

Pilot Knob Lutheran Church Communique



December 24, 2025

Christmas Eve in a German Labor Camp during WWII

Posted by [Lighthouse Trails Editors](#)

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Author of *Trapped in Hitler's Hell*



We prayed that God would miraculously sustain our strength; each day our food rations diminished so the German soldiers on the battlefronts could receive more food. Shortly after all of us Christians had prayed for physical strength, the neighboring farmers again rallied for us. Risking their lives, they smuggled us sausage, bread, and cheese and told us to eat the nourishing mushrooms in the forest where we cut trees. God seemed to pack a thousand calories in each tiny mushroom and bite of bread as we who trusted Jesus were given physical and spiritual sustenance.

Two horrible realities faced us women in

December: winter and the traitors among us. To make life more comfortable for themselves, some women were reporting others to the guards for such things as conversations, attitudes, or anti-Nazi sentiment—anything that would make their lives more comfortable. Many of them spent the night with the guards and were given preferential treatment.



Anita (14), in Germany during WW II

As the winter winds increased, everyone's spirits sank. Our uniforms were terribly inadequate, and many of us were sent clothes from home. Father sent me some warm socks, gloves, and a jacket. If we worked long enough and hard enough, we could keep ourselves relatively warm on the work line. But marching to and from the work area was difficult because the wind raced through our clothing.

Again we anxiously awaited the whistle when the horse cart would bring us warm, lumpy soup. But it tasted awful, and usually it was cold by the time it reached us. The chunks in the soup were like tree bark. I watched Gunther one day as he took his bowl of soup to a mock grave. Pouring the soup in the grave, he covered it with dirt. Then he took a large stone and placed it over the grave site. On the stone he wrote: "Hier ruhet still una unvergessen, unser heutiges Mittagessen." ("Here rests, still and unforgotten, today's menu.")

Just before Christmas I met another beautiful believer: Christian Risel. We met on the work line while cutting trees and, in our own silent way, quickly fell in love. Though I loved Rudi, Wolfgang, Gerhard,

and Gunther, the love in my heart for Christian was different. A little older than I, he was strong and handsome in spite of the months of labor and deprivation. His eyes virtually sparkled, while the eyes of others in the camp were glassy and dazed. He had a smile when everyone else had a negative word, for he loved everyone in a special way. He even had Christian compassion for the Nazis. But he loved me the most. Of course no time was allowed for romance in the camp. It was too cold to stay outside much in our thin clothing, and we couldn't go inside each other's quarters. But we cut trees together frequently and got to know one another better. Each day that we were together, our love was reaffirmed.

"Someday, Anita, we will be gloriously free and happy once again," Christian said as his axe cut into a thick pine tree. "We will have money to spend and food to eat, and we will have loved ones surrounding us. We'll never have to dread another knock on our door. Do you believe that too, Anita?"

"I do. God reaffirms it every day. But I would rather be locked away and have Jesus than to be my sister, Hella, safe in the free world but denying the very One who gave her freedom."

"Nothing happens without a purpose, doesn't it?" Christian said. "What do you suppose is our ultimate purpose for being trapped in Nazi Germany? I think it is to glorify God in the end. Do you think that is true?"

"I do, Christian."

"Anita, do you know what day it is today?"

"No."

"It is Christmas Eve. I have a surprise for you and the other Christians in the camp."

"Why have you waited so long to tell me, Christian?"

"Because it was just confirmed at lunchtime." Christian's eyes really sparkled with excitement now. "Mr. Anders has given me permission to take all the Christians to a Christmas Eve service in Ostlinde tonight! Of course a guard will accompany us, but he will be exposed to the gospel too."

"Christian, you don't mean it! A real Christmas Eve service. We must spread the news. Oh, it is another miracle of God." To war-weary Christian prisoners who loved Jesus, this was the best news in months, perhaps years. But the camp's unbelievers had no time for our happiness; most of them felt no special comfort each day as we believers did. Whether they were jealous or skeptical, they preferred that we keep to ourselves, which only drew us closer together.

Twenty of us trudged over the snow-covered hills and meadows that night to a little country church at the edge of Ostlinde. The snow was falling lightly, and both melted snowflakes and tears dampened my face as Christian took my hand. "This will be the most meaningful Christmas I've ever had," I told him. "It shows God's very special love for us. It tells me He cares for us and that we'll be all right in the end."

"The birth of Jesus must have been like this," Christian said quietly. "He was poor and persecuted, and He was misunderstood and rejected, yet He always forgave. We have to forgive too, Anita, even the Nazis."

That night we huddled in the little church with a hundred or more of the farmers and townspeople. We sang Christmas carols and praised the Lord until well after midnight. As we read the Christmas story, we were reassured that Jesus knew our every ache because He also had been a man and had experienced human grief. In the dim candlelight we all gathered at the altar on our knees and prayed for Germany and our separated families; the guard stood careful watch in the doorway. Then we trudged home in the moonlight, for the snow had stopped falling. No one spoke a word; we all were savoring every minute of this blessed Christmas Eve.

[A]s we headed back to the camp over the snowdrifts, in the stillness of that dark, dark night, nobody spoke. Our silent communication conveyed a oneness that superseded all verbal expression. Saturated with the restful music and with gratitude to God, I sank into a deep and restful sleep on my straw mattress.

Anita Dittman was 17 years old when this story took place. For more about Anita's story, see [Trapped in Hitler's Hell](#)) (image from istockphoto.com; used with permission; design by LT)

Pr. Bob Snitzer

By the Way:

Today, 4:30 Christmas Candlelight service.

Today, no Confirmation until the test on January 7

December 28, 9:00 Morning worship and reception of new members.

10:15 No Sunday school until January 11.

Past communiques and sermons can be read and heard on our website: www.pilotknob.org and Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PilotKnobLutheran>

Our service also airs on: KGLO 1300 AM at 10:00 AM, and KLOW 107.3 FM at 7:00 AM.
Spread the word.

If you have an article or God sighting you would like to share with the congregation please submit it for publication in the **Briefings**. [**pastorbob@pilotknob.org**](mailto:pastorbob@pilotknob.org)