

Johannes Hassebroek - a storybook career in the Third Reich?



The sender is prisoner Joh. Hassebroek, No. 359.901, in the Wellesley Barracks in Braunschweig [B.A.O.R. = British Army of the Rhine]. This is postage paid internee mail [postal traffic in the trial] of a war criminal from the detention center Braunschweig (WCHC No. 2) dated 27.7.1948 to Dr. Wolfgang Graener in Hamburg 13, Harvestehuder Weg 40 [lawyer].

In Wikipedia we can read as follows: Born in Halle an der Saale in 1910, Johannes Hassebroek grows up in orderly family circumstances. In 1926 his school education ends with a middle school leaving certificate, he starts a commercial apprenticeship, which he completes and is taken on as a commercial employee. In 1931 he is dismissed, he is unemployed for three years and in 1934 he can start a career at the tax office in Merseburg. He is raised nationally minded and anti-communist and joins the Bismarckbund; it is a youth organization in the vapor circle of the Stahlhelm. In 1926 he joins the NSDAP and the SA - a step he probably takes because of his dislike of the Weimar Republic and his temporary unemployment. In 1934, an acquaintance refers him to the SD and the SS, where he is able to take a basic military course with the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler. He graduates in 1936 as an SS leader. In 1937, he becomes adjutant to the commander of the SS-Totenkopfverband Ostfriesland in the Esterwegen concentration camp. After its dissolution, he is transferred to Oranienburg near the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in another unit of the SS-Totenkopfverbände. After the outbreak of World War II, he fights on all fronts: Invasion of Poland, Western campaign, Unternehmen Barbarossa; from 1942 he is deployed as a company commander on the Eastern Front. Here he is wounded, is no longer fit for war and is assigned as camp commander in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Under his command, conditions for German prisoners improve; for Polish, Russian and Jewish prisoners, their situation worsens. In 1944 Hassebroek is SS-Sturmbannführer; in February 1945 he escapes with his command staff to the subcamp Reichenau in the Sudetenland. In August 1945 he is arrested, and three years later a trial against him begins in Hamburg before a British military court. Accusation: he had murdered British officers in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. In October 1948 he is sentenced to death. The death sentence is not carried out; in 1954 he is released from prison; he moves with his family to Braunschweig. In 1967 he has to stand trial again for the murder of twelve prisoners in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp at the Braunschweig Regional Court. The court finds him guilty of manslaughter; because of the statute of limitations, Hassebroek is acquitted in 1970. The Federal Court of Justice confirms the verdict.

During the post-World War II era, numerous verdicts are handed down in a similar manner. The West has recognized an old ally as a new enemy: the Soviet Union. In August 1949, Stalin also has nuclear weapons, the Cold War begins - perhaps the old warhorses are needed in a new confrontation... [cf. General Patton in Applied Thematics].

Further reading: Wikipedia [Hassebroek was already interned in Braunschweig at the end of July].