is not clear how systematically adult townspeople were compelled to watch the films.<sup>124</sup> In December 1945 the Windmill Theatre was the venue for a meeting which re-established the SPD political party, and for a Christmas concert for the people of Lübbecke, as well as a solo dance exhibition by Dortmunders Jutta Hutter and Allen Schott.<sup>125,126</sup>

Many of the town's bars were out of bounds to British soldiers, while some were reserved for them, rendering them fascinating to curious schoolboys who watched with interest the comings and goings at a cellar bar known informally as the Drei Hexe (three witches) opposite the Holland-Moritz Hotel, where Anglo-German club meetings were held. The name was an unkind reference to the bar's three rather elderly waitresses. Restaurants could offer Lübbeckers only meagre fare. The Gasthaus zum Amtsgericht's top dish on offer in 1947 was a 'first class meat broth', which they claimed would set customers up for the oncoming freezing winter of 1947. The type of meat was not specified.

Plans for new swimming baths adjoining the Oberfelder Allee sportsground (Alfred Meyer Kampfbahn) had been halted by the War, but Lübbeckers could still swim at the Blase factory pool or, favourite, the bathing site on the Mittelland canal. In the summer of 1945, the canal had lost none of its attraction, not only for locals but also for the British occupiers, each supposedly keeping to their own area of the embankment. This, despite the fact that, with the canal blocked by destroyed bridges, and the water undisturbed, munitions thrown aside by fleeing Wehrmacht soldiers could be clearly seen through the water.

School sports had been curtailed too, because during the War, many sports halls had been taken over as air raid shelters or to accommodate units of the German army. Requisitioned again by the British after April 1945, it would be several years before these were once more available to Lübbecke school children. And after the War, the grass on the Alfred Meyer sportsground was scythed, and the many molehills flattened to create a cricket pitch for the British.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout the British Zone, Christmas parties were held for needy German children by British volunteers who donated food from their own rations. Bill Yeadell attended the children's party at Toc H on Christmas Day 1946, and the following year two parties were held at the Mittelschule in Jahnstrasse, organised by British Girl Guides and welfare organisations. A German eyewitness described how the children sat at well-laden tables

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<sup>124</sup> Testimony of Christine Meyer-Eming

<sup>125</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 14.12.45

<sup>126</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 28.12.45

<sup>127</sup> Helmut Hüffmann

under a festively decorated Christmas tree, and Father Christmas appeared several times to hand out presents. Afterwards, for the first time in their lives, the children watched a film of Mickey Mouse's comedy antics.<sup>128,129</sup>

## Freedom of expression

The NSDAP organ, *Westfälische Neueste Nachrichten*, was closed immediately the Allies arrived on 3 April 1945. It was replaced for a few weeks by *Die Mitteilungen* (The Announcements), a zone-wide newsletter published by 21st Army Group for the German civilian population, but on 26 May the military authorities launched the first edition of a new German language local newspaper - the *Neue Westfälische Zeitung*, which is still published today, with offices on Lange Straße, Lübbecke. At the outset the content consisted almost entirely of official instructions to the local population, on curfew hours, weapons amnesties and fraternisation; announcements of Allied policy to provide Germans with food, shelter and freedom from disease; and articles about wider events, like the 1945 London conference, the Hiroshima atom bomb, theories about how Hitler was said to have died; and – quirkily – a report of a Lancaster bomber's flight to the North Pole and back.<sup>130</sup>

Initially published weekly, the paper underwent a gradual transformation from being simply a mouthpiece of the Military Government to becoming a more authentically local newspaper. By July 1945, small ads were being included listing articles for sale and people looking for work, and August 1945 saw more significant changes.<sup>131</sup> The newspaper's *Amtliche Bekanntmachungen* column (Official Announcements) began to be issued in the name of Dr Amelunxen, Oberpräsident of Westfalen Provinz, rather than the Military Government, and an editorial was published for the first time. The tone of the editorial, commenting on a recent policy statement by the Military Governor was rather anodyne, but it nevertheless bore the hallmarks of having been written by a journalist, rather than translated from an British PR brief.<sup>132</sup> In the same edition, Lübbeckers could read that eagles had been seen once more flying in the Teutoburger Wald; and that schoolchildren in Rheine had been recruited in the battle against the potato beetle, and were being paid 1 pfennig for each one they collected and 5 pfennigs for each larva. On 14 August the newspaper introduced a letters page; and provided separate *Amtliches Bekanntmachungen* for each Westfalian town. It also showed a photograph of British troops parading on 12 August in Münster to celebrate VJ day, over

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<sup>128</sup> WRDY diaries 1946-1949

<sup>129</sup> Helmut Hüffmann

<sup>130</sup> *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* 1.6.45

<sup>131</sup> *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* 13.7.45

<sup>132</sup> *Neue Westfälische Zeitung* 7.8.45

a report that the German population seemed to enjoy the 'militärische Schauspiel' (military theatre):<sup>133</sup>

At the end of August 1945, under the Military Government's Freedom of Expression policy, publishers were invited to apply for licences to publish books, newspapers, brochures etc in what the Neue Westfälische Zeitung called 'a first step for press freedom', and this was followed up by the publication on 18<sup>th</sup> September of Military Government Ordinance No. 8 on the Right of Public Speech.<sup>134</sup>

## New beginnings

In the summer of 1945, life began to return to Lübbecke, At the end of June, a limited postal service was re-established. Post boxes remained closed, but letters could be taken to the temporary Post Office in Haus Kappelmann, at 9 Lange Straße. Only stamps issued by the military authorities could be used; but it was a start, and people were able to get in touch again with relatives with whom they had had no contact for many months. Postal services were fully restored from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1945 and, by 1947, Hehemeyer's bookshop was selling international postage stamps again.<sup>135,136</sup>

As rolling stock and railway lines were repaired, trains started to run again. By July 1945, 418 passenger trains and 284 goods trains a week were running through the railway town of Hamm; and there were daily passenger services between Hamm, Bielefeld and Duisburg. News of the bombing of Hiroshima reached Lübbecke at the beginning of August, but the townsfolk may have been more interested in learning that the railway line from Lübbecke to Herford was reopening.<sup>137</sup> And local train services between Minden and Lübbecke were restored in December 1945, following repair of the Hille canal bridge.<sup>138</sup>

Shipping was also starting up again. In September 1945, herrings became available again, following the landing of 1800 barrels of fish. The lower Rhein was once more navigable for shipping, and many of the ships lying damaged in the Duisburg-Ruhrort port had been salvaged.<sup>139</sup>

1947 saw the first tentative signs of economic recovery in the British Zone, with a reduction in unemployment and an increase in industrial production, but it would be

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<sup>133</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 14.8.45

<sup>134</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 31.8.45

<sup>135</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 29.6.45

<sup>136</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 31.8.45

<sup>137</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 3,10.8.45

<sup>138</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 7.12.45

<sup>139</sup> Neue Westfälische Zeitung 7.9.45

many months before the people of Lübbecke felt the benefits in their daily lives. Despite all attempts to stamp it out, the black market continued to thrive, as people strove by legal or other means to get hold of the things they needed. But, in a sign of things to come, a limited number of requisitioned shops were released by the British authorities in the Autumn of 1947. The Bokoloh brothers, hairdressers, announced on 11 October that they were once more open for business in Bahnhofstraße to German customers. What is more, townspeople could access the salon without obtaining a pass from the military authorities, even though it lay within the prohibition zone. In November, a shoe outlet was advertised, selling straw-soled house-shoes, produced by a factory in Gehlenbeck, which could be purchased without a ration card. Rauner the goldsmith in Lange Straße offered to create wedding rings crafted from precious metal provided by customers themselves. Kutschke the chemist recommended his herbal tea as a gift for Christmas 1947. But grocers Köhler in Bäcker Straße and Wippermann in Lange Straße did not advertise: meagre food supplies and rationing made shopping too frustrating for both shopkeepers and customers.

At the end of 1947 the previously prohibited areas of the town were opened up and Lübbeckers were able to walk freely through their town again. And the following year brought seismic change, with the launch of the Deutsche Mark on 20 June 1948. Everyone immediately received 40DMs, and a further 20DMs in August, and the old currency was devalued 10:1 to establish a sound relationship between goods and prices. In Lange Straße there were protests against the devaluation, but the change was dramatic – from one day to the next goods appeared for sale in the shops which had not been seen for years, albeit high prices unaffordable for locals. In another indication that times were changing, in November 1948 the British put on display in the gymnasium of the Jahn-Mittelschule a collection of requisitioned furniture which was now surplus to requirements. Lübbecke house owners came along, hoping to recognise their own furniture, but many of them were disappointed to find their chairs with broken arms, and sofas with ragged upholstery.

By 1949, with the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundes Republik Deutschland), the main job of the Control Commission was coming to an end. A democratically elected Government led by the Catholic Rheinlander Konrad Adenauer of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) took office in Bonn, the federal capital, while protestant Lübbecke's representatives in the new Bundestag (Lower House of Parliament) were members of the SPD (Social Democratic Party), as they are today.<sup>140</sup> So, as Germany emerged after four years of military occupation, was the glass half-full or half-empty for the people of Lübbecke? In December 1949, the British Kreis Resident Officer's report painted a mixed picture. Lange Straße was festooned for Christmas and crowded with people, but unemployment levels remained high, and among the crowds

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<sup>140</sup> 13.12.49 KRO Lübbecke Monthly Reports Part II. National Archives File FO1013/1420

there were still beggars and poor refugees. Prices were high, and there were claims that meat prices were inflated because local farmers were exporting cattle to Italy, Belgium and Holland. All the same, he thought he detected greater optimism than the previous year and noted that people were pleased by rumours of the run-down of the Control Commission.<sup>141</sup>

The KRO also noted that former NSDAP Kreisleiter Ernst Meiring had reappeared and been seen walking in Lübbecke's streets. Although rumoured to have been responsible for the burning of Lübbecke's synagogue and known to have sent political opponents to the local concentration camp, Meiring could not legally be charged with any offence unless witnesses came forward with evidence, which many were reluctant to do, for fear of implicating themselves. Moreover, Lübbecke's records had been burned in 1945 just before the Allies occupied the town. Young Hitlerjugend member Herbert Biermann was sent to the District Courts on the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1945 to assist in burning documents. But the boilers were so full of paper that they would not burn so they were destroyed on a bonfire in front of the building – just in time: Allied tanks could be heard approaching the town that afternoon.<sup>142</sup> The law did eventually catch up with Meiring, and in 1951 he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment but, as recounted by Walter Seger in his book about Lübbecke during the Nazi era, Meiring managed to escape punishment on the grounds that he had not committed a crime or an intentional offence within 3 years and, in early 1955, his case was wiped from the criminal record, so Lübbecke's former Kreisleiter and fanatical Nazi loyalist Meiring emerged with a clean slate.<sup>143</sup>

## Some Lübbeckers' perceptions of the occupation experience

When Military Government came to an end in September 1949 with the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany, Control Commission staff left Lübbecke for the newly established UK High Commission in Wahnerheide, near Cologne. Lübbeckers had not seen the last of the British, however, for BAOR troops were stationed in the town until 1982.

What were Germans' perceptions of their occupation experience? As will be described in a future section of Life in the British Zone, and as documented by Dr Bettina Blum, requisitioning was the cause of much criticism.<sup>144</sup> Although there was not the same level of public protest in Lübbecke as there was in the Ruhr towns, the townspeople whose houses had been occupied no doubt felt, like many other Germans, that requisitioning

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<sup>141</sup> 13.12.49 KRO Lübbecke Monthly Reports Part II. National Archives File FO1013/1420

<sup>142</sup> Personal Memoir of Herbert Biermann

<sup>143</sup> Walter Seger *Wiederaufnahme*. Books on Demand, Norderstedt ISBN 978-3-7431-7743-7

<sup>144</sup> Dr Bettina Blum *My Home Your Castle: British Requisitioning of German Homes in Westphalia*. Published in *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany* Bloomsbury Publishing 2018

unfairly penalised them for the actions of the Nazi regime. Others were more pragmatic: “Of course Germans didn’t like being thrown out of their properties, but it was an occupation, and we had lost the war”.<sup>145</sup> The devaluation of the old Reichsmark against the new Deutschmark, which led almost immediately to large price hikes in the cost of everyday goods and services, also made life very hard for Lübbeckers, and was perceived by some as a deliberate policy by the British and French Governments for reasons of economic competition. On the other hand, the many were glad to have secured jobs with the British and seem to have enjoyed generally good relations with them.

Freedom of public discourse and political speech were a welcome novelty. Karla Bach, a small child at the time, describes being afraid of saying something forbidden, even within the family. A tiny example of that fear was when she named her comical doll on wheels ‘Neville Chamberlain’. She had no idea who he was but had picked up the name from somewhere. Her parents scolded her and told her never to repeat the name. When the war ended, one could say what one liked it felt, she says, that for many Germans like her parents like a Befreiung (liberation)

Karla Bach heard English for the first time when her Aunt in Düsseldorf took her to Die Brücke (The Bridge), a network of reading rooms and British information centres. Helmut Hüffmann, looking back after 45 years, wrote in 1990 that “the Anglo-German Club in Lübbecke gave German participants their first glimpse of democratic debate and its rules of play, sowing a modest seed for future democracy and tolerance”. And democratic debate was indeed evident at political level. At an SPD meeting in Lübbecke in the Autumn of 1949, several speakers were reported to have described the current Labour Government in Britain as “a menace to democracy in Germany”, and that a return to a Conservative Government would be welcomed by many leading Social Democrats. At the same meeting, however, the British occupation was described as helpful in inhibiting the development of right-wing policies by the CDU-led Federal Government under Adenauer: “it is to a certain degree fortunate that Germany is occupied, otherwise there would be the possibility of the right wing becoming too dictatorial”.<sup>146</sup> As the discussion was attended and reported by the British KRO, it may be that the views were deliberately expressed in terms intended for his ears, but lively political discussion was nevertheless in full swing.

Hans Hagemann lived with his parents at 65 Osnabrücker Straße and, when they knew the Allies were approaching, they took their precious items to family members in Stockhausen. His parents, who remembered hearing the Allies arriving in the town, were able to make deals with the British because they had produce (eggs, vegetables etc), to barter their produce for items such as coffee and cigarettes. On his way to school most

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Wolfgang Krüger

<sup>146</sup> 16.9-15.10.49 British Resident Lübbecke Report. National Archives File FO1013/1420

days Hans used to meet and say good morning to a British Officer whose shoes were polished to a gleaming shine. To this day, Hans keeps his own shoes highly polished.

Wolfgang Krüger had learned a little English in an American PoW camp, and on returning home found a job with the British as an accommodation manager, organising the purchase and supply of furniture from local factories for requisitioned properties. He had both Germans and British working under him. At a time of high unemployment Wolfgang regarded work with the British as an opportunity and was treated well. His neighbours, too, were glad he'd got a job with the British because he received many 'gifts' – butter, chocolate, etc – some of which they benefitted from. In his view, these gifts were a form appreciation for the work he did. Wolfgang understands that Germans didn't like being thrown out of their properties, but 'it was an occupation; we had lost the war' (implicitly, what did they expect?). Otherwise, he recollects, views of the English [sic] among the German population were mixed, depending on their level of contact, but the Scots were a 'whole different matter'. In the military towns Germans were shocked to discover that the English and Scots got into fights each other.

For Bengt Müller, speaking of the period after CCG left Lübbecke, the British presence in Lübbecke was perfectly normal and, because his father was friends with Capt Derek Baggins, nothing negative was ever said about the British. Because of the Cold War they were happy that the British, Americans and French were in Germany, and Bengt has never changed his view about this. He knows that the young soldiers got drunk and had to be hauled out of discos etc by the MPs but he never saw it, and no British were ever rude to him.

More will be said about the post-war relationship between Germans and the British in a further section.

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## Interviews

Helmut Hüffmann

Bengt Müller

Horst Schürmann

Herbert Biermann

Karla Bach

Hans Hagemann

Jocelyn Matthews-Hoyle