



## **EGMONT ZEHLIN ARREST RECOLLECTIONS**

**1946 - April - Egmont Zechlin sends the Harnack family his recollections which he had written in May 1945.**

Their final hours in freedom on the Curonian Spit at an idyllic fisherman's lodge situated in the lagoon right next to the elk roaming grounds. They went for a walk after dinner and Arvid seemed to have something on his mind. When they reached the village streets he asked the two women to go on ahead, with Egmont and Arvid behind.

Harnack said, "How wonderful to be so free in a natural setting, for once to be free at last of all the intrigue and the big city. I am really looking forward to the coming days. Then a gust of wind told us a thunderstorm was coming, we heard thunder and had to hurry to make it back to our summerhouse before the cloudburst. Once there we went right to bed. So I never did find out what he wanted to tell me.

When I went into the yard the next morning he was standing there in shirtsleeves, talking to a gentleman I didn't know. And then I saw that there were also several other men standing at the garden fence. He said to me in this very calm manner, and he even drew it out somewhat, "The gentlemen had a breakfast date with a lady and didn't know what house she lived in" his words had a slightly mocking undertone, of course. Then the man pulled out his identification and said to me, "We are the alien police. We are just combing through the town." I still didn't suspect anything as the two of them went into Harnack's room I said, I'll go and get my ID cards. Then one of the men came over, looked at our IDs and said, almost in passing, "We have orders to inform Senior Executive Counsilar Harnack he is needed in the ministry." to that, Anneliese responded naively, "But they only needed to send a telegram." Then he asked us if we had made arrangement to meet anyone here and I answered, "Yes, of course, the Harnack's. Right after that I went from our room, which was in the back of the house, through the front garden to the front. I knocked softly on the door to Harnack's room and as I opened it with the words, "after all the excitement, do we want... I saw both of them packing surrounded by three men. Harnack walked over to me and said calmly, "We're going with the gentlemen to Berlin. They need me in the ministry." and after a pause he added, "it is a disgrace what in Germany..." At that moment one of the men stepped between us. However, I pushed my way into the room and explained... I realized now what was happening. "But you haven't even had breakfast yet." I remained calm, like out in the field when it gets dangerous, and tried to gain time to think about what to do. First of all I wanted to get close to him in case he wanted to whisper something to me. But the three or four people moved around very casually and inconspicuously, yet in such a way that at the right moment they always managed to get between us. And when I wanted

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to help Mildred pack, one of them pushed his way over and said, "Oh, let me, I'd be happy to help!" He also offered her a cigarette and when she hesitated he said, "Please take it, it'll do you good." Maintaining the masquerade about the trip to the ministry I insisted that we should first have coffee together, and told the two of them vigorously to come with me. Finally Harnack said to me, "The gentlemen are very friendly. They haven't had their coffee yet either. Go on ahead and we'll all join you." so I left the room and went to the inn with Anneliese. There we packed the coffee pot and everything else, and went back and set the table while the others were still packing. As I led Mildred to the table she covered her face for a moment with her hand and moaned, "Oh what a disgrace! What a disgrace! I then had a brief conversation with Harnack, which the Gestapo man next to us listened to attentively, and once I tried... without success, of course to convince him of Harnack's innocence and at the same time to let Harnack know that I would do everything to get him out. I mentioned the misunderstanding that would soon be cleared up and that the dean who was a high-ranking SS Leader and was even in the SD, thought very highly of him and would try hard to help him. Meanwhile, Mildred had finished packing. It made an incredibly strong impression on me that she made the beds especially orderly, so as not to make any trouble for anyone, and then she did something particularly typical of her tender soul and her sense of aesthetics; She grabbed the flower vase with flowers that her husband had surely given her the day before and looked around for water. She filled the vase with water from the washing pitcher and after looking around for the proper place, set the flowers on the table. She pulled on the edge of the tablecloth so it lay perfectly flat and gave the perfectly tidy room a final look over. Then the two of them turned to go.

At this point, we turned to go with them, the highest ranking Gestapo officer, who had been nothing but polite, if not friendly, up to then, said to me in a changed tone... and Harnack stopped moving and listen to everything-"Professor (he used this form of address for the first time here, which also showed that he had either heard from the others who had checked our IDs or was otherwise informed as to who I was), I consider you too intelligent to assume that you would not know what is going on here. I have instructions to handle this matter as discreetly as possible. This has been difficult due to your presence. But I would like to inform you that you are not to tell anyone anything that you have seen and heard here; otherwise we will have to come back to you." And then he said to Anneliese: "My dear madam, the same goes for you." Upon which I explained: "These two people are faculty colleagues of mine. You cannot bar me from contacting the dean, that is SS -Oberfuhrer S., whom you presumably know, to inform him of the matter." And he replied, "You are not to do that. He will hear about it in due time. And if you try to contact him by telephone or telegraph, we will hear about it. As he turned I nodded to Harnack to let him know that I would do something. Then we left. I kissed Mildred's hand and as I said goodbye to Harnack, I could finally look

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him in the face unobserved. Up to now my expression had had to give a slight impression of corresponding to the tactic I assumed toward the Gestapo men that it might all be a minor misunderstanding that would soon be cleared up, Harnack said to me, and he was very moved, "Dear Egmont (and we were not generally in the habit of addressing each other by our first names), thank you for everything, and for today as well," and I could only put all I felt into my handshake. And they went out. They both looked back at us and at the landscape.

Arvid Harnack's idea , as he repeatedly explained to me ever since we met in 1930 in Marburg, was. .. to put it succinctly... that Germany had to decide between the socialist East and the capitalist West. And that for ethical, economic, and political reasons, only following the example of the East could lead to good. Although his wife was an American, this was his conviction. No doubt it came essentially from his preoccupation with the situation of the working class, which was the topic of his doctoral thesis and had also been the theme for his Rockefeller grant in America. His socialist interests had developed especially through his time at the University of Wisconsin, where he met his wife. In that connection, he pursued "planned economy" studies and once founded the "ARPLAN" society, which stood for "Working Group for the Study of the Planned Economy." While Harnack supported the Russian option, already in our Marburg talks in 1930 I used to argue back that if fronts were established with the proletarian East opposing the capitalist West, then Germany would become a battlefield, that is, along with Rhine, and there would also be war within society. And we would then lose our sovereignty and become an appendage of Russia. To quote Bismarck, Russia would have greater leverage: it would be a "societas leonina"! At that time I already supported a political "free hand" strategy, which involved maintaining relations with all the great powers, if possible, so that if it became necessary to make a decision, there would be enough freedom to opt for the one that allowed us to retain the greatest possible degree of national liberty. Harnack could sometimes get almost angry when I expounded on such thoughts to him. Harnack predicted that every one of us must decide if he wants to live east or west of the Elbe. The trip to the Curonian Spit was arranged so the two men could discuss their views further. They had reached agreement up to a point that his senseless war had to end and that no one would negotiate with Hitler and his crew.

Egmont described Mildred as a rare woman whose rare combination of scientific knowledge, literary and poetical creative power feminine charm, and especially decency of character made her one of the most ideal women I ever met. We all fought the struggle to save her with all our might. Harnack's sister, who stood up boldly and proudly to a beast of a prosecutor, a sadist named Roeder, went to all kinds of people under a false name. Axel von Harnack managed to smuggle at least one volume of Goethe into her cell and all sorts of attempts were made with the Swiss envoy, etc.

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Harnack, we found out, was radiant with joy when his death sentence was pronounced, because at the same time it was announced that his wife had been sentenced to five (actually 6) years' penal servitude. He was convinced, of course, that she would soon be freed, as he believed the war would end much sooner.