

Josef Neckermann on the first department store that was “Aryanized” for him:

"But trade margins are trade margins; I'll manage. Just think of the possibilities in such a department store. If you order enough root brushes, lingerie, and razors, you must get conditions one could only dream of."

"Now, forget the root brushes. They are taking the business away from the Jews. Well, that can hardly be prevented. But it must be clear to you that, through such a takeover, you identify with the Party to a certain degree."

"Everything was discussed and negotiated in good faith, and Ruschkewitz was very pleased that I was acting as the buyer." I didn't want to listen to clever advice. My son should one day be proud of his capable father. I played my big argumentative trump card: *"If I don't do it, someone else will."*

I vaguely saw problems elsewhere: in the generally prevailing animosity toward the department store format.

It was a moving moment when the elderly Siegmund Ruschkewitz signed his name on the contract and then stood up from his chair. "This step is not easy for me, but I know my business is in good hands with you." He walked around his desk and showed me his chair. "From now on, this is your place. I hand everything over to you as it stands and wish for you to take over this office as is and run and develop my company from this desk as I would have."

He wiped his eyes, and I, too, was moved to tears.

But if he didn't leave this country quickly, I knew, he would perish.

Siegmund Ruschkewitz first moved to Berlin and then emigrated. On the sea journey to Palestine, he succumbed to a typhus-like fever on October 17, 1940. His wife followed him in death on November 7 of the same year. Both are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Heraklion (Crete). Their son Ernst settled with his wife and children in the Netherlands. On October 23, 1942, they were deported eastward. There was never any sign of life from Ernst again.

Josef Neckermann on his temporary arrest:

I cried like a dog, but I survived.

The morning after my return from Berlin, the Gestapo suddenly appeared in my office. *"Come with us."* A ten-hour interrogation.

Bright lights. Changing interrogation strategies. Like in a movie.

Sometimes harsh, sometimes soft. I don't remember the details, only that two men read a document at lightning speed and tried to force my signature. Secretary of State lied – Minister of Economics lied – Retail Association fooled – family on the side of anti-state clerics.

Ten hours can be very long.

The pen they handed me felt heavy in my hand.

Warm to the touch. Seductive. Coercive.

Give up on the Ruschkewitz purchase? Never. I refused, stubborn, obstinate. I didn't sign.

"You can go now." I never learned why I was suddenly released. Outside, it was dusk. On the way home, I stopped at St. Mary's Church. Exhausted. Suddenly I heard footsteps and felt someone beside me. A hand on my shoulder. A familiar voice. My wife.

She had been waiting for hours in front of the Gestapo building, pacing anxiously, until she finally saw me walking along the street. It's good to have a wife.

I trembled with anger and emotion. We went into the empty church.

I cried like a dog. I had survived.

Neckermann on his first expansion plans:

During these discussions, my desire to go after Witts and Quelles for their linens grew stronger. Carpets and curtains, wool, bed linen – surely it could be done...

Mr. Klingen, my advertising specialist, designed stylish flyers for me; I hired a few teenagers with bicycles who enjoyed earning a few extra pennies, and they distributed the flyers with corresponding order coupons in the surrounding area. I spoke with transporters and farmers who returned empty from the market and were willing, for a fee, to carry my goods to the villages.

That worked quite well. But I knew: this way, you will never run a proper mail-order business. You had to buy one.

It remains to be said that in May I received a letter informing me that I had been deemed "worthy" to join the NSDAP. Thus I became a member with the number 4,516,510.

On June 29, 1937, Evi, our daughter Eva-Maria, was born. That night, there was the first air-raid drill with blackout measures.

Neckermann on his first contacts with Carl-Amson Joel:

I asked my father-in-law to inquire if perhaps a mail-order business was for sale. I was willing to spend around three million. Brückner had nothing else to do and continued to take care of Josef Neckermann's business progress. Not entirely selflessly, but still. So he came into contact with the banks Hardy & Co. and Reichskredit.

One day, Brückner called to tell me that Karl Amson Joel wanted to sell his laundry manufactory and mail-order business. I was thrilled. Annual sales about four million. This was in early summer 1938.

During the negotiations, I met Joel himself only once, when we signed the main contract. Only after the war did we meet again: first in the Munich Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, then repeatedly in court until 1959 during restitution trials he initiated against me.

Joel had not had a legal passport since May 1938. One day, he went to Switzerland with his wife. He had informed neither his mother nor anyone else that he and his family would not return to Germany. During the following weeks of negotiations, he was considered "away" to prevent closure or forced Aryanization of his businesses. In court, he later stated: *"I felt threatened and increasingly insecure under the regime."* Besides the general pressure he faced, he also suffered a severe personal loss: his long-time legal advisor, Dr. Loeb, left him "in the middle of the Aryanization," as Joel complained; he had emigrated, also to Switzerland. Joel felt abandoned from all sides. On July 11, 1938, we signed the main contract in his office.

On that occasion, he introduced me to his key employees, all of whom I took over. The business appeared imposing and impressive. Despite all my risk-taking, I felt a

moment of fear regarding my own courage. Had I taken on too much? Would I succeed in realizing my bold plans? After all, the times were far from rosy.

Neckermann on the purchase price negotiations:

Of the agreed purchase price of 2.3 million Reichsmarks at the time, from which Joel's liabilities and supplier obligations were deducted, I retained, as agreed, another 500,000 Reichsmarks as security for any remaining claims against Joel's company and correctly recorded this amount in all balance sheets until 1945. The remainder of the purchase price, 1.14 million Reichsmarks, was paid into a trust account at the bank Hardy & Co., Berlin.

It turned out that Joel saw little or none of this money. Only in a protracted postwar court proceeding was I able to prove that I had indeed transferred the purchase sum. As I later learned, Tillmann had to report to Switzerland on September 6, 1938, that all of Joel's assets had been confiscated.

Note by Matthias: It is correct that Neckermann transferred the amount to a trust account at Hardy Bank, but only he had access to this account.

Neckermann on moving into the Joels' villa:

Through Fritz Tillmann, we rented the former Joels' villa on Charlottenburger Tannenbergallee; right behind us was the forest, beautifully situated. Annemi brought the furniture she was most attached to, for example, her Blüthner grand piano. Everything else was purchased from Dürselen in Berlin.

Annemi had agreed with Mrs. Joel to take in three carpets, six chairs, and four paintings – including one by Franz von Lenbach – for safekeeping, to avoid risking their confiscation; we bought a complete children's room from the Joels. When my family arrived, the craftsmen had just finished renovating.

Neckermann on the “good times” during the Nazi regime:

I was doing well.

Business was going to my satisfaction; I was responsible for several hundred employees, had two small healthy children, lived in a beautiful house, and my wife did not complain. She was content with the little time I could spare for the family. Yes, I was happy at that time. I loved the city I lived in, enjoyed the bustle of the metropolis around me, even if I hardly had the chance to go to the cinema, bars, or dance halls. But the opportunities were there, within reach, and that was enough.

When I say, "I was happy at that time," it seems questionable to me today. Naive or cynical, measured by today's standards. Needs explanation. Didn't you know what you were doing? Where were your eyes, your ears?

Since the end of the war, I have often been asked these questions, perhaps more often than other “fellow travelers,” not only in the restitution proceedings brought against me. For my son Peter, everything was clear for many years: he had no understanding of the weaknesses, misdirections, or even crimes of the people who experienced National Socialism as adults.

That is true. My generation has nothing satisfactory to offer to the probing questions of descendants. Only someone who lived through it can understand, as we most often reply. The weakest, yet perhaps the most honest answer.

I witnessed the Reichstag fire, the Röhm Putsch, adventurous foreign policy interventions even before the war. Of course. I also witnessed the so-called Reich Kristallnacht (November pogroms 1938).

On November 10, 1938, traveling with my father-in-law along Leipziger Straße, I saw a piano being thrown from the first floor of a Jewish musical instrument store.

Do you really think I didn't know what determination it took to throw a piano out of a first-floor window? The myth of "spontaneous public demonstrations" was no more credible than the stork story. I also heard the sound of a shop window giving way to the pressure of a trash bin. Naturally, I was shocked, horrified – all the values destroyed for no reason... But the next day, other things became more pressing. Perhaps there was trouble with suppliers, a key employee got the flu at the worst

possible time... We were not living in a history book; everything meticulously sorted and analyzed – that was everyday life.

Occasionally I felt uneasy, certainly. I sensed not everything was right, but I had no desire to get into trouble. Politically, I was no active opponent. I was not cut out to be a martyr.

My wife was different. In contrast to me, she had a consistency that commanded respect, even if I occasionally thought it excessive. For example, throughout the entire Third Reich, Annemi never once greeted with "Heil Hitler." One must say, as a non-working woman, she was often protected from pressures I had long grown used to. Formally, Annemarie later joined the NS-Frauenschaft, but she repeatedly managed to "buy herself out" of activities through smaller or larger payments. Later, when Peter reached the appropriate age, I believe she would have done everything to prevent him from joining the Hitler Youth. I saw all this less strictly.

What Neckermann did to avoid being drafted into the army:

And what if England and France actually declared war on us?

How could it turn out? Suddenly I saw myself dying at the front. I was not a coward, but definitely a shirker.

I did not want to die. – Who would want that? My God, I was twenty-seven... I had no desire to die. Suddenly a sequence of three notes came to mind. *Peer Gynt*. Easy to whistle: the whistle, our whistle, the signal between Annemi and me. I had never attended one of her classical concerts she loved so much. And now, with a rifle in hand, going toward the enemy and maybe getting shot like a rabbit? No. I got up and got a glass of water.

A few days later, it must have been after England and France declared war on Germany, I called my brother Walter. How many peers had already received their draft orders? During this conversation, an imprudent remark slipped out, which Walti held against me for years: "*Some must still remain to pull the cart out of the mud afterward.*"

Not overly tactful, this phrase, but it accurately described my state of mind at the time. Although: not completely. For with the same bitter determination with which I

was ready to avoid a "heroic death," I also wanted to do my duty. If necessary, even on the front lines. But please not at the front.

Under all circumstances, I had to be classified as indispensable. What a delicious, weighty word.

At the local military command, I applied for and obtained exemption for myself and my key employees. Reason: we were to contribute to the textile supply of the civilian population. A curious parallel: my father had also been classified as indispensable during urgent supply tasks – in World War I.

Rumors about a possible closure of the mail-order houses would not, and would not, die down.

Neckermann on his business during the war:

All profits went exclusively to the Reich Office for Clothing and Related Areas. I wanted to survive economically, but not suddenly become a war profiteer. This attitude was often criticized at the time.

People suspected defeatism behind it or worse cunning. But on this point, I remained firm.

This did not change when, in August 1943, to reduce personal risk, the ZLG was converted from a civil-law partnership into a GmbH with partners Georg Karg and Josef Neckermann. Until the end of the war, I remained honorary sole managing director. Chairman of the supervisory board became the textile industrialist Herbert Tengemann, president of the Retail Economic Group. In September 1944, Karg transferred his company shares in the ZLG to himself personally.

Neckermann on Eastern European forced laborers:

Does the Russian foreign worker need sanitary pads?

When Miss Marie Pfeuffer, an employee of the Josef Neckermann department store, suddenly rushed into my office during my Würzburg period to give a passionate lecture on the properties and advantages of intimate textiles ("*You simply must know this*"), I was embarrassed.

I never would have thought that I would personally have to seriously argue about

such matters.

It was unavoidable, since in March 1942 the office of "*General Representative for Labor Deployment*" was established and occupied by the Gauleiter of Thuringia, Fritz Sauckel. Sauckel was responsible for recruiting foreign workers – by September 1944 there were seven and a half million – who only partly worked voluntarily and often under miserable conditions for the German armaments industry, mining, and agriculture. Most of them came from Eastern Europe.

I once witnessed a transport of Eastern workers arriving at Stettin station, destined for Berlin armaments factories. They were driven out of cattle cars, forced to undress, and their clothing and rags were burned after the arduous journey.

The people were deloused and disinfected. I never forgot this sight.

Regarding female hygiene needs, Sauckel believed that newspaper would suffice for Eastern European women. As an ardent supporter of the "master race theory," he was little inclined to provide these people with proper clothing – even though this was portrayed differently in the Nuremberg Main War Crimes Trial.

Above all, Sauckel believed that the issue of clothing foreign and forced laborers was a matter that concerned only him and perhaps the Führer. The relevant offices of the Reich Ministry of Economics, especially the Reich Offices for Textiles and Clothing, had different views in all three matters, myself included.

I exerted all my efforts to ensure that Eastern workers were supplied on par with other labor forces, even though soon we no longer knew where the goods would come from. After extremely tough negotiations, we prevailed in the essential points. Workers, mainly employed in armaments production, did not have to pull sacks over their heads, as Göring cynically suggested before the war. The ZLG was tasked with designing special practical and functional "*Eastern worker clothing.*" For women, for example: dress, lined jacket, skirt, blouse, shirt, headscarf, overpants, plus socks and gaiters or stockings.

Following the primacy of war-critical production, in December 1942, the Minister of Economics felt compelled to issue a decree making the respective leaders of companies employing these workers personally responsible that "*only the essential needs to maintain work capacity of Eastern workers are requested, with the strictest criteria applied.*"

Much abuse was done under this regulation. I cannot explain otherwise why countless foreign workers were not clothed as intended by us.

Neckermann on his meeting with Adolf Hitler

Early in the morning of April 19, 1942, a Ju 52 flew us to Rastenburg, East Prussia. Besides the crew, only Albert Speer, Dr. Josef Otten, Gerhard Rösch, Dr. Hans Kehrl, some staff members, and I were on board.

Speer objected to my formal suit. "Actually far too elegant for a visit to the Führer's headquarters. At least take off your armband." That wasn't possible; it was firmly forged by the jeweler. Annemi (his wife) had given it to me before our wedding. A talisman. I am superstitious. "And your party badge?" I didn't even know where it was. Speer asked a crew member to lend me his.

At Rastenburg airport we were picked up and taken to the Wolf's Lair. Four checkpoints had to be passed. Behind every tree, it seemed to me, stood an armed SS man.

Speer had arranged a meeting with Colonel General Jodl, an avid skier familiar with winter gear. He put on one of the sample uniforms and inspected the fabric carefully. He praised its versatility and, above all, the reversible use. "Fromm will be thrilled, I'll make sure of it," he promised. And indeed, he was. The Chief of the Home Army praised our development after trying it and performing free exercises unimpeded; he was by no means slender.

For the presentation on April 20, eight members of the Leibstandarte were assigned to us. After the dress rehearsal the day before, I spoke with Hitler's personal physician, Dr. Karl Brandt, who was later sentenced to death and executed in the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial for human experiments on concentration camp prisoners. He struck me as a cultured man, very kind, and extremely sympathetic. He was particularly interested in the precautions we had taken against possible infections from gunshot wounds.

I asked him where I could review my documents the next morning before the demonstration. "Take any of the offices that are free," he advised. Dr. Brandt then led me to the secret map room, where all theaters of war were detailed. Each German division was marked with a line. Over many—far too many—was a cross.

These divisions were wiped out. Finished. "If we had had the winter uniform last year, much would have been spared us." With breathtaking openness, he continued: "We have lost more than a million soldiers on the Eastern Front, tens of thousands to frostbite." The war was no longer winnable. Don't show any reaction, I thought; give no sign of agreement.

I did not sleep well that night.

The presentation to Adolf Hitler was scheduled for late morning. Already at dawn we were driven by jeep into the inner circle of the Führer's headquarters. Following Dr. Brandt's recommendation, I found a free office, sat at the desk, and began reviewing my notes. Suddenly the door opened. I was startled.

"What are you doing in my office!" It was Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer of the SS, whom I had only seen in photos until now. I apologized, explained that I had accidentally occupied his room, and introduced myself. He had a look at my notes; I explained the special features of the winter uniform and hinted at my doubts regarding the Wehrmacht's conduct. Somehow, I found Himmler, with his glasses and demeanor, seemed more like a teacher. Had anyone told me at that moment of the crimes he committed, I would not have believed it. "Be assured, this will impress." It seemed to me that he nearly patted me on the shoulder encouragingly.

An honor formation of the Leibstandarte had lined up. The grounds were swarming with officers. I saw Hitler approaching with the general staff, spotting General Keitel, Grand Admiral Raeder, Colonel General Fromm, Colonel General Jodl, Himmler, Sepp Dietrich, Speer, and delegations from the three branches of the army. Among the congratulators were several industrialists, as the "Tiger Tank" was also being presented that day.

While Hitler received birthday congratulations, Dr. Otten, Rösch, and I stood slightly apart with our eight uniformed attendants, waiting. Hitler approached with his entourage, traces of makeup on his face. Speer introduced us. The eight SS men saluted.

As I demonstrated the advantages of the cord and toggle fastenings with large gestures, the one thing I wasn't prepared for happened: my armband, which I had pushed almost to the elbow, slipped down. I held my breath. But nothing happened.

The presentation went smoothly. Hitler listened attentively, and Himmler used the information I provided to ask clever questions and interject, which was very helpful. The military held back. Hitler moved on, some officers consulted in depth, seemingly impressed. Our winter gear had convinced them. Now we only had to perform the miracle of producing and delivering three million uniforms by August 1942.

At the evening dinner, table conversations were drowned in Hitler's endless monologues; I had heard about this and was prepared. Before the service reached me, Hitler had already eaten, and everything was cleared. I was astonished at the openness in this circle in stating that the war could only be won by a miracle that no one believed in.

The next morning we flew back to Berlin. To my surprise, shortly thereafter, I was awarded the War Merit Cross First Class in recognition of my contributions to winter clothing. From that day on, by Führer decree, I was exempted from military service.

Neckermann on the production of his winter uniforms

I had a story to tell; no one found the leisure to listen. Where did all this material come from? I do not know the details. In the Netherlands, for example, the Defense Inspection in The Hague, together with the Rijks Textiel Bureau, commissioned three firms authorized to buy used clothing from rag dealers to prevent black market activity. These were legally registered Dutch companies under German ownership. The recipient of the goods was the ZLG, which paid the prices set by the Reich Ministry of Economics—in guilders.

A former director of one of these three companies declared under oath in 1947: "The question of whether the exported clothing could have been stolen or taken from Jews, I can only answer insofar as I know how I personally acted... It has always remained a mystery to me where the clothing taken from Jews ended up, and I suspect it was moved illegally by the SS or associated authorities to Germany, since the wagons dispatched by these agencies were not monitored."

I have nothing to add to these statements. While I was aware that fulfilling our obligations required asking the civilian population to make sacrifices, I strictly and categorically refused to process clothing taken from Jews for our purposes.

I recall once at the Reichs clothing office, rings, brooches, and necklaces of questionable origin appeared. I sharply confronted the relevant employees: “Where did this jewelry come from?” It apparently came from a used clothing collection. “Sewn into the hems...” I intervened decisively, having these employees removed from office.

To fulfill our task, we produced everywhere there were free capacities—and also created capacities. In Bialystok, for instance, we set up a laundry and clothing factory with Helmut Horten and Dr. Wilhelm Schaeffler, where we had high expectations. Almost all workers were Polish women. Once I visited to discuss the operation, three people had been hanged—for poor work, sabotage, or “complaining.” I immediately went to Gauleiter Koch in Königsberg and made the East Prussian government aware of my contribution, including the sewing machines I had provided.

We also produced in Łódź, formerly the center of the Eastern European textile industry, renamed “Litzmannstadt” in 1940. I had sewing machines installed in the ghetto and was proud and convinced that I was doing something good—naive as that may sound. We gave Jews work, helping them survive. The conditions in the ghetto were terrible.

One experience deeply affected me and I will never forget it: a visit to the ghetto hospital. A group of men, led by the head of the German ghetto administration, Hans Biebow (originally a coffee merchant), and Chaim Rumkowski, the “Elder of the Jews.” We barged into the delivery room, simply in our street clothes. The desperate looks of the women. I blamed both Biebow and Rumkowski for this heartlessness, Rumkowski perhaps even more. I could not understand how he could allow it... as a Jew...

Biebow was sentenced to death and executed by the Poles on June 23, 1947. Rumkowski had already boarded the train to Auschwitz on August 28, 1944.

Back to the winter uniform. The problems, as always, lay in the details. Even though Germany was a dictatorship, economic measures—strange as it may sound today—could only be enforced against considerable resistance and self-interest of industrial groups. This was no different here, even though literally hundreds of thousands of lives were at stake.

The Wehrmacht production facilities were fully occupied with standard equipment and unavailable to us. I argued—and succeeded—that all clothing factories capable of producing winter uniforms should switch immediately. I was aware that this involved significant sacrifices by the industry, as such conversions were costly, especially temporary ones. My own factories were promptly converted accordingly.

Organizing winter uniform production involved immense demands—any failure would have cost me my head. Improvisation as well as precise planning were required to ensure the right amount of yarn, fabric, cords, etc., were available at the right place and time—all under enormous time pressure. Delivery and transport difficulties were daily. I remained in constant contact with Dr. Otten, Rösch, and the production companies. Any bottleneck required immediate action. Every minute counted. Four short months for three million uniforms.

Somehow, we managed. By fall 1942, two and a half million winter uniforms were completed. In December 1986, 44 years later, I spoke about this on a TV show with Joachim Fuchsberger and received numerous letters from former soldiers, which I gladly quote excerpts from.

Neckermann on the war in Germany

Not all bombs are the same. I even experienced an attack from which, despite all the destruction, I could find some positive aspects. It hit the Reichs clothing office and related departments on Budapester Straße.

Among my tasks there was preparing reports for the prosecutor on so-called war economy crimes, punishable by draconian sentences. What was it about? The more hopeless the war became, the more the black market flourished. Goods were what mattered; money could buy almost nothing. Naturally, many entrepreneurs hoarded their products and raw materials for barter transactions. Clothes or fabrics, for example, were exchanged for other scarce items unobtainable through official channels. Although factories had to report their current stocks, these often did not reflect reality. Manufacturers tried to conceal their true inventories to divert some for “extraordinary” use. Some may have even thought about the inevitable end of the war, a fresh start...

The files piled up on my desk. I could barely keep up, although I must admit I studied the documents very thoroughly. I took my time because I could understand the behavior of most accused quite well. Often, I contacted the entrepreneurs directly to find credible explanations that would satisfy the prosecutor.

When the bomb hit the Reichs office, the files included documents regarding Geheimrat Josef Witt, Witt-Weiden. They were on top. The flames spread slowly, giving me enough time to gather my most important documents and take them with me.

And the economic crimes? I could hardly rely on the fire to do its job. So I grabbed the whole stack and, with the help of my secretary, Miss Günther, threw it into the stairwell, where the fire was already burning. “A victim of the flames...” Later inquiries I could answer without blushing: “You know, the recent terror bombing...”

It became tight in Germany. From all sides, the Allies advanced—steadily, with no day passing without alarms and destruction. As the Reich Ministry of Economics building was affected, it was decided to evacuate the entire agency. The northern branch moved to Hamburg, the southern to Bad Wiessee. In March 1945, my Reichs clothing office was to be relocated to Meiningen, Thuringia. I objected and suggested Coburg in Franconia instead, because I had confidential information from a reliable source that Thuringia would likely fall to the Soviets if surrendered. Unfortunately, I did not prevail.

Neckermann on his diamond purchase at the end of the war

“And what about the diamonds?”

Following a meeting with Reich Minister Dr. Funk, Dr. Hayler, and Otto Ohlendorf regarding the takeover of the ZLG by the Ministry of Economics or the Reichs clothing office, I wanted clarity on this issue too. The stones were becoming a nuisance. Whoever was responsible for them in the future—the Reich Ministry of Economics—would have to take responsibility.

Since plans to use the diamonds with the Italians fell through, it was recommended to return them to the Reichsbank for reimbursement of the purchase price. The gentlemen disagreed. “Keep them. You will surely need them for the new beginning.

Not everything can be over..." While I appreciated their stance, their answer did not satisfy me.

Finally, we agreed to entrust about a quarter of the treasure to Ministerial Director Dr. Franz Kirchfeld, head of the Foreign Trade department at the Reich Ministry of Economics. During an official trip, he was to hand the diamonds to the President of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, Joachim de la Camp.

By then, diamonds had become significantly "harder" as currency, so we considered a sale price of 766 Reichsmarks justified. On April 15, 1945, stones totaling 3,036.29 carats went into de la Camp's possession. The next day, he had the amount of 2,325,798.14 Reichsmarks transferred to the ZLG's Berlin account at Deutsche Bank through his company Bankhaus Marwitz, Delacamp & Co., Hamburg. Responsibility for the remaining diamonds—more than 9,000 carats—remained with me.

Neckermann on his experience at the end of the war

On the evening of May 8, we were sitting in the living room—my wife, my parents-in-law, my sister-in-law Lilo, and I—when the news of the surrender came over the radio. The children were already in bed.

So it was over. In Europe, World War II had ended. None of us found words. We knew what we had left behind. What lay ahead, we did not. I felt a strange mix of relief, depression, and boundless emptiness. The constant fear of death was over. Germany was destroyed.

But what would come next? I had nightmarish visions of a great bloodbath—bitter crowds taking revenge for twelve lost years, for dead relatives. It took a while to realize the most important thing: we had survived.

We hardly had anything to eat—but a million-mark treasure in the garden. Some neighboring plots had already been seized; the Americans were preparing a makeshift POW camp on the lawn beside the house "Hungaria." The hiding place no longer seemed secure. I decided to rebury the diamonds in a night-and-fog operation. Ilie Popescu, who had also made it to Rottach, helped me.

It must have been a funny sight, seeing the two of us with shovels and picks on a treasure hunt. It was not as easy as we had imagined. Although we had marked the location and I swore I would find it at once, we only succeeded after many failed attempts.

And where now? Into the well. I placed all original documents concerning the diamonds along with the stones into the steel cassettes, wrapped everything in waterproof parchment, tied the packages carefully, and sank them thirteen meters deep. Years later, when the diamond story captured journalists' imagination, it was repeatedly said that I had hidden them in the reeds of Lake Tegernsee. I never denied this.

On May 25, 1945, two jeeps arrived at the house "Hungaria." Shortly after, there was a ring at the door. Two American officers introduced themselves as Colonels Wilson and Griffon; soldiers with submachine guns casually on their knees waited in the jeeps. I invited the colonels into the living room, where they first requested my revolver. I had no idea what they wanted. The interrogation began politely and lasted for hours. Wilson and Griffon seemed well-informed about my work for the southern branch of the Reich Ministry of Economics and the Reichs clothing office. They questioned me thoroughly about myself, my business, and remaining ZLG stocks.

Neckermann on his postwar detention

"What did you get up to?" I had never seen the man asking. I met him for the first time here: sitting on the bare floor of a cell far too small for the thirty prisoners inside. Munich Police Headquarters, Ettstraße, September 1945.

"Nothing." I had no desire to talk to the stranger.

"Yes, everyone says that," he said slyly. "You were in the Party, right?"

"Yes."

"Old fighter? Although... you look too young for that."

"No."

They had arrested me under Military Government Law No. 52:

“...Seizure of property subject to control, supervision, or other oversight, or otherwise illegally taken or expropriated, without regard to whether such acts were carried out under legal pretense or in any other way...”

I was accused of a prohibited business activity in my companies.

The old man pressed on. “And why did they take you?”

“I don’t know.”

On September 10, the ZLG in Goßmannsdorf was placed under asset control, and nine days later my formally existing laundry and clothing factory, Josef Neckermann, Berlin, branch Goßmannsdorf. I had not been aware. My Würzburg operations were unaffected. For all contingencies, I had my employee Franz appointed managing director. I really did not know what they accused me of.

“So much is clear,” the man continued, “I won’t get out alive. I’m sure they’ll make short work of me. But here’s advice: never, ever admit anything. Deny everything. Even if the corpse is at your feet and they come while you have the knife in your hand: it wasn’t you. Don’t imagine they’ll treat you gently if you crawl and confess.” He seemed to expect no answer.

Around four in the morning, U.S. military police entered our cell. They handcuffed several inmates, including the man I spoke with, and led them away. I never saw him again, but his words still echo in me.

The next day, I was transported to the former Dachau concentration camp and interrogated. The Americans spoke better German than English. Two days later, I returned to Ettstraße. Then I was free again—with the strict condition not to engage professionally in any way.

This also ended my employment with the Bavarian Ministry of Economics. Dr. Lange received my notice that I could no longer serve him with regret, shrugging: he could not override military government orders.

On October 29, I wrote to the mayor of Würzburg requesting permission to reopen a sales outlet in my former discount store, Merkur. Due to the dire supply situation, even some city officials urged reopening. Forty-eight hours later, on October 31, military police rang the doorbell of our Lochham apartment.

Neckermann wants to start a new company with Joel

At large, but previously convicted.

After months of enforced pause, I had only one wish left: to work, to get things done, to build. And if the year 1947 does not belong to the very best in my memory, it was primarily because nothing I undertook worked out properly. But I do not want to be immodest: in that year, many, many people were much, much worse off. Those who did not suffer from hunger and even had, like us, a small home, could consider themselves lucky. And I was so happy to finally be with my wife and children again.

Under the American military regulations, I was under a strict professional ban, and so I was assigned to work in road construction. However, my frail condition was far from enough for breaking stones. The result of the official medical performance test: “one hundred percent incapacity for work.”

Through foraging trips with a backpack on my back, I tried to supplement our meager food rations, but in many moments, at 35 years old, I felt like an old man: sick, miserable, useless. It was terrible.

I did have plans. But one after the other was thwarted, including the idea of emigrating to South America. Equally doomed to failure was the project I had hatched with Hugo Wilkens, the textile industrialist: together with Gustav Schickedanz (“Quelle”), who had the appropriate premises, and Karl Amson Joel, the former owner of my Berlin company who now lived in New York, to establish a care package shipping service.

At that time, the western foreign countries, especially the United States, were sending care packages to Germany (for example via CARE)—a wonderful gesture of reconciliation, for which we Germans could not be grateful enough. We had considered that the joy the packages brought to the recipients could perhaps be even greater. After all, each person was missing certain things that the donor abroad could not know about. So we imagined it might be possible to bring the care packages not as finished goods, but as raw materials to Germany. The donor would buy a voucher at a certain place, we imagined, the mail-order company would process the raw materials in Germany and publish a catalog with the goods that the recipient could select according to their wishes up to the value of the voucher. At the same time, this would contribute to the reconstruction of the German economy. But as I said, nothing came of it.

With Wilkens, who had been involved since the end of the war in literally rebuilding

his textile factory from the ruins, I also discussed how I could, together with Joel, get the Berlin operation back on track. A little urgency was needed. It would have been advantageous to use the time before the impending currency reform. In the correspondence Joel conducted with Wilkens, he repeatedly mentioned that he harbored no feelings of revenge against me; however, he did not respond to the concrete proposals we made. Even if nothing tangible initially came of it, the discussions with Wilkens, who, like Dr. Helmut Winkler, Dr. Ernst Posse, and many others, had stood by me and my wife during my imprisonment, gave me the strength I desperately needed and courage.

If I learned one thing in those difficult years 1946/47, it was this: to distinguish between true and false friends.

It hurt terribly to be cut off as a “prisoner” and “ex-convict” by people who had sought my acquaintance during the war; but I overcame it. I could do without them. Among those who stood steadfastly by me in hard times was Anna Vaitl, a courageous, capable woman, wise in life and of considerable temperament. Together with her husband, she had leased the “Ratskeller” in Würzburg, where my wife and I had often been guests. Now, after the death of her husband, Mrs. Vaitl ran the “Torggelstuben” in Munich, a renowned establishment not far from the Hofbräuhaus. At Anna Vaitl, I had already during my intermezzo at the Bavarian Ministry of Economics found my daily warm meal, and even now, I never left the “Torggelstuben” with an empty stomach or empty backpack.

Neckermann’s judgment of his activities during the Nazi period

On May 3, 1948, the verdict of the arbitration panel in my denazification proceedings was issued.

I was classified in category IV (“follower”) and sentenced to pay a reparation contribution of two thousand marks to the Compensation Fund.

In the reasoning, the presiding judge referred to the numerous affidavits that demonstrated my anti-national-socialist attitude and specifically noted that I had not hesitated to employ half-Jews and politically persecuted persons both in my own businesses and in the central warehouse association. He concluded almost regretfully that he could not completely exonerate me:

“When the witnesses speak of the ‘workhorse’ Neckermann, when it is established

that he, unlike Sauckel's views, provided exemplary support to the foreign workers with everything necessary, and that his social attitude and correct conduct towards Jewish partners, his helpfulness towards racially persecuted or endangered persons, can be considered exemplary and withstand any criticism, this is only a rounding out of the picture that the panel obtained from the massive array of witnesses. According to Art. 12 I 2, he is, after all, a follower. The law intended it that way. The phrase from Faust: 'Reason becomes nonsense,' applies to him as to few others, for in fact he conclusively proved that he not only did not 'follow along' but actively resisted the tremendous tide of National Socialism. Since the economic disadvantages could not be conclusively proven, he is a follower."

This chapter was thereby closed.

Neckermann is happy again

Sigrid, Uschi, July, and Tini, the sons Peter and Johannes; also present was, besides our "Perle" Therese, Nico Hariton, who had completed a study stay in Clausthal-Zellerfeld and returned to us as a freshly graduated mining engineer. For the children, our new home was a small paradise. We had two shepherd dogs, and geese and ducks roamed in the garden, which never saw a cooking pot. The most beautiful thing: a "private" stream, perfect for building sluices and paddling. Even the barracks itself had, at least to children's eyes, something excitingly romantic. Like in a railway carriage, small rooms branched off to the right and left of a long corridor. Due to lack of space, the children had to sleep in bunk beds, which they loved, "like in a sleeping car." Peter, Evi, and Johannes missed neither our family nor Gräfelting. "Now things are looking up." Nico, our house and hobby astrologer, saw it in the stars. "We have a great future ahead of us." It was about time.

Neckermann receives new lawsuits

In the midst of preparations for the founding of the mail-order business, the past caught up with me.

In 1948, Hans and Fritz Ruschkewitz, from Israel and South Africa respectively, filed restitution claims based on the Military Government Law No. 59 of November 10, 1947, relating to the two department stores I had purchased in 1935 from their father, Siegmund Ruschkewitz, who had died on his way into exile.

The regulations were based on the principle: "1. The purpose of the law is to accelerate, to the greatest possible extent, the restitution of identifiable assets (things, rights, incorporations of things and rights) to persons from whom they were taken between January 30, 1933, and May 8, 1945, due to race, religion, nationality, worldview, or political opposition to National Socialism."

"In favor of a beneficiary," Article 3 stated, "it is presumed that a legal transaction concluded between January 30, 1933, and May 8, 1945, constitutes a deprivation of assets if the disposal or surrender of the asset was carried out by a person directly affected by the persecution measures under Article 1..."

Hans and Fritz Ruschkewitz were represented before the restitution chamber by my former guardian, Justice Karl Rosenthal, an experienced Würzburg lawyer who had represented the interests of my parents and, until his emigration in 1938, also those of my mother. Rosenthal's daughter Anni ("Dixi"), born on exactly the same day and at the same place as my wife, had been her best friend until Annemi's death, her "twin," and Dixi and I remained good friends to this day. I was genuinely pleased to see Rosenthal again in this way.

The decision of the restitution chamber stated that Ruschkewitz "felt relieved by the conclusion and parted from his contracting partner without bitterness," and that Neckermann had "not attempted in any of the negotiations to exploit the political situation for his own benefit," and that "the handover of the private office occurred peacefully. Ruschkewitz gave Neckermann a basket of flowers for the opening of the business..."

At the beginning of 1950, Hans and Fritz Ruschkewitz and I reached a settlement that satisfied both parties. I transferred the rubble plot on the corner of

Schönbornstraße, which Ruschkewitz subsequently sold to Kaufhof AG for 300,000 DM. In addition, I paid a sum of 50,000 DM in installments. In return, the remaining trusteeship over the Merkur department store was lifted; I received full control over this business and all remaining inventory.

Since 1946/47, I had also been in contact, partly personally, partly through Hugo Wilkens and later through my father-in-law Richard Brückner, with Carl Amson Joel (he spelled his first name with a "C" since leaving Germany in 1938).

On March 25, 1947, he had written me a letter thanking me for my willingness to provide him with information at any time about the development of the Berlin company, which had passed into my possession through the 1938 purchase contract. He assured me: "Mr. Wilkens will confirm that I am the very last person to hold any feelings of revenge. But you will surely understand that I am trying to recover as much as possible of the property taken from me by the authorities at that time. You would certainly do the same in reverse. Your cooperation is therefore welcome, and I see no disadvantages for you, only advantages."

Shortly thereafter, however, my father-in-law received a letter from him indicating that his "American lawyers are involved in the matter. Therefore, you are not dealing with me alone."

This should have made me think.

It was most important to me to credibly demonstrate this in my defense, entirely regardless of the fact that, since the collapse, I had naturally held the moral view that Jews should be returned their businesses or otherwise compensated.

Moreover, I was of the opinion that the laundry and clothing factory could not fall under the law in question, simply because its registered office had at all times been in Berlin-Wedding, a sector under French control, and therefore hardly subject to American law.

Nevertheless, at the time the "crime" I was alleged to have committed occurred, I had, in agreement with Oestreicher, been of the opinion that the assets of the Berlin company could not be affected by that law because the term "forcible deprivation," on which it was based in its then-current form, had only been very inadequately and vaguely defined.

Furthermore, the lawsuit was moot in that, according to my business judgment, no liquidation had taken place at all. The only things that occurred were severance payments to long-standing employees and some invoices were settled. Asset damage via liquidation had therefore not taken place.

And yet: although I felt I was in the right, in all respects, I was far from certain that I would get my rights. I feared the trial—fear above all due to past experiences with American military courts. Fear also because Karl Joel had begun to pursue me, who on March 3, 1949, made a statement claiming he had received not a penny from the purchase price I had transferred to an account at Hardy Bank.

He said among other things: “On July 11, 1938, I was forced to agree with Neckermann that an amount of 3,660,074.20 RM would be paid, but he had already intended not to pay me anything at all... Brückner and Neckermann took over the business without paying a single penny...”

Joel’s restitution claims, initially estimated at eight million DM, were later increased by him or the lawyers to whom he had transferred his claims to eleven, then fifteen, and finally twenty-six million DM in a lengthy procedure before the German restitution chamber in Munich, which was to last until the mid-1950s.

Although I was present and tried to reach a settlement with him, or in his representation with Dr. Philipp Auerbach, the General Counsel for those racially, religiously, and politically persecuted, he left nothing untried to denounce me to the State Department at the Military Government in Germany. He alleged that I had committed serious criminal offenses and had illegally set aside millions since the collapse. I was appalled at so much hatred.

“The parties stipulate that at the time of the deprivation of Mr. Joel’s property there was no intention of dishonorable action.”

On June 8, 1949, the restitution authority for Upper and Middle Franconia concluded a settlement between Joel and me “for the purpose of an amicable resolution without prejudice to the respective legal positions.”

Now I very much hoped that Joel would remain in Germany until my trial before the military court in Würzburg and would testify truthfully in court that I had exerted no

pressure on him during the purchase negotiations. But he did not appear, instead flying back to New York before the date.

On June 13, the main hearing began before the court of the American military government for Germany in Würzburg. I had appointed Christel Lammers as one of my defenders, who had already successfully carried out the appeal in my first military court trial of 1945/46, as well as Berlin business lawyer Dr. Günter Rosener. In Rosener I found family under the large chestnut tree in the garden. Occasionally present: Jim Phelps. We drank the good Franconian wine, and my trial opponent proved to be a charming conversationalist, demonstrating astonishing drinking endurance time and again.

Those were peculiar times, a bit crazy, certainly.

When Phelps said goodbye in the evening—"See you, fellar"—I sat down to prepare for the next day of trial while also attending to my business obligations in writing or by phone, which were not entirely halted thanks to Dr. Betzen and Albin Burkel.

On Saturdays and Sundays, I worked around the clock in Frankfurt, trying to make up everything missed during the week. I simply could not believe that I might end up in prison if the "Neckermann Textile Mail-Order KG" opened. Meanwhile, the trial conduct of presiding Judge Alexander Kronhart gave rise to the worst fears.

The dreadful day of the verdict had arrived. When we entered the courtroom, MP stood at the door guarding the closed room during the announcement. These external circumstances naturally contributed to the greatest nervousness—if not fear. At first, the reasoning was read aloud for a long time; the lunch break followed. Afterwards, the defense attorneys had the opportunity to put in a "good word" for their clients. It seemed endless. The tension became unbearable. Then the verdict.

Two days before the elections for the first German Bundestag, I was found guilty, on Friday, August 12, 1949.

Neckermann makes it possible.

“Neckermann has always been a name, and everyone will notice:

Neckermann is unique!

Study my catalog at your leisure and order with full confidence! My goods will once again prove my old efficiency.

Should a shipment not meet expectations, simply return it to me, and you will be reimbursed in full. That is my guarantee!

If, however, you are satisfied, please recommend me.

With kind regards,

Neckermann

Textile Mail-Order K.G.

Josef Neckermann.”

Our first catalog comprised a total of twelve pages with 133 offers—exclusively textiles. The attraction—“my proof of performance”

Eva, Anni, and Marianne, three finely drawn spring dresses, which, according to the commentary, “speak for themselves”—did not stop us from presenting them in full detail. The most important information in the footer, printed in semi-bold: “All dresses have a special fit and modern lengths.” As if we had even more to offer than Anni, Eva, and Marianne.

“Eva,” priced at DM 13.45, the most expensive, a “smart ladies’ dress,” was considered particularly effective because it was “made of strikingly pretty patterned cell-wool mousseline, very flattering and youthful, with a modern collar, deep pockets, and belt.” We offered it in the “fashionable basic colors Erika, Blue, Ink, Black,” with the discreet note: “Suitable for half-mourning,” sad but current in a time when almost daily death notices from prisoner-of-war camps arrived.

The “full-figured lady of any age,” fortunate enough to be unrestricted in her choice of colors, was recommended “Marianne” “in a subtle pattern, with a white collar trim.” Considering the great public attention that even in the 1980s a few collections aroused, which addressed the fuller figure at favorable prices, we were ahead at the time.

Politics helps Neckermann again

... when Frankfurt, represented by its popular SPD mayor Dr. Walter (“the Fat”) Kolb and Mayor Dr. Leiske (CDU), stepped in. The city was extremely interested in the thousand jobs I promised to create in the near future, and the magistrate only had concerns in one point: Josef Neckermann was a convicted felon. By the military court, he had received a sentence of at least four and at most six years in prison on probation.

Wholesale and retail trade used this circumstance to influence the gentlemen so that the unwelcome competition could be avoided if possible.

Kolb gave me the opportunity in personal discussions to comment on the accusations. After he gained an overview of the true situation, he coined the memorable phrase in a city council meeting: “The verdict of an American military court is not a verdict for me.” With that, the pressure was off.

Frankfurt came up with an offer that we simply could not refuse: a six-thousand-five-hundred-square-meter plot directly at the East Station, on a 99-year lease with a rental of only one mark per square meter per year. Additionally, the city offered a self-debtor guarantee covering the expected construction costs of 1.2 million DM.

For our part, the decisive factors were the proximity to the airport, the favorable train connections, the central location, and finally Frankfurt itself as the future “actual” capital.

So we abandoned our thoughts of Calw and Ulm, and construction could begin.

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Everything was at stake.

On Monday, February 6, 1950, the oral hearing took place before the Supreme Court of the US Military Government for Germany in Nuremberg, where the appeal of the military court case in which I had been severely convicted in 1949 was ongoing.

Only after another nine months of uncertainty was the verdict announced on November 1, 1950:

I was acquitted on all points.

The decision of the highest military court stated: “The whole situation was so clear, and the annulment of the first-instance verdict so urgently required, that this court finds it difficult to understand why there could have been any indictment or conviction by the first court at all.” Above all, the court turned against the improper linking of criminal and civil law, which, according to the verdict, “was not only without any legal basis” but “contrary to all legal principles of modern criminal law.”

From then on, I was free to settle Joel’s restitution claims without fear of imprisonment if I did not comply with all his demands. Free also to concentrate fully on building up the Neckermann mail-order business without the burden of pending lawsuits.

All was at stake

On Monday, February 6, 1950, the oral hearing took place before the Supreme Appeals Court of the U.S. Military Government in Nuremberg, where the appeal of the 1949 military court case ran.

After nine months of uncertainty, on November 1, 1950, the verdict was announced: I was acquitted on all counts.

The highest military court stated:

“The entire situation was so clear and the annulment of the first-instance verdict so imperative that this court finds it difficult to understand why there was any indictment or conviction by the lower court at all.”

The court also condemned the illegal linking of criminal and civil law, calling it without legal basis and contrary to all principles of modern criminal law.

From then on, I was free to negotiate Joel’s restitution claims without risk of prison, and fully concentrate on building the Neckermann mail-order business.

Neckermann feels persecuted by Joel

For years, a restitution case had been pending before the Restitution Chamber at the Nuremberg-Fürth Regional Court, which Karl Joel, born 1890, the former owner of my laundry and clothing factory Josef Neckermann, Versandhaus Berlin, now living in America, had initiated against me—independently of my acquittal by the highest military court in Nuremberg. I try to present the history of these long-lasting disputes in this chapter in one go, as objectively as I can, and I ask the reader to note that this matter extended over several years and affected my family, the Neckermann Versand KG, and me personally in a way I would prefer not to describe in detail.

Legally and morally, Karl Amson Joel, like all those persecuted on religious, racial, or political grounds during the Third Reich, had a claim to restitution. There could be no doubt about that.

I had paid the purchase price for Joel's business at the time correctly into an account at Hardy Bank Berlin. However, Joel received this amount only partially, because during the final negotiations regarding the takeover he had already emigrated to Switzerland. Under the laws in force at the time, he was thus considered a "foreign exchange emigrant," which led to the seizure of his assets by the German foreign exchange authorities.

Since the end of the war, I had made various attempts to save the Berlin company, which had meanwhile been partially relocated to Ochsenfurt, from complete collapse together with Joel, but Joel had not agreed. By the mid-1950s, the company, due to poor management by the changing trustees, no longer had any assets.

When I founded the textile company Neckermann in 1948 and later transformed it into the Versandhaus, no funds from the earlier Berlin company were used. My new company was neither identical nor even partly identical with the Berlin company, nor did it assume its legal succession.

Joel, however, did not refrain from extending his restitution claim to the Neckermann Versand KG. At the Restitution Chamber at the Nuremberg-Fürth Regional Court, he was unsuccessful. In the fall of 1954, his lawyer Freiherr von

Godin (Munich) applied for a preliminary injunction against my company. He demanded "security measures," meaning that the Neckermann Versand KG should be placed under trusteeship and that I, as managing partner, and Albin Burkel, head of purchasing and limited partner, should be dismissed. To achieve what he described as a "lightning-fast" decision, Joel initially submitted his request to the Hessian State Office for Asset Control and Restitution, but he was rejected.

Attorney Dr. Günter Rosener and I ensured that the request was handled by the competent court. As a precaution, I declared myself willing to provide a bank guarantee of one million DM for any remaining restitution claims that might personally affect me. This was done on November 3, 1954.

In the hearing before the Restitution Chamber at the Nuremberg-Fürth Regional Court, which took place between January 10 and 12, 1955, all of Joel's applications for security measures against the Neckermann Versand KG were rejected. Until the final decision on his restitution claims, the guarantee of one million DM remained in place.

On January 24, 1955, we met "in the main matter" before the Restitution Chamber at the Nuremberg-Fürth Regional Court. It was six long hours in which we tried to amicably reach a settlement. Finally, we succeeded.

For the "settlement of all restitution claims of the entitled party (Joel) and the elimination of all doubts regarding the identity or legal succession of the company," the Neckermann Versand KG agreed to make a payment of two million DM to Joel. Furthermore, we agreed that the company Laundry and Clothing Factory Josef-Neckermann-Versandhaus should be released from asset control with immediate effect and that I would assume its debts.

During the settlement negotiations, the purchase price I had paid in 1938 was thoroughly discussed. According to the records of the then Berlin-based bank Hardy & Co., the amount was 1,079,960.70 RM, deposited into an account under the name "Special Account Joel." In the proceedings, it could not be sufficiently proven that the account under the exact title "Laundry and Clothing Factory Josef Neckermann, Special Account Joel" at Hardy Bank could be economically attributed to Karl Amson Joel; without the consent of Joel's then authorized representative, City Councilor

Tillmann, I could not have disposed of it. How could I prove that—after so many years and without any documents at hand?

According to information from Hardy Bank, no records were still available. On the advice of my lawyer, we therefore included the following clause in the settlement agreement under point V:

"The entitled party declares that, in the case of the validity of this settlement, he does not dispute that the obligated party Josef Neckermann has paid the amount of 1,079,960.70 Reichsmarks as part of the purchase price into the special account of the entitled party at Hardy & Co. Bank in Berlin."

I fulfilled my obligations and believed that the matter was thus concluded.

Now I must report on events that I personally witnessed only to a very small extent, but which were of crucial importance to me.

Immediately following the settlement we had concluded with each other, Karl Amson Joel initiated legal action against Hardy Bank & Co. At this point, a person comes into play who had nothing to do with the Joel-Neckermann restitution proceedings but ensured that it was far from over: lawyer Dr. Kuboschok, legal advisor to the Versandhaus Quelle.

Joel's authorized representative, Hans Freiherr von Godin, was better acquainted with Kuboschok. At a meeting in a Munich justice building, von Godin mentioned to Kuboschok that the restitution proceedings between Joel and me had now been concluded by settlement and that he intended, on behalf of his client, to sue Hardy Bank for the payout of Joel's entitlement. Von Godin further reported that I had allegedly declared during my hearing in the restitution proceedings that I had transferred the amount of 1,079,960.70 Reichsmarks for the purchased Versand business to Joel's account at Hardy Bank.

The bank, however, refused to pay out the appreciation amount from this purchase price payment, which amounted to 69,550 DM. At von Godin's request, Kuboschok, who knew members of Hardy & Co.'s board well, agreed to find out during his next visit to the bank the reasons that motivated the bank to refuse payment.

Indeed, Kuboschok visited Hardy Bank in February 1955. He asked the legal officer, lawyer Dr. Dietze, for a meeting. Kuboschok explained that he was acting on behalf of Mr. Joel and requested to inspect the files concerning the account Joel had opened in 1938.

The bank willingly provided Kuboschok with the relevant files. Among the documents was a letter from me dated September 15, 1938, addressed to Hardy Bank. In it, I requested the opening of an account for the Laundry and Clothing Factory Josef Neckermann under the name "Special Account Joel." Kuboschok made a copy of this letter. The letter also stated: "I remain authorized to dispose of the account until you receive other instructions from me."

As a reminder, Joel was already in Switzerland at that time and considered a "foreign exchange emigrant" by German authorities. He had entrusted his authorized representative, City Councilor Tillmann in Berlin, with the further handling of the sale.

Kuboschok informed lawyer von Godin about my letter of September 15, 1938.

In mid-September 1955, Kuboschok again approached Hardy Bank legal officer Dr. Dietze and informed him that Joel had now filed a lawsuit against the bank for the payout of his account balance. During the conversation, Dietze pointed out that while the account had been designated a "Special Account Joel," it was formally still an account of the Laundry and Clothing Factory Josef Neckermann.

Although the files showed that City Councilor Tillmann, as Joel's authorized representative, had made dispositions with the consent of the accountant responsible for the bookkeeping at the Neckermann/Berlin company, Dipl.-Kaufmann Volk, a transfer of the account to Joel was not evident from the incomplete files. For the bank, only Josef Neckermann's letter of September 15, 1938, was decisive.

Kuboschok replied that Joel did not attach much importance to winning the case against Hardy. More important to him would be to induce Neckermann to give a false statement in court. After all, Neckermann had allegedly claimed during his testimony before the restitution chamber that he had transferred the money to Joel's account.

I was to be confronted with my 1938 letter only after I had already committed to my testimony in court. Kuboschok literally told Dietze that the goal was to "trip up" Neckermann. Ultimately, Kuboschok even suggested to Dietze that the bank should have the famous lawyer Dr. Schmidt-Leichner represent them in the trial, a highly competent specialist in criminal law who would prove Neckermann's untruthfulness. Dietze decisively rejected this proposal.

Schmidt-Leichner was still involved, but on the other side: In the legal dispute Joel vs. Hardy Bank, he appeared alongside Freiherr von Godin as Joel's representative.

Up to this point, I had absolutely no knowledge of all these events happening behind my back.

On January 16, 1956, I had to appear at 10:15 a.m. for witness testimony in the Joel vs. Hardy Bank & Co. proceedings before the tenth civil chamber of the Frankfurt Regional Court. I was repeatedly and urgently asked what designation the account had that I had paid the purchase price into at the time.

Truthfully, I replied that, after 18 years, I could no longer remember exactly but believed it had been called "Special Account Joel." Schmidt-Leichner did not let up, and I increasingly insisted on this incorrect memory.

At this moment, Dr. Dietze intervened and ensured that my previously withheld letter from September 15, 1938, was presented to me. So there were indeed corresponding documents!

I was then able to correct my previous statement. After the testimony, Dr. Dietze kindly informed me of the events and circumstances described.

Later that same afternoon, Dr. Dietze again received a visit from Dr. Kuboschok, who wanted to find out if I was aware of his (Kuboschok's) activities regarding Joel, which Dietze truthfully confirmed.

"And what about Mr. Schickedanz?" was Kuboschok's comment, legal advisor to Quelle. From this statement, Dietze concluded that Gustav Schickedanz was informed about all Kuboschok interventions for Joel.

However, in the legal dispute, it could never be conclusively proven to what extent he actively influenced the proceedings to harm a troublesome competitor. The chairman of the Restitution Chamber in Fürth, who was called as a witness in the lawsuit against Kuboschok, stated, "The restitution case against Neckermann was very important to Mr. Schickedanz. According to his statements, the witness had learned from Joel that Schickedanz had supported him in carrying out the proceedings and had paid for his travel and stay in Germany."

Schickedanz himself, who was also summoned as a witness, excused himself.

In the dispute, the American lawyer of Mr. Joel, Herman J. Tart, New York, was also heard as a witness. He stated that Schickedanz had contributed 50,000 DM to Joel's legal costs in the restitution matter. The payment was made in September or October 1959.

At the time of the challenge to the settlement—which has already been anticipated here—numerous competitive disputes between the Versandhäuser Quelle and Neckermann were pending in the courts. They were finally settled in 1961 as part of a general settlement. At Quelle's request, the legal dispute Neckermann vs. lawyer Dr. Kuboschok, in which Quelle was not directly involved, was also included in the settlement. The lawsuit and counterclaim concerning Kuboschok were withdrawn in April 1961. The incurred court and attorney fees were borne eighty percent by Quelle, although it was not a party to the proceedings at all.

After the settlement and the payment of two million DM, Karl Amson Joel continued to pursue claims that were, in his view, not fully settled. He filed new restitution claims against me personally and against members of the Neckermann Versand KG. The proceedings dragged on for years, involving countless hearings and legal documents, and affected both my private life and business operations.

Despite the formal settlement, Joel repeatedly attempted to use legal channels to assert additional claims. Each time, my lawyers were able to demonstrate that these new claims lacked any legal basis. Nevertheless, the psychological and financial pressure on me and my family was considerable, as lawsuits in the 1950s in Germany were expensive, time-consuming, and public.

Joel also tried to involve third parties in his disputes with me. Through his attorneys and contacts, he sought support from competitors and other influential business figures, attempting to weaken my position in the market. These attempts, however, were largely unsuccessful. My company continued to grow and expand, and the Neckermann Versand KG retained its independence.

At the same time, I learned that some of Joel's claims were indirectly supported by figures associated with the Quelle Versandhaus. While Quelle was not officially a party to these legal actions, their legal advisor, Dr. Kuboschok, had repeatedly intervened on Joel's behalf. This intervention aimed to gather information and influence the outcomes of the proceedings, although it never led to a direct financial advantage for Quelle in the lawsuits themselves.

Through persistence and the legal skill of my attorneys, I was able to defend my company and myself successfully. In the late 1950s, the courts repeatedly confirmed the validity of the original settlement and rejected any new claims from Joel. Ultimately, the disputes ended with the recognition that all restitution claims had been settled and that my conduct in acquiring and managing the business was legally correct.

By the end of the 1950s, all major disputes with Karl Amson Joel had been definitively resolved. On March 25, 1959, the Third Senate of the Supreme Restitution Court in Nuremberg rejected Joel's appeal against the settlement of January 24, 1955. With this decision, all files were closed, and no further legal claims against me or the Neckermann Versand KG could be raised by Joel.

The company filed a lawsuit against Dr. Kuboschok on September 29, 1956, seeking damages for his harmful actions. This case, too, dragged on for several years. During the proceedings, it became clear that Ernst Volk, the accountant who managed Joel's special account within the company, could document all transactions, proving that the funds deposited under the name "Sonderrechnung Joel" were exclusively used for Mr. Joel.

The signatures on the payment orders came not from Volk, but from Stadtrat Tillmann, Joel's authorized representative in Berlin. Volk's written records showed that 573,762.86 RM had been paid from the "Sonderrechnung Joel" account. In January 1939, the remaining balance of 415,614.60 RM had been confiscated by the

Berlin-Moabit customs office and seized under the currency laws of the German Reich. This proves that the account was only set up under the name “Wäsche- und Kleider-Fabrik Josef Neckermann Sonderrechnung Joel” to prevent immediate confiscation, since Joel was already in Switzerland at that time.

In retrospect, it appears that Dr. Kuboschok, as a constant and close legal advisor of the Quelle Versandhaus and thus of Mr. Gustav Schickedanz, assisted Karl Amson Joel in preparing the challenge to the restitution settlement. Both Joel and Kuboschok regularly informed Schickedanz about the ongoing proceedings. However, it could never be definitively proven in court whether he actively influenced the proceedings to harm a competitor.

At the time of the challenge to the settlement, numerous competitive disputes between the Versandhäuser Quelle and Neckermann were pending in the courts. They were finally settled in 1961 through a general agreement. At Quelle’s request, the lawsuit Neckermann vs. attorney Dr. Kuboschok, in which Quelle was not directly involved, was included in this settlement.

The claims and counterclaims regarding Kuboschok were withdrawn in April 1961. The resulting court and attorney fees were covered by the company Quelle, even though it was not a party to the proceedings, to the extent of eighty percent.

All documents scanned and translated for the novel *„Vienna waits for you“*, by Matthias Euler-Rolle.