

THE PRISON CALLED HOHENASPERG:

***An American boy betrayed by his
Government during World War II***

by

ARTHUR D. JACOBS
Born in the U.S.A.

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Cover photograph: Author at age thirteen

Dedication

In memory of a son, brother, and father gone home,
Archie Keith Jacobs (1953-1976), killed in the line
of duty in Morton County Kansas

In tribute to
Viva Sims Jacobs
David and Michael Jacobs
Dwayne Jacobs
Dianna and Whitney Hatfield
Paul J. Jacobs
Lambert W. Jacobs
Edwin and Mary Simmons

And in memory of
Lambert D. and Paula (Knissel) Jacobs
Art and Mildred (Wilson) Dreyer
John Wade and Roxie (Allred) Sims

A salute to the Crew of the S.S. Aiken Victory on the
January 17, 1946 voyage, and to the WWII GIs who came to
my rescue

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Preface

Almost fifteen years ago, while I was watching a national television broadcast, the following words were spoken: “During World War II the U.S. Government did not intern German Americans.” The program’s subject was the internment of Japanese Americans. I sat back and thought to myself, “Have I been dreaming all these years that I was interned in a camp with Japanese Americans? I know I played with them. Some of my friends went to school with them. I even went swimming with them, and dined with them. I was behind the same barbed wire fences that were being discussed.”

Then, on August 16, 1984, The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta, a U.S. Representative from the State of California, in his testimony before a subcommittee of the United States Senate said, “We did not lock up German-Americans.” While reading newspaper reports and editorials from around the country, I read, “German Americans were not interned.” I was perplexed and became convinced that a misinformation campaign was in place. These and other untrue statements about the internment of Americans of German descent inspired me to write my story.

Statements like Congressman Mineta’s, “We did not lock up German-Americans,” are paradoxical. Were Mineta and others telling the members of the United States Senate and the world that if German-Americans had been locked up, then the internment program would have been justified, or were they so misinformed that they did not know that German Americans were interned?

In 1945, I was told by my seventh grade teacher in Brooklyn, New York, and by my parents that internment was part of

war and what was happening to my family was supposedly being done in the best interests of the country. I had even heard officials of the U.S. Government tell this to my parents. Because what I heard, read, and viewed in the 1980s conflicted with what I was told in the 1940s, I began to search for the truth about the World War II civilian internment program of the United States of America.

During this research my friends, acquaintances, colleagues, students, and librarians would ask, “What are you researching?” After they learned the “what,” they asked “Why?” Usually I replied, “It is a long story about the early years of my life.” “You see,” I said, “I was interned in the United States.” The astonished reply generally has been, “You were interned? I thought only Japanese Americans were interned.” I responded promptly, “Not true. I am not a Japanese American, but I am an American of German descent, who was interned at Ellis Island, New York; Crystal City, Texas; and at the prison called Hohenasperg (Camp 76), Germany.”

This book documents the “long story.” It is based on my research and recollections of the events that took place. It tells of the devastating effects that the decisions and actions of a judicial system gone awry had on one family—the Lambert D. Jacobs family of 411 Himrod Street, (Ridgewood) Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.

Arthur D. Jacobs
Tempe, Arizona
March 24, 1999

Introduction

This book tells the story of Arthur D. Jacobs. It begins in 1943 when, as a ten-year-old boy, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation invaded and ransacked his family's home on three separate occasions based solely on anonymous accusations. The book then charts how the U.S. Department of Justice repeatedly violated his family's constitutional rights:

In violation of the Sixth Amendment, the author's father was denied the right “to be confronted with the witnesses against him...” (Although World War II ended more than half a century ago, the FBI, claiming national security considerations, has refused repeated requests by the author to know the identity of his father's accusers.)

In further violation of the Sixth Amendment, the author's father was denied the right “to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation...”

In violation of the Fourth Amendment, the author's family was denied the right “to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures...”

In violation of the Fifth Amendment, the author's parents were denied the right that “No person...shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself...”

In further violation of the Fifth Amendment, the author and his family were denied the right that “No person...shall be deprived...of property, without due process of law...”

These violations culminated in the repatriation of the Jacobs family to a war ravaged and starving Germany in 1946, where the U.S. Occupation Authority imprisoned them. This book is a story of injustice and self-discovery.

For over four decades, Arthur D. Jacobs had accepted the official position that the “internment of aliens of enemy nationality” was necessary for public safety and national security during times of war. As a result of almost two decades of research, however, he has discovered that this was not the sole reason for the internment program under the Roosevelt Administration.

In his opinion, one of the primary purposes of the internment program was to provide the U.S. Government with leverage in negotiations with Berlin for the return of persons from the Americas who were interned by Third Reich.

In February 1944, at least 634 German Americans were shipped to Nazi Germany as part of this exchange program. In January 1945, two months after the author's father was interned, another exchange voyage occurred.

A subtle, but important, aspect of internment was the mindset of the internees, themselves. Because internment challenged their belief in the integrity of the U.S. justice system, internees adopted, as a psychological defense mechanism, two contradictory views of American justice. Based on interviews with several former internees and discussions with his father and mother, the author learned most internees thought, “I did nothing to deserve to be interned, but I wonder what ‘Hans’ did. Why is he in here? He must have done something, because in America you are not arrested unless you violated the law.”

In recent years, the author has discussed his father's case with several journalists. Invariably at the close of those discussions the journalists would say, "Now Art, you know your father must have done something wrong. In America, we don't go around arresting people without cause." Art's consistent reply has been, "Prove it! Show me the cause! Saboteurs, spies, and other agents of the enemy were not interned; they were either sent to prison or executed." Unable to show cause, the journalists respond with only shrugged shoulders.

The deeper the author delved into the internment program, the clearer it became to him that most, if not all, of those who were interned did not pose a threat to national security. Many were interned on the basis of anonymous accusations. For example, neighbors and even the man on the street, would tell FBI agents that a person has a picture of Hitler in his or her house, or was a contributor to the Nazi Party. The FBI added such information to the alien's FBI dossier with little or no attempt to confirm the truth or accuracy of the accusations.

That internment was not completely motivated by national security considerations can be seen in the case of the author's father. Despite both the unanimous opinion of the local hearing board and the legal opinion of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York that the author's father should not be interned, Edward J. Ennis, Director of the Alien Enemy Control Unit of the Department of Justice had him interned. In view of the two exchange voyages previously noted, there is a strong indication that the author's father was interned to become a member of an internee pool for possible future exchanges.

This book, however, transcends the story of the injustices inflicted on the author and his family. It is a cautionary tale,

which reveals that during wartime the rights guaranteed to us by the U.S. Constitution can become tenuous.

If during wartime the U.S. Government can deny the constitutional rights of one citizen, the constitutional rights of every citizen are in jeopardy. Once the precedent is established, the authorities may apply it as frequently and as broadly as they desire. If it could be done to German Americans yesterday, it can be done to Arab Americans or Serbian Americans today. Just because what happened to the author occurred over fifty years ago, do not assume that it cannot happen today, tomorrow or to you. Many of the laws that enabled the Justice Department to violate the constitutional rights of the author's family are still on the books.

The author is confident that the U.S. Government will finally acknowledge what it did to German Americans between 1941 and 1948. He hopes that after reading his book, Americans will recognize that their rights can be threatened by unconstitutional acts carried out by officials of their government. Remember, “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.”

Joseph E. Fallon
Free lance writer/researcher
March 1999
Rye, New York

Chapter One

A Place

God was with me in this place.

It is a *place* that has had many names and has had a presence for centuries. Some have called it a hill, a hump, a mountain. It rises almost 1,200 feet. It is a *place* that was used to imprison poets, economists, other political prisoners, soldiers, and persons with tuberculosis. The Nazis murdered Jews here. Terrorists have been imprisoned here. It is surrounded by an abysmal and wide moat followed by towering walls. It is a *place* that was not clean or well lit.

It is a *place* of many names. Two examples are:

Tränenberg—the mountain of tears, and
Höllenberg—the mountain of hell.

It is said of this *place* that those who go up the hill do not come back. It is a short fifteen-minute drive from Ludwigsburg, a thirty-minute drive from Stuttgart, and a ninety-minute drive from Nuremberg. Its official title is Hohenasperg also known as Hohen Asperg.

It is a place of nightmares, not a place of pleasant dreams. I remember this place, and how I feared it. When I was but thirteen, I was a prisoner and *celebrated* my thirteenth birthday there. It is there that I became a teenager, and was harassed and threatened. In 1972, twenty-six years after I was released from this place, I drove by it. From a distance it came into view, but I did not stop. I really wanted to stop, but I could not. As I went by I thought, I just can't go back up that hill. I was reminded of the cold, damp cell, and I

remembered the hangman's tree. I began to relive my life in this place and my years of nightmares about it.

Visions of the large tree, the hangman's tree, in the courtyard flashed through my mind. I remembered being told by my guard, an American soldier, that those who do not obey orders are hung; and if that doesn't work, they're shot! He said, "See the bullet marks in the tree!" My prison "mates" included high-ranking German officers suspected of war crimes and other persons who were being "denazified." As I passed the place, I said, "That's the place where I was thrown into a prison cell." I heard a cell door being shut—with a thunderous bang! I thought, I was just a kid and wondered why was I treated like a criminal in that place? I remember that each time I attempted to tell the soldier, "I am an American," he would respond, "Shut up, you little Nazi, shut up!"

For almost four decades I questioned my memory about the hangman's tree. I repeatedly asked myself, "Was there really a hangman's tree in that place?" Did I dream it? Were there bullet marks on the hangman's tree? Did I also imagine those other horrible things? Anytime I was out of my cell I was under the watchful eyes of armed guards. Did I dream that my armed guard shouted, "Do you see that big tree in the courtyard, it's the hangman's tree?" "Make sure," the soldier said, "that you don't ever take your hands off the top of your head when you are out of your cell." The guards escorted me to and from my cell for each meal. I was required to eat in a standing position, with armed guards all around me, staring at me, whispering among themselves. I, the prisoner, was required to be silent. I was ever reminded by my guard not to talk to other prisoners while I was eating. He reminded me that I was to eat in silence; and when I was finished, to stand there with my hands on my head until I was ordered to move on. Several times, I blurted out, "Sir, I am an American!" The soldier snapped back, "Shut up, you

Nazi! Remember what I told you about the hangman's tree.”
As usual, I became frightened and stood there, speechless.

Chapter Two

The Cell

Even though I was a kid, I was locked in a cell in this place. I asked myself many questions. What did I do to be treated like this? I had no idea why Americans would treat another American so harshly. I was just a kid! Was I dangerous? Why was I yelled at? Why did they call me a “little Nazi?” It was cold, wet, and dreary in my cell—it was stark! It was beyond scary. It was frightening. It was madness. Why did my fellow Americans, soldiers in the United States Army, shout orders at me? I am not a Nazi; I am an American, I thought to myself. Why didn’t I have papers that proved I was an American? I believe I was able to keep my sanity only because I always searched for a mental escape from the horrors I was facing. Thus, during my stay in this place, I would have flashbacks. How did I get here?

I remembered the ride in the tarpaulin covered U.S. Army Studebaker truck (called a “six by six” by the American soldiers), that took us up the hill to this place. Then I recalled the viehwagen (boxcar) in which I was sealed for almost four days during one of the coldest winters on record, without heat, without blankets, and without toilets, except for an open, stinking bucket. I remembered I curled up in a fetal position in an attempt to keep myself warm. It is a wonder I did not freeze to death. Each time the train stopped, I would hear the armed American GIs bark “Raus, mach schnell,” in their broken German. Why did they shout at me in German, I wondered? I was an American, I understood English. Didn’t they know that I was an American? My thoughts wandered back to when I left the ship that brought us to Germany.

I thought about my fifty-mile trip in the rear of the army truck, the “six by six” that took us (about 25 persons in the truck I was in) from the ship at the port of Bremerhaven to the city of Bremen. It did not look like a city. It was just a huge pile of rubble. We passed one pile of rubble after another. Where buildings once stood, now there was nothing but heaps of bricks and mortar—ruins. In some instances there were only walls standing amidst the destruction caused by the bombing and fire bombing of the city, mile after mile the scene was the same. I could see what looked like old women pulling hand wagons in which they had placed the bricks they had picked from the piles of rubble. They would put the bricks in the wagon, pull the wagon to where bricks were stacked, and then they would take each brick out of the wagon, one by one, and place it neatly on the stack. I had a good view from where I sat at the very back of the truck. You might say I had “the best seat in the house.” I was ordered to sit there by the armed military guard. I can still hear the loud flapping of the truck’s tarpaulin. I remember the cold wind whipping in from the back end, while I sat there almost frozen. The winds whipped into and around me. I thought my feet were going to freeze off! I hung on to my seat the best I could as the driver sped over the cobblestone roads and swerved to miss the potholes. And when the truck hit a pothole, I nearly bounced out, but somehow I managed to hold on. Why, I wondered, was I ordered to sit at the very back of the truck? As we passed one section of the city, there were no buildings, not even shells or walls of structures—nothing—just rubble, and at a distance in the background stood a tall bomb shelter. It appeared undamaged. Then I said, “My God, what happened here? How many people died here?” However, my thoughts in the cell were short-lived.

My mind continuously wandered from the past to the present. What have they done with my mother? What have they done with my father? What have they done with my

brother? Where are they? My thoughts turned back to the reality of the moment, to me. Each time the soldier escorted me back to the cell, there was silence as I entered. Then the soldier slammed the door shut. Wham! What a noise! The bang of steel against steel thundered through the cell and made me shudder. Each time I returned to my cell it seemed like this banging noise became louder and louder, and my nerves became more frazzled. I heard him set the key in the latch and lock it. In my cell it was painful to dwell on the present for very long periods of time. Where did all of this begin? Where will it end? The thoughts of misery, destruction, carnage, and hate were too much for my young mind to bear. I would have to think of better times, better places, and better people. My mind wandered back to my family, friends, teachers, and neighbors in Brooklyn.

Chapter Three

The Best of Times, The Worst of Times

I often wondered about my friends in Brooklyn. What is my best friend Fred Flynn doing now? Did Fred's brothers get safely back from the war? Is everyone together again? Who is helping the Italian grocer on the corner of my block? I worked for him, stocking his shelves, and bringing up the bottles of beer and sodas from the cellar beneath his store. I even helped to make deliveries to his customers. Many times he or his son would take me to the fresh vegetable market, where they purchased produce for the store. Sometimes he would even let me use the *picker* to get the cereal boxes from the top shelf. Anytime the grocer needed help I was available. I wondered if his sons had to go off to war? There was also the German butcher's shop across the street. Once in a while the butcher would allow me to sweep up the sawdust from the floor of the shop, and my reward would be a slice or two of lunchmeat. Both of these proprietors were friends of my parents.

I also did odd jobs for the coal and kerosene man whose business was in a small garage on Cypress Avenue. He would let me fill his customers' kerosene cans (heating oil) and/or their coal sacks. There were times when he let me go on major deliveries with him to help put the coal chute into the cellars of his customers. He, like the grocer and the butcher, was a nice man—each of them rewarded me well for my work. I was always looking for ways to earn money so I could buy the things I needed that otherwise we could not afford.

Besides doing these small jobs, I formed the Himrod Street baseball team. When we were starting out, I told all of our players to get their numbers and shirts, and bring them over to my house and my Mom would sew on the numbers. Then I told Mom what I had planned. She replied, “You did what?” I said, “Mom, I told them you would sew on their numbers. You know Mom, I figured because you sewed all day at work, you could do it fast.” Mom saw the excitement in my eyes and agreed to do it. Thus, the Himrod Street Gang was the only sandlot baseball team in the neighborhood with numbers on their shirts. Our team had no coach and no equipment. We just played sandlot ball with our own gloves, balls, and bats. We were also the umpires, which led to many arguments about balls and strikes. Sometimes we had to cover our worn-out baseballs with adhesive tape, and some of our cracked baseball bats were mended with either adhesive or black electrical tape. I do know this, we had lots of fun. I missed my friends.

From time to time my friends and I would sneak into the Grover Cleveland High School baseball field. When we played there, each of us had a dream. A dream that one day we too would play baseball for Grover Cleveland High School. Then, we would no longer have to slip into the ballpark. However, when I left my home in Brooklyn, my dreams stayed behind. I no longer had visions of playing for Grover Cleveland.

I began to think of my Pop. I remembered how honest he was, and how he taught us to be honest. Two particular lessons on honesty came to mind.

One lesson on honesty occurred when I was eight years old. During one of my early ventures, I walked down to a Woolworth’s “five and dime” store on Knickerbocker Avenue about eight blocks from my home. I saw a pencil and eraser I thought I really needed, but I didn’t have enough

money. I looked and saw no one watching, so I grabbed them and put them quickly in my pocket. My heart was racing as I walked out of the store. When no one shouted or ran after me, I became proud of myself. I had done it! I would not let myself think about it being wrong. It was only a pencil and eraser! That evening shortly before dinner my father asked me how I got my new pencil and eraser. I replied, "Oh, the manager in the five and dime store gave them to me." "Which, five and dime store?" Pop asked. I replied, "Oh, you know the Woolworth Store on Knickerbocker Avenue." Pop replied with another question, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes, I'm sure." Then to my surprise, Pop said, "Let's go down there so you can show me." "Okay," I said. Instantly, I became very nervous, but I figured after we went down the three flights of stairs from our flat, Pop would believe my story. Wrong! Pop and I walked down to the store; all during our walk Pop kept asking me if I was sure that the manager gave me the pencil and eraser. Each time he would ask, I replied in the affirmative.

When we got to the storefront, Pop said, "Let's wait out here. When you see the manager who gave you the pencil and eraser, point him out." All along my thinking was that my father was bluffing, and I was going to stick to my story, because I knew the consequences if Pop found out that I stole the pencil and eraser. When I saw a manager, I turned to my father and said, "Pop, there he is, the young man in the white shirt and black tie. That's him!" Pop looked at me and said, "Okay, let's go in and talk to him." I was caught and I knew it. I turned to my father and told him that I took them without paying. This, I thought would close the case. But it did not. Instead my father looked at me and said, "Archie, go in there and give back the pencil and eraser to the manager, and tell him you're sorry for stealing and that you won't steal ever again." The walk to the manager seemed like ten miles! But he was very nice and when I

handed them to him and explained what I had done, he said, “Thank you for being honest.” I learned a valuable lesson. My second lesson regarding “honesty is the best policy” occurred when I was ten and a paperboy for the Brooklyn Eagle newspaper. On this Sunday morning I started my route early as usual. It was still dark. I picked up my papers just a few doors from where I lived. When I was sorting my papers and putting them into my newly won canvas delivery sack, I noticed a bicycle parked in front of some garages across the street.

When I finished my route and came around the corner, the bike was still there. I had never ridden a bike before, but I always wanted to try, and wanted a bike for my paper route. I took my delivery sack and threw it into our vestibule, then I went back to the bike. I got on it and to my surprise in a very short time I was riding the bike quite well. It was getting late in the morning and I thought I had better get home before my father came looking for me. I rode the bike just up the street to where our flat was and parked it in our yard. Then I went into our apartment house and down into the cellar. I unlocked and propped the cellar door open, and walked the bike down the cellar steps and parked it in front of our storage stall.

After I closed the outside cellar door I anxiously ran up the stairs, I could hardly wait until I told my father about my latest find. By the time I got upstairs to our flat I was a bit winded, but quickly announced my finding with a question, “Pop, guess what I found?” Pop asked, “What did you find?” I replied, “A bicycle.” “A what?” he asked. I again told him I found a bicycle. Then my father got up from his chair and asked me, “And just where did you find the bike?” I told him by the garages on the other side of our street. “Take that bike back where you found it immediately! Make sure you leave it just as you found it! And from now on when you find something that isn’t yours, leave it alone.”

“But, Pop,” I said. “No ‘buts,’ take it back,” Pop ordered. So I took it back. I thought the whole episode would be over and done with after I took back the bicycle, but it was not. When I got home I was lectured by my father about “finding” things that don’t belong to me.

As I thought about my wonderful Pop, I became sad. Why did they treat him like that? It was almost too disturbing to think about. I began to wish that this is just a nightmare and when I wake up we will still be in Brooklyn all together as a family. But this nightmare was real!

I also thought about my days in the Boy Scouts of America. I remembered learning to tie the hangman’s noose. I never thought that I would ever worry about being hung in such a noose. It was most difficult for me to tie some of the knots, while others I found easy. One reason I found it hard to tie some of them was because the instructors were right handed and I was a lefty. The sheepshank and the fisherman’s knot came to mind. My brother and I would walk together to our scout meetings that were held in the Lutheran Church about eight blocks from our home.

Suddenly and without warning I was startled by a strange sound! It sounded like an echo in a tunnel. I was distracted, and asked myself, “When did this disaster begin?”

The Summer of 1943 was the beginning of the nightmare. One day, two Special Agents of the FBI rapped on the door to our flat. I remember the loud rapping startled me and that my mother was very frightened. She went to the door and asked, “Who is it?” The agents announced, “The FBI!” My mother unlocked and opened the door and before my 4’ 9” mother could invite the agents in, they flashed their badges and identification cards and forced their way in. They told my mother and me to sit down in the kitchen while they searched our home. The agents not only searched our home,

they also ransacked it! They threw the clothing and other articles out of my dresser and made a shambles of my room. Clothing and other articles were scattered all over the house.

The agents found nothing, but they did take several of my mother's personal photographs of her two brothers. In addition to the photographs, the agents took several letters that my parents had received from my father's parents in Germany. Before they left, my mother had tears running down both of her cheeks. It was clear that she had been frightened by these men and what they had done inside her clean, neat home. Neither my mother nor I knew why the agents had been in our home and why they tossed our clothing and other personal effects out of the dressers. They just came in and took over. They asked no questions, offered no apologies, and gave no reason for the search.

When the agents finally left, my mother sobbed and cried aloud. She questioned why this had happened. It took quite awhile, but she slowly pulled herself together and without a word began to put everything back in place.

All of a sudden reality set in again—the present—I was back in my cold and damp cell. I wonder where my mother is? Is she also in a cell like this at another place? Is it as cold and damp where she is held? Do they shout and bark out commands to her, as they do to me. Where is my brother? Where is my father? What is happening to them?

Each time I was in my cell by myself, it seemed as if it was an eternity before I would see or hear anyone, and when the armed soldier came for me, I again shuddered. He would begin by shouting, "Put your hands on your head." Then he would unlock the cell. "Come out!" he would shout. As soon as I stepped out of the cell, he would yell, "Stop!" The GI would direct me as I walked, and would follow just a few paces behind me, telling me when to turn, when to stop, and