

# Honoring Those Who Serve

## Earl Burgardt Translated in Nazi War Trials

BY MARY MILLS HEIDBRINK Staff Writer for the *San Antonio Express-News*

Raised in a German-American farming community in Kansas, Earl Burgardt spoke only German as a young boy. Though punished for it when he started school, his fluency in German became a valuable asset when he was sent to Germany toward the end of World War II.



Earl Burgardt

Working in the Third U.S. Army headquarters in Germany under Gen. George Patton, Burgardt was later selected to do translation work in Nuremberg, during the trials of Nazi war criminals after the war.

“My mother said he was kept on because he was such a good translator,” his son Michael Burgardt said. “He was one of ten they kept to translate.”

Burgardt, 90, died with pancreatic cancer.

The great-great-grandson of the so-called Volga Germans—ethnic Germans who were invited to farm in Russia but later left when their government insisted their sons serve in the Russian army—Burgardt grew up on a Kansas farm during The Great Depression.

“When the crops failed, and the dust storms came, they were almost starving,” his wife Ila Burgardt said.

“They were very religious Catholics and spoke German, not English,” she said. “The church was big part of his life.”

Living through the Dust Bowl years, Burgardt later recalled his mother wetting towels to put in the windows to stop the dust from getting in the house, his son said.

Drafted into the Army during his senior year in high school, Burgardt was allowed to graduate before reporting to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After basic training at Camp Livingston, Louisiana, Burgardt was put on a ship to Europe.

“It took us nine days to cross the Northern Atlantic. We landed in France,” Burgardt recalled in a 2016 Veteran’s History Project interview.

Transported by freight train, he and other soldiers were loaded into “forty-by-eight-foot box cars,” Burgardt said. “It was cold, freezing, we were on that train for two days before we arrived in Germany, in a small town called Bad Tölz.”

It was 1945 and Burgardt was assigned to an abandoned Waffen-SS officers’ school that had become a headquarters for the Third Army.

“That’s where I lived, and worked for Gen. Patton,” Burgardt said in the interview. “They picked the people that had finished their high school education to assign to headquarters. I was assigned to an area where the mail all came through our office.”

Burgardt was released from the military after his translation duties ended.

Moving to Wichita, Kansas, Burgardt was hired by Boeing, working as an accountant and later, as an auditor. Retiring from Boeing after forty-two years, Burgardt moved to San Antonio, Texas, where he enjoyed golf, dancing, and Spanish music. ■

This article first appeared in the *San Antonio Express-News* and was written by staff writer Mary Mills Heidbrink.

## From Hitler’s Wolves to Christ’s Lambs

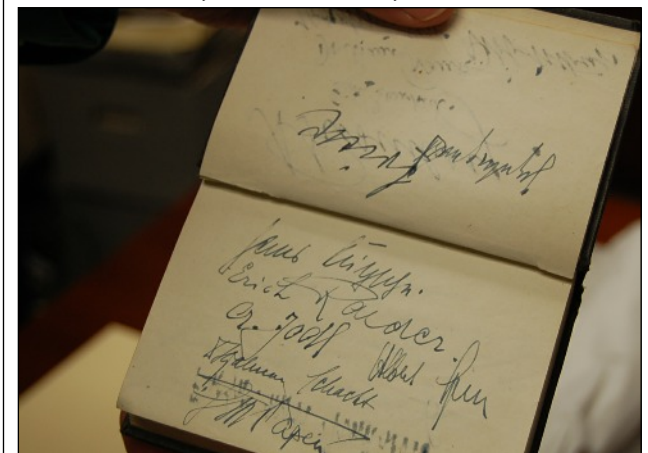
They walked to the gallows together, pastor and penitent. Each step up took them closer to the fall—the abbreviated, fatal fall to come. As the criminal stood above the trapdoor that, moments later, would open to rope him into eternity, an officer asked him if he had any final words, “I place all my confidence in the Lamb who made atonement for my sins,” he said. “May God have mercy on my soul.”



Henry Gerecke

Then, turning toward the man who had been the shepherd of his soul during his incarceration—the man who had been his confessor, his preacher, and the one from whose hand he had received the body and the blood of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper, he said, “I’ll see you again.” Then noosed, hooded in black, and legs tied, he dropped out of this world into another.

The “shepherd,” Henry Gerecke, was in his early 50s when he accepted the assignment to become a spiritual adviser to men considered the scourge of the earth. He was chosen based on his missionary work in jails, his ability to speak German and his faith. Gerecke died October 11, 1961 in Chester, Illinois. ■



The Devil’s Bible? Above is a German-language New Testament featuring the signatures of seventeen Nazi defendants of the Nuremberg War Crime Trials.



### Duffers for Veterans Golf Scramble

**Saturday, June 16.**

**Honey Creek Golf Club, 15276 Hwy K, Aurora**

Benefit fundraiser for the Veteran residents of the Missouri Veterans Home in Mt. Vernon. Four Person scramble. Fee of \$60/person, cart included. Lunch served. Number of flights based on entrees.

Registration times of 8:00 am & 12:30 pm. To register call David Kloppenborg at 417-466-7103 or email at [david.kloppenborg@mvc.dps.mo.gov](mailto:david.kloppenborg@mvc.dps.mo.gov)