

63 YEARS AGO

A dreadful thing happened 63 years ago. Gotthilf Wagner was murdered and we like to publish the following in honor of Gotthilf Wagner, the two articles prepared for the soon to be released "**Exiled from the Holy Land** – *The loss of the Templar settlements in Palestine and deportation to Australia, 1941 – 1950*". We thank all those who contributed to making this book a real historical document, especially Sieger Hahn who made the effort to compile Gotthilf's life story. We are glad that this event now is in print and will not be forgotten. The work of compiling and editing has been completed and the book is presently under preparation for printing by our Publisher Trafford in Canada.
-Horst Blaich



*Immanuel Katz (*1896 †1969)*

GOTTHILF WAGNER MEMORIAL SERVICE

Text: Job 5:17-19; Job 35:2-15; and Romans 14:8. Hymn no 299. 1-5. 6-7.

On Friday 22 March [1946], like a bolt out of a blue sky, we were hit by the horrifying news that our leader and old friend Gotthilf Wagner was heinously murdered at the insidious hands of common thugs. His foes, who were no match for him and could

not touch him in the open, have resorted to the vilest depravity to remove by cowardly murder the irreplaceable man who, to us, was a blessing, but for them, a person to be feared because he stood in their way. There had been repeated attempts to destroy him by bomb attacks, but God, through His Providence, had graciously saved him and preserved his life, but now a horribly tragic fate has caught up with him. There rages within us a holy tempest of repugnance against the damnable deed, but we are reduced to impotence in the face of this dastardly act. If the authorities cannot find the ways and the means to deliver the culprits to lawful punishment instead of letting them off scot-free, we are left facing the fact that any one of us could be struck down with impunity.

The severity of the loss the Jaffa-Sarona community and indeed each one of us, as well as our Society as a whole have suffered through the death of Gotthilf Wagner does not bear thinking about. His service, which included representing the Society to the authorities, was dedicated to community life: the entire management of the Society had rested in the hands of our esteemed departed friend and we cannot imagine how we can go on from here. Why did we have to suffer this blow, why has God allowed it to happen? Are we abandoned by all men and forsaken by God? Our pain is justified and so, too, is our gloomy and desperate question, why, Why?! – Let us, however, be mindful that if we go down the path of brooding, of letting ourselves go, of doubt and despair, or even of rebelling against God, we will be led astray and lose our way.

Mr Wagner had intended to visit and stay with us in Betlehem for a while to recuperate from working tirelessly for the common good when, just before his visit, he had taken a trip to Jaffa on business. He was accompanied by his sister Frida, who observed motor cyclists pursuing them. Alarmed, she pleaded with her brother to turn back or at least take another route, to which he replied: We are in God's hands and He will protect us. The steadfast trust in God that inspired him and his upright and fearless attitude do empower me, I believe, to say it would not be in keeping with the philosophy and character of the departed if we were to go down the path of doubt and despair.

'Blessed is the man whom God corrects, therefore do not despise the chastening by the Almighty'. These are words that our natural human mind cannot accept, for not only does punishment cause pain, but also injures our self-esteem. What is more, we mostly are so convinced of our innocence that, surprised, we resist trying to justify ourselves even when we begin to see the reasons for our punishment. How many questions are crowding our minds, how many 'whys' has the death of our departed triggered within us! God must know we have nobody left, He knows that we have always fulfilled our duties, even under the most difficult conditions! The time seems to have come from which it is said:

That God has darkened the minds of men that with open eyes they do not see, and with open ears they do not hear; the hearts of men are harder than stone, and they do not want to change; it seems that knowingly and with diabolical intention, they no longer want to respond to what God demands of us. It is true – as one out of our midst has once said – that even superstition is not as dangerous as lacking faith. Spiritually and religiously, superstition is still active, whereas unbelief is too indifferent and superficial, and too lazy to think about facts, to ponder realities or to establish useful ideals. Through brainwashing and incitement, superstition affects only individuals and has ruined relatively few (such as in witchcraft trials), whereas unbelief seizes entire nations and sweeps them to their doom. Its aim is decay and the dissolution of order, human or divine, and the destruction of social, religious and ethical morality which, in the last analysis, spells chaos and the doom of humanity. As we can observe in the world today, humankind is doing its best to be on the path to self-destruction. The use of atom bombs for the destruction of our fellow human beings without limitation serves as a foreboding of the catastrophe it will entail.

Since humanity, us included, has drifted on to paths so slippery and far from God, God intervenes time and again, for He does not want death and destruction for man, but wishes that we mend our ways, which means that we come to our senses, stop and examine ourselves, recognise and rectify our mistakes and proceed to walk on God-pleasing roads and live, really live, even if we die. Therefore: **Blessed is the man whom God corrects; do not despise**

the chastening by the Almighty, for He makes sore but also binds up; He wounds, and His hands make whole; He will deliver you in six troubles, and in the seventh no harm will befall you.

To give this sorrow the right expression and perspective lest we are not only crushed and beaten, but will find the strength to walk upright once more, we want to listen to a time-honoured passage from Romans 14:8: **For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live or die, therefore, we are the Lord's.**

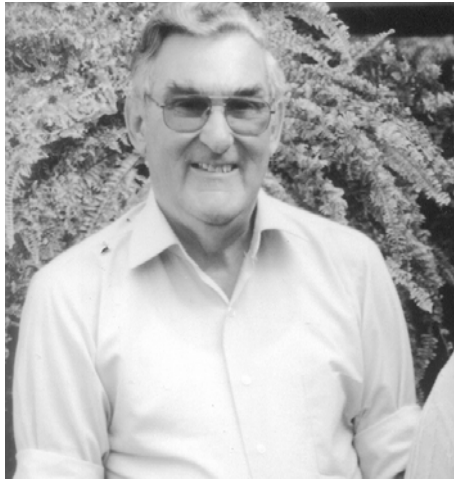
P r a y e r

Almighty God, dear Heavenly Father! In this hallowed hour of remembrance, we humbly bow to you, conscious, as always, of our indebtedness to you, for we live and exist only through you and in you. We praise you also when in pain and deepest mourning because we know that what you have ordained for us is right and comes from a good and wise Father, who knows all things better than we do. We thank you that you had given us him, whom you have now recalled; we thank you for everything he, with your assistance, was able to do for us. Take us all into your care and do not deny us your fatherly help and shelter, protect us from coming to grief in body and soul; make us recognise that happiness is only found in the obedience to your commandments, and give us your spirit who guides us on to your path. Give that our life's work will consist of serving your cause so we may be yours, even in death, and forever!

A m e n

As a last salute to you, Gotthilf Wagner, and as a visible sign of our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, I place this wreath on your grave on behalf of the Bethlehem Community.

R e s t i n P e a c e



Siegfried Hahn (1924)*

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON GOTTHILF WAGNER (2006)

Born: Jaffa, Palestine, on 14 July 1887

Died: en route to Saron, Palestine, on 22 March 1946

Father: Wilhelm Heinrich Wagner (1853-1893) died in Jaffa, Palestine

Mother: Katharina Molt (1855-1898) died in Jaffa, Palestine

Gotthilf Wagner lost his father at the age of six and his mother when he was eleven. Gotthilf and one of his three younger sisters found a new home with Georg Wagner Sr and his wife Wilhelmine, their uncle and aunt. He went to the German school in the Jaffa Templer settlement and completed his education at the American College in Beirut, Lebanon. As a twenty-year-old, he went to Germany, where he trained and worked at Deutz Engineering Works in Cologne. It was here that he met his wife-to-be, Lina Frings. On his return to Palestine, he found temporary employment with Theophil Frank in Haifa. He married Lina, who had followed him to Jaffa, on 11 December 1909. This marriage was blessed with two boys, Walter and Kurt. The younger, Kurt, a Lieutenant, was killed in action in Tunis on 8 May 1943, leaving a wife and a young daughter. The older son Walter, with wife and children, was deported to Australia with many others in 1941.

The First World War broke out while Gotthilf was employed at Gebrüder Wagner (Wagner Brothers), his uncle's firm. He went to Germany and enlisted in the German army, where he was promoted to captain and earned the Iron Cross, Second and First class. In December 1920, he returned to Jaffa and to his job at Wagner Bros. He was a conscientious and hardworking man. He went back to Germany just once more in 1931 for business reasons. During those years, his energy belonged to the firm and he soon rose to the position of Managing Director. In 1934, Gotthilf and Lina celebrated their silver anniversary.

Gotthilf was also a religious man. In 1930, he became an elder in the Saron/Jaffa Templer community, a service he performed until the end of his life. He took his role seriously and always gave his best. One of the six directors of the Temple Society Central Fund from 1922, he was also a director of the Tempelbank [Bank of the Temple Society] from 1925. As an elder, he was a member of the Tempelrat [Templer Council], the body responsible for electing Templer presidents, such as

Philipp Wurst in 1935, after Christian Rohrer had died. In spite of all his commitments, he always found time for meeting his peers at the Lorenz restaurant or at Stephanus Frank's Weinstube [wine saloon].



In 1934, he became the guardian of Siegfried and Erich, the two youngest sons of his uncle Immanuel Hahn, who had died. He had a good understanding for young people and always tried to guide them on to the right path. He delighted in spending time with the boys, taking them up the Kastel mountain, a stretch of road on the way to Jerusalem with lots of bends. After having driven them to the top in his car, he would let them race down the hill on their scooters or bikes. On another occasion, he woke the boys at midnight to show them how the flames of a burning timber yard were lighting up the sky.

1936 - 1939, a time of political unrest in Palestine, caused much uncertainty, fear and worry. Gebrüder Wagner was commissioned to produce armoured cars for the British Palestine Police. This, and the manufacture and supply of irrigation equipment, which was instrumental for the development of the region, earned Gotthilf Wagner an MBE [Member of the Order of the British Empire].

Gotthilf's biggest worry at the time was the City of Tel-Aviv's continual attempts to buy the land of Sarona. He was constantly haunted by the vision of Sarona

being swallowed up by the city. He steadfastly believed the settlers' compensation should not be money, but land elsewhere in Palestine, or in another country.

During this period, a group of Elders was looking at a large tract of land in Lebanon, planning to buy it on behalf of the Temple Society. Gotthilf Wagner, the chief negotiator, had visited the area, Beekah Valley, at least four times before the final payment was made. The Temple Society Central Fund provided most of the money. The land was purchased in Gotthilf's name.

The outbreak of the Second World War changed everything. Many young men had left for Germany to enlist, and those left behind were interned in camps. Gotthilf was particularly shocked when the Haifa Templer community was ordered to vacate their homes and abandon the settlement. This was followed by the evacuation of the Jerusalem, Jaffa and Walhalla settlements. Gotthilf, with his wife and the two boys - Siegfried and Erich - was evacuated to Sarona, where he established his office opposite the British camp administration. He became the liaison officer between the British Authority and the German internees. His office handled all enquiries and instructions by the authorities as well as the communications between the internment camps in Palestine.

In 1943, the first attempt on Gotthilf Wagner's life was made with a bomb planted under his office window. He was wounded, but not severely. It was assumed the attack was aimed at the men who had assembled there for their daily roll call. Months later, however, the Jews struck again by blowing up his house in Walhalla which, fortunately, was not occupied.

In March 1946, Gotthilf Wagner, his wife and another fifteen people, the last to have remained in Sarona, were evacuated to Wilhelma. He continued to administer the lands and orange groves of Sarona from his office in Wilhelma.

One of Gotthilf Wagner's official duties was to make weekly payments to the Arab workers, who were looking after the Sarona land. He was shot and killed by a Jewish group on his second trip. This was no random shooting; no one else in the car was touched and no money was taken. It was a well-planned action to eliminate this person, the biggest obstacle to obtaining land from the German settlers.



The Gotthilf Wagner family
Back row: Kurt (son), Frida (sister), Walter (son).
Front row: Maria (sister) Gotthilf, Jutta (granddaughter) Lina (wife)



Gotthilf Wagner at home

Appendix 2 GOTTHILF WAGNER

ARAB NEWSPAPER REPORT (Ad-Difaa) 25 March 1946

It is now known that Gotthilf Wagner, who was murdered by some Jews on Friday, had driven from Camp Wilhelma to pay the wages of Arab workers. It was probably the second time that he left the camp for this purpose. He knew that leaving the camp every week was fraught with danger, because the Jews had tried to kill him two years before by planting a mine, which exploded but, miraculously, left him unscathed.

When a motor cycle followed in his tracks, his passengers were worried and somewhat afraid, but Mr Wagner insisted on keeping going. When a car deliberately stopped his progress in Livinski Road, he asked its Jewish driver to move. Then, suddenly, Jewish youths fired three shots at him at point blank range. The Jewish guard who was assigned to Mr Wagner had not made the slightest attempt to defend him. The whole thing was well thought out from A to Z and the murderers were well prepared for the ambush.

When Gotthilf Wagner was buried, there was adequate guard protection. Mr Steller was the one most affected by the murder, because he was worried about not being able to shoulder the sole responsibility for the colony with all its lands and agriculture.

Gotthilf Wagner was totally against yielding even a foot of land to the Jews and maintained this attitude to his last breath. He had pursued the land controversy as far as the Colonial Office, even up to the Privy Council. He was aware of the great Jewish demand for the land of Sarona, to which the German owners had clung in spite of bribery attempts and other difficulties. For many years, the Tel-Aviv authorities had asked for a road to be built through Sarona, but Gotthilf Wagner fought it tooth and nail. Most of the colonists were born in this country; they are familiar with the customs and habits of the population and love this land like their own lives. Thus, they parted with not a single dunum [unit of land, 1,000m²]. The Jews never tired of trying to grab parts of the German colonies, especially the lands of Sarona. They knew that Wagner was the greatest obstacle in their way. The land was the real reason for his assassination and, to get it, they did not shy away from anything, even murder, such as was committed on Gotthilf Wagner.

Appendix 3

JEWISH NEWSPAPER REPORT (Haboker) 25 March 1946

Gotthilf Wagner and his family lived in Wilhelma for the last two weeks. Before his transfer, he lived in Sarona, from where he conducted his work and supervised the lands.

From Wilhelma, he regularly drove to Sarona every Friday morning at 8am to look after his workers and pay them their wages. Some Jews knew about this. When Wagner left the camp, two men followed him on motor cycles. Steller, who was with Wagner, noticed them and alerted Wagner, asking him to turn back, but Wagner rejected this and kept going. His sister and his secretary were in the car as well. Six Germans, with an Armenian driver and an Arab guard were behind them in another car, intending to go to Jaffa.

Gotthilf Wagner was respected in the camp by the British, who allowed him to drive anywhere. When the war situation had become critical for the Germans, the Germans in Palestine had become afraid and asked the government to sell their lands and to give them British citizenship. Gotthilf Wagner, however, was against this and made a speech forbidding them to sell [even] a square foot of land.