

Germany During World War II: A Child's Experience

By Trudy Hamilton



My name is Edeltraud Gerda Hamilton. My friends call me Trudy. I was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1936. I have a twin-sister whose name is Helga Ingeborg and she lives in Arlington, Texas. I also have a brother, Siegfried Erick who still lives in Stuttgart.

When I was three years old World War II broke out. I don't remember a lot of what was happening when I was three, but as I got older and the war escalated more and more, my father was called into military service. He had no choice but to go. He was in the Luftwaffe or German Air Force.

The war was going on all around Germany, but we saw very little of it where I lived, much as the war in Afghanistan, but we don't really suffer here in the United States. Of course, my dada was gone and we did live in fear every day. Life was hard for my mom without dad and she had three little kids to care for. My brother was eight years old, my sister and I were three and a half when our dad left.

During the war we had drills in school so we would know what to do in case of an attack. We each had our own gas mask that we carried with us all the time. If there was an attack we could leave the school to go home unless our mother came to get us.

Most of the air raids were conducted by the British at night, but there was one day during the day my mom came running to get us and take us to the bunker. Often some part of the city was under attack by bombers. We could feel it, hear

it and even smell it. It was very scary, but we always made it home.

During an attack we would go into the cellar under our apartment and sometimes stay for hours or even days at a time. Sometimes we didn't have time to take enough food in the shelter with us. The air raids went on for a couple of years.

When my brother was about 12 or 13 years old he was taken to serve in the "Hitler Youth" where all young boys had to go. They learned how to be soldiers and worked on farms since all the farmers had gone to war.

My sister and mom stayed in the city. We were about 7 or 8 years old. My mom worked delivering newspapers and my sister and I would have to help her every day before we went to school. Keep in mind that we went to school from 8am to 5pm everyday except Saturday and Sunday. Most men had gone to war and the women ran the businesses and households.

My dad was allowed to come home from the war once a year for two weeks on vacation. Those are the only times that I remember the most about my dad. Even though the war was going on and we had little to eat and no toys to play with or time to play with them, the days when dad was home were the best times. Our family was together. I remember so well that when the two weeks were over we all went to train station to send him back to the war. So many men would be there to be sent away and never knowing if they would ever return. My dad spent most of his time in Russia with the Luftwaffe.



Avro Lancaster, British bomber

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American Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses over Germany

Stuttgart is an industrial city and once the Americans came into the war we got bombed a lot more than before. The Americans only fought about nine months but by then the war was in full force. We had almost constant air raids. We would always know by the sound of the sirens, there were three different sounds, how much time we had to run to safety in our cellar.

Our cellar was two stories deep and our apartment was on the third floor. We girls had jobs to do when we went to the cellar. Bring our suitcase with clothes, our gas masks and I had to bring a big bottle of water. We could not forget anything because your life depended on it. Remember I was three and a half when the war started and about nine and a half when it was over. A very long six years!

Sometimes we could watch when parts of the city were being bombed too far away to hurt us. We could see the bombers and the bombs flying. Much like watching a thunderstorm. But when a bomb flew you could hear it making a whistling sound and then the fire and noise when it hit.

At night the bombers would shoot something out into the air that would make the sky light up like daylight. We called them Christmas trees. It helped the bombers see where they were bombing.

It was increasingly difficult to buy food. If you had lots of money you could get food on the black market but we didn't have any money so many times we were put to bed hungry.

In September 1944 we had a direct hit on our building. We were all in the cellar and our building was on fire. We had to get out. The part of the city we lived in was all aflame. As we crawled out of the rubble the rabbits in the backyard were on fire and we could not help

them since we were running for our lives. I will never forget their terrible sounds as they burned to death.

We ran and ran looking for a bunker to stay in but they were all full. By then space was so scarce that you had to have an entry card to get in a bunker and we did not have one. They were given out by politicians and it helped to know someone.

Eventually we found a bunker several blocs away from home and after running most of the night. We stayed there for several days. I believe the Red Cross came and served water and soup to all the people. They helped us stay alive.

I almost forgot to tell you that when we left our burning house of course we all had our gas masks on. It was so hot from all the burning buildings that the rubber on the mask got so hot that it was burning our face so we had to throw them away.



When it was safe to leave the bunker after a few days we left to go see what was left of our house. Of course, nothing was standing. The place was in rubble. As we were walking throughout the streets my mom commented that she never knew that people had so many statues because there were dark brown statues laying all over the place. Only when we recognized a neighbor lady holding her baby did we realize that the "statues" were actually burned people.

Since we lost our home and all that we had except the clothes on our backs my mom thought that our Dad would be sent home from

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the front, but that never happened. The fighting by then was so hard that no soldier could come home.

Life was hard for all of us but mostly for my mom. We found a damaged but livable place to stay and since it was unoccupied we just moved in. Food was now rationed and we had very little. Nothing was ever thrown away. To this day I still eat every bit of an apple except the stem.

In our spare time the people would go and volunteer to clean bricks so the city could rebuild but this didn't happen until the war was over in April 1945.

We never saw our dad again. Sadly he died on December 27, 1944, just about four months before the war ended. I was almost nine years old, my brother was 14 and my mom was 39. Life went on but it was very hard. I hope none of us will ever see war so close and personal as I have.

It was a struggle for all the people. Once the war was over and no longer any fighting we all had to start all over with nothing. We had the occupation and Americans took over our sector. We could not be outside after 10 pm and had to do whatever we were told by a GI. Some were nice but many were not.

Time heals all wounds and my sister ended up marrying a GI in Germany and I came to live in this great country in November 1956. I never saw her again. My mom died on her birthday in July 1961. She was 56.

My husband is American and we married in 1959 in California. We have been married for forty-three years and have two daughters and two granddaughters. And so we lived happily ever after.

Germany During WWII Timeline

- 9/01/39 WWII begins
 - 12/7/41 Pearl Harbor is attacked
 - 12/8/41 U.S. declares war on Germany
 - 6/6/44 D-Day
 - 5/07/45 Germany surrenders
 - 8/6/45 A-Bomb dropped on Hiroshima
 - 9/02/45 Japan surrenders; WWII ends
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