

My name is H el ene Kerger-Walisch, I was born in Watrange in 1929 and live in Tarchamps. We had a medium-sized farm and there were 6 children. When the war came, the girls were already working away from home.

**You were 12 years old when the war began. How did you experience that moment?**

The war began during our fair week. We wanted to wallpaper the living room for the fair Sunday. My father took everything off the walls and when he was finished, the soldiers marched past. That's when my father said: "The war is here, we are not putting up the wallpaper anymore." In the afternoon the planes came and in the evening, when we were milking, the soldiers, who were terribly tired, came with their cups and my father gave them milk free of charge. It went on like that day in, day out.

**How did you experience this as a child or a young girl?**

The customs officers were put in the house first. One of them came to see whether there were any beds. We had one too many. So they put one in with us, and we had to feed him as well. Later there were three of them, two of them were real Nazis, the other one was from Ersfeld, he was nice and helped us a lot.

**How did this affect your everyday life or school?**

We didn't learn French at school anymore, only German. I still have my report card where everything is written in German. Then they wanted us to join the Hitler Youth. But we didn't. We had to collect potato beetles. We never did that before. And we had sports lessons.

**What were the worst moments in the village or for you as a family?**

That was when my brother was drafted. That was very upsetting. He was in captivity for three years. After that he came home. The man who later became my husband, was also called up. I knew him from school. He was at the Russian front for 13 months. When he came back, he didn't want to talk about it. He only told me that he was so hungry that he took a piece of bread out of a dead soldier's hand in the bunker and ate it. That's how terrible it was.

**I assume that you and your family were constantly afraid for your brother?**

He was always writing. He spent three years in England in a prison camp. They didn't release him, although we tried everything. On day, all of a sudden, he came home.

**How did you experience the Battle of the Bulge? That was very close by.**

We were right in the middle of it.

**What exactly happened to you?**

We loaded everything onto the ox cart and drove to Wiltz to family members. We stayed there for six weeks. When we came back, our house looked terrible. It was very bad. We knew what to expect. My father had gone back on foot and when he returned he was crying and said he wouldn't go back anymore. He wanted to take the sewing machine when a soldier came, threatened him with a gun, threw the sewing machine on the floor and chased him out of the house. Out of his own house. So, he returned to Wiltz. Our neighbour was supposed to come too, she even had a ham with her. Then she changed her mind and stayed at home. She wanted to check on our cattle. When we got home, the cattle were lying dead in the barn. The animals

had been shot. It was dangerous. They were also in Wiltz with the tanks. They took everything from us there too. Our family had a chicken coop. They chased the chickens outside and shot them. They only made trouble. When it was all over, we came back to Watrange. Everything was destroyed. They had made straw beds in the bedrooms and relieved themselves on them. The house was a mess. So, we spent a few days cleaning up before we could stay in the house again. Those were no easy times.

**Were houses in your village completely destroyed?**

Yes.

**How did it happen? Because of the bombs?**

Yes, and they were burnt. The house of the man who later became my husband was completely burnt down. They were given a shack until they had a new house.

**Was it also different because you lived so close to the border?**

I think so. They worked their way into Belgium. The customs officers were placed at the border and were not allowed to let any Belgians into Luxembourg. The customs officer who lived with us asked my mother for a sandwich to take to his post. He told me later that he had given the sandwiches to the Belgians. They were sitting there in a guardhouse.

**At some point, Luxembourg was finally liberated and the war was over. How did you experience that?**

That was a moment of joy. We had thought that was no longer possible.

**Do you have a special memory of it?**

First the collaborators were arrested. People wanted to hang them at Harlange. It was their own fault. They were vicious. When we had to darken the houses in the evening, they went through the village to check whether there was still some light.

**How did life go on after that?**

I stayed at home for a short time and then went to Belgium in service with a family. There I also learned French.

**Did you get to meet some of the American soldiers? How did you perceive them?**

I can't say if they were much better than the others.

**Why?**

Because they were soldiers. They had set up their field kitchen where everyone could get food. Also in Wiltz. Once they came with a big tank to our family's yard. They had a beautiful accordion with them. One of them asked me if I wanted it. I answered in the affirmative, but I would have had to climb up to them. I didn't want to. So he threw the accordion on the ground and it broke into pieces. They had stolen it from somewhere. It was a bad time. Especially when the men were drafted. And they took what they needed. We got a letter that we had to take our horse to the train. That's when they took all the horses. They didn't ask whether you still needed it yourself or not.

**So the young men who were drafted were not much older than you? And you knew them?**

Yes.

**Were there also some from the village who did not come back?**

Not from Watrange. From Harlange, yes. I knew many of them too. I still have an in memoriam card where they can all be seen next to each other. Many did not come back.