

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Nazi Germany Project

Germany 1930 - 1940

O. H. 245

LINE SCHMIDT

Interviewed

by

Steven R. Ard

on

June 2, 1981

LINE SCHMIDT

Line Schmidt was born on September 13, 1918, in Stuttgart, Germany, to August and Marie Baisch. She had three sisters and two brothers. Her father did painting while her mother, a housewife, occasionally did sewing to help their finances. She went to the Volks Schule for eight years. When her father died in 1931, she went to work to help with family expenses. First she did sales work and then she was a keypunch operator for Mercedes Benz.

Line's husband and one brother were killed in the war. She has one daughter, Irene. Today Line Schmidt lives in Birkenfeld, Wurttemberg. At the time of her interview, she was visiting her only child, Irene Neumayer, in Girard, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: LINE SCHMIDT

INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard

SUBJECT: Nazism, War

DATE: June 2, 1981

A: This is an interview with Line Schmidt for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on Germany in the 1930's and 1940's by Steven R. Ard at 710 Esme Drive in Girard, Ohio, on June 2, 1981, at approximately 8:25 p.m.

Line would you like to tell me where and when you were born?

S: I was born September 13, 1913.

A: Where at?

S: In Stuttgart.

A: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? What was it like growing up?

S: I have three sisters and two brothers. There are six children all together.

A: What was it like?

S: It was a rough time. My father was a painter. My mother was a housewife. She sewed because my father didn't make too much money. In the wintertime he had no work, just in the summertime. It was seasonal work. It was rough sometimes to get enough food to eat. There was not any rent and we did not own a house.

A: Can you describe some of the years in the 1920's? Can you tell me what things were like in Germany in the 1920's?

- S: In the 1920's I was a child. I had a good father and a good mother. I went to school eight years in Volk Schule. I had no better education because we didn't have any money. In 1928 there was inflation in Germany. My father brought some money home and the next day we couldn't buy anything for this money because the money was worth nothing.
- A: Did he keep bringing more and more money home?
- S: Yes, but I cannot remember.
- A: Do you remember carrying money around in sacks or boxes?
- S: No.
- A: Do you remember a time in the early 1920's when the economy picked up and things seemed a little better?
- S: No.
- A: What can you tell me about the 1930's?
- S: My father died in 1931, and my youngest sister was six years old. I was seventeen years old when my father died. I just finished the apprenticeship when he died in 1931. Afterwards I had to give all my money to my mother. My brother was a little bit older, about two years older than I was. The oldest sister was 25 at this time. She married shortly before he died.
- A: What kind of work were you doing?
- S: I was a sales lady first, and then in 1932 I was off to get a job. I worked for Mercedes Benz for ten years, from 1932 to 1942.
- A: When you were a sales lady where were you working at?
- S: I was working in a store. We had handbags and some leather stuff. Afterwards I was in a big sale house, but just for ten months.
- A: Were things still pretty expensive then in 1931? Were there a lot of people shopping?
- S: Yes, you could buy. A lot of people could buy when they had money, but a lot of people had a lot of kids. You couldn't buy too much because the money was really short.

A: What kind of work did you do at Mercedes Benz?

S: I was a keypuncher over there.

A: What exactly did you do as a keypunch operator?

S: We made the payroll for the whole plant and we made the material that they used for the cars. We had to keypunch this.

A: This was about the time Adolph Hitler was campaigning. Do you remember some of these early elections? Do you remember some of his early campaigns?

S: Yes. I think we were happy because a lot of people did not have any work and he gave us work and we had a good time. Everybody had work.

I saw him one time when he came to our town and drove down the street. Something was funny, when you saw this guy, how can I explain it, I got goosebumps. When he started the war it wasn't good.

A: Can you remember back in January of 1933 when he was appointed by Hindenburg, the Chancellor?

S: I do not because I wasn't interested in politics.

A: After he became dictator did you listen to some of the speeches that he and the other party members gave? Did you hear them on the radio?

S: Yes, sometimes, but not too much. I really wasn't interested. When he started the war--I was married at the time in 1935--I told my husband, "My gosh, I am really afraid if you go to war." He said to me at this time, "Not every bullet finds its mark." Then he got killed.

A: Going back to the speeches, the few you did hear, did you hear Hitler or Goebbels speak?

S: I heard him speak on the radio.

A: Can you remember what you felt at the time?

S: No, not really. I was really mad when something happened up there when I didn't know about it.

A: Would you say a lot of people around you felt like you did, or did they support Hitler; your friends that you worked with at the Mercedes Benz Company?

S: Some said he was okay. Some said that he was not okay.

A: They just did not take an interest?

S: Yes.

A: When we got into the war did the Mercedes Benz Company start producing things for the war?

S: Yes, some. They had to produce something. I don't know what, but not bombs. I don't know what, maybe some cars or something.

A: Did the company really get going at that time? Did there seem to be a lot of workers and people employed?

S: Yes. We had some girls in the plant too because a lot of the men had to go to the war. We had a lot of girls. I was in the office and I never went out of the plant much.

A: Was the plant bombed during the war?

S: Yes. I can't remember if it was in 1943. Not all of it was bombed, just parts were bombed. I think it was in 1943. I was no longer at Mercedes Benz then.

A: The plant didn't close down for any period of time? Did they repair the bombing very quickly?

S: What do you mean?

A: Did they fix it after it was bombed?

S: Yes. They fixed it right away, what they could. For some things they had no material, but if they could fix it then it would be fixed. They worked some more.

A: Can you describe some of the bombing that took place in your city in general?

S: Yes. One day I can remember I came home after work and I was tired, you know? This night I couldn't hear the alarms, the sirens. I did not hear it in the night, but then I heard some bombs falling, and I got up and went into the cellar. Some fellow from my apartment house was there and he said, "Mrs. Neumayer, what are you doing in the house? I said, "I was sleeping, I didn't hear this." I was with him in the cellar. Our house was not bombed. After the sirens I went upstairs and nothing was happening so I went back to bed.

After maybe an hour or so it happened the second time. I heard them and I went to the bunker. Irene was out of the town, evacuated, because the kids were going to school and they had to be evacuated to some little town, to a farm or so. She was in the Black Forest at this time.

A: Can you tell me what you did to prepare for these bombing raids?

S: I just had my suitcase, my papers, and my birth certificate. I had my suitcase all the time. I had a lot of clothes in the cellar. In the suitcase I had real important things, like a little bit of underwear and clothes. The suitcase stayed packed all the time.

A: Did you keep this by the door?

S: I think I had it in my bedroom.

A: Can you tell me about the bombing in the city, was it pretty bad?

S: Yes it was. I can remember one time when my brother was home from vacation. He was in the war and he had vacation for a soldier. The last night he was here we all were together with him, all my sisters, and then came an alarm. It was really bad. I was with him and my sister-in-law and all our sisters, and they bombed his house where he was living. It was an apartment too. He had to go in the cellar and afterwards the house was bombed upstairs. It was burning really bad. When this was over we had to take some stuff from the second floor on down, and I can remember I had his radio. It was a big one. I had it under my arm. I don't know why. I had a couple of pillows under my arm when I was going down, I don't know why.

A: This was in the burning building itself?

S: Yes. When I went home to my apartment there were things all over the street burning. I was really scared this night. It was terrible.

A: Did they hit schools and churches and hospitals and things like that? Was everything hit?

S: Some, but not too much. They had something on top of the hospital. I really can't remember. Maybe some, a little bit, but not too much.

A: You said you went to the bunker. Can you describe that bunker to me, can you tell me what it was like?

- S: It was made of cement blocks and there were a lot of little rooms. First we had one room together when Irene was still there. We had a room with my mother-in-law, she was living with us. We had a room to ourselves, but later on they put more people in it because it was worse. You had bunk beds up there; two for the kids. Later on the kids had to go somewhere.
- A: Were there a lot of people? Were these bunkers large so that they could hold a lot of people?
- S: Yes. We had maybe six or seven stories. In this thing where we were living there were a lot of apartment houses. There were a lot of people and children.
- A: When you spent time in the bunker can you tell me what you did there? How did you pass the time?
- S: Sometimes when you had room you could lay down a little bit. We talked. We were always afraid maybe something would happen where you couldn't go out anymore.
- A: What was the longest time you spent in the bunkers?
- S: Sometimes at least two hours.
- A: You said your brother came home from the war and you helped evacuate his house.
- S: Yes. He was just in the kitchen at home.
- A: Did he talk about the war?
- S: Yes, he was saying how awful it was, but what could you do? He had to go back. He wouldn't like it, but he had to go because they would kill him. I don't know if they would have killed him or imprisoned him. One brother was killed in the war too, three days before my husband between the 28th of July in 1941 and my husband on July 31, 1941, three days.
- A: Did the kids come back after that, or did they come back after the war?
- S: They came back. You could keep them then, but before you had to evacuate the kids when it was so bad with the bombs. But after the war was over in 1945 I could pick up my daughter and she came home.
- A: Why was Stuttgart a target? Were there major military installations there, or did they just pick the city because it is a large city?

- S: I think because we had a large Mercedes Benz plant and we had some other factories like Porsche.
- A: Do you think the industries were hit more by the bombs or the people's homes?
- S: I think it would be half and half. I would say so. I'm not sure, but I would say so. The gas lines for the city were near Mercedes, but there were trees near it that hid it good. They just dropped the bombs randomly. We were always afraid. We said they were coming close. We were lucky. In one place the windows were broken and there was dirt in our apartment, it was not too bad. I was lucky!
- A: How did you prepare for the blackouts?
- S: Oh, they were bad.
- A: We are talking about the bombing, and it is interesting that mostly the richer homes were hit as opposed to the others.
- S: It was like this in Stuttgart. In Pforzheim it was all bombed. It was even. I did not live too far away from Pforzheim, and they built it up really nice again.
- A: Going back to the fires, were the fires quite widespread? Did they burn down whole blocks at a time?
- S: It took a long time because we had everything taken down from upstairs, everything. In the attic everybody had a little place to put something on, but you didn't need too much. In the war you had to take this all down.
- A: Let's go to the time period after the war. Can you describe what it was like after the war was over?
- S: Yes. We were happy the war was over, but we had nothing to eat. I mean during the war everything was under control. You got so many tickets to buy things. I was by myself. I had the whole month of tickets for two ounces of butter, or maybe three or four ounces of meat for the whole month. Bread, I had enough bread. This is the only thing I had enough of. Sometimes I could trade it to people who had a little bit more of maybe butter, or crisco, or so. Maybe some people got things from farmers. They might have a relative on a farm, and they would get a little bit more and then you would get some. I can remember from my sister, my oldest sister, I got a bottle of oil. This helped me a lot

when I got something like that.

A: How long did these conditions last?

S: Until 1948. When they devalued the Reichsmark then we had everything in the store after maybe a couple of weeks. It gave them a couple of weeks, but we had no money then, and had just 40 Marks from the government. I was at work and I got my salary. I could buy things.

A: Where did you go back to work at?

S: I was in an office in 1948. I was in an Export Taxing Corporation. I was like a cashier. I did some bookkeeping and stuff like this in the office.

A: When the occupation soldiers first came in how did the German people feel about this? How did they react to seeing the foreign soldiers in Germany?

S: Sometimes it was bad because we never saw a black person and it was the first time we had some black people in the city. I can remember the French in Stuttgart and after that the Americans came in. They didn't bother me. I did not go out often. Sometimes it was the girl's fault. Sometimes they went in shorts and the soldiers became interested and raped them.

A: Did you have any contact with any of the soldiers?

S: No.

A: What did you tell your daughter about the soldiers?

S: I didn't tell her too much because she knows how I feel. She was a good girl, really. She wasn't bad. She was home with me then and we were happy to be home. Later on, when she was a little bit bigger, she was good. I can't complain.

A: Did you at any time hide from the soldiers when they first came in?

S: No.

A: Is there anything else you could think of that you would like to mention from this time period that you think would be important to put on the tape?

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S: No. Things went slow. This is normal, it takes time.
After this it was normal. I was working every day and
I had no time.

END OF INTERVIEW