

Town honors hero ...27 years later

New York Times Service

OFFENBURG, Germany — Franz Lienert, a retired railroad employe, has become a hero in this little town at the foot of the Black Forest mountains.

But his wartime heroism did not show on the battlefield and he never talked about it in 27 years.

As a Nazi customs official stationed at the Polish-Romanian frontier during the Second World War, Lienert, now 61 years old, risked his own life to save a Jewish family from deportation and certain death in the gas chambers, it came to light last month.

An infrequent occurrence under the Nazis, Lienert's courageous deed would never have become known at all if his wartime Jewish friend, now living in Haifa, Israel, had not launched a police search for him to express his belated thanks.

Last month West German police wired back a "we found him" message and Lienert has been a local celebrity — much against his will — ever since. Only his wife had known about his singular act of bravery.

A simple modest man, Lienert says he does not like the "fuss" about his deed but he cherishes the letter which Paul Romer, a Haifa pharmacist, sent him two weeks ago.

"As soon as I am recovered," Romer wrote from a hospital bed in Haifa, "I shall pay off my debt of gratitude and plant a tree for you in the Grove of the Just."

A frail man suffering from chronic bronchitis, Lienert does not care for much talk, but after prodding he told his

story in singsong Swabian dialect.

He said he was stationed in 1942 at Kutu, near Kolomya, in Polish Galicia, where he developed a friendship with Romer, the local pharmacist, after buying a salve for his eczema. "We weren't supposed to enter Jewish shops but we customs people along the Polish-Romanian border didn't worry much about the police," he explained.

One evening in October, 1942, the Jews of Kutu were driven out of their houses and herded together at the market place, Lienert recalled, adding that he happened to be at the Romers when the action started.

He said he quickly urged Romer to hide his wife and three children in the cellar, and they were hardly out of sight when two heavily armed nationalist Ukrainian soldiers smashed in the front door.

"I knew what awaited the Jews," Lienert continued, "and I therefore knew that I had to do something for the Romers." Unarmed as he was, he planted himself in front of the intruders and told them: "I am in command of this house."

Lienert said he could not recall after so many years exactly what more he said. "I think I must have said

something like 'What do you want here? Get out of here fast. This house is under my command.'"

Obviously impressed by these words and by the swastika on Lienert's grey customs uniform, the Ukrainians left the house without even venturing a glimpse inside. He said he stayed with the Jewish family through the night in case the troops came back. Shortly after the incident his unit was transferred from Kutu.

The pharmacist wrote in the letter that he and his family also left Kutu a short while later to avoid deportation. "We went underground and woods and fields afforded us protection and sustenance," he said.

The Romers' ordeal ended in 1944 when the Soviet army liberated the area from Nazi occupation. He said he then moved on to Breslau, now Wroclaw, in Western Poland from where he emigrated to Israel in 1957.

The Offenburg government paid tribute to Lienert's deed during a special session last week and he was given a plaque with the inscription "In tribute to a noble deed — your grateful community." Almost all West German newspapers reported the incident.

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Alberta plans more

The successful day parole system in Alberta penal institutions will be expanded to allow more serving prisoners to work and go to school.

So far this year 37 men have applied for day parole, 32 gaining it.

The system was implemented this year by the attorney-general's department in co-operation with the National Parole Board.

KEY CENTRE

The Belmont Rehabilitation Centre near Edmonton is the key institution for men on day parole. It has 29 inmates of whom 13 were transferred from Fort Saskatchewan Jail because it's close to Edmonton.

Calgary has two men on day

parole, Peace River Jail has one man on a weekday parole to allow the inmate work on a nearby farm, returning to the institution on weekends.

Warden E. E. Noel of the Fort Saskatchewan Jail, said, "I'm in favor of this type of conditional release."

COMMUNITY TAKES OVER

"There is a point where facilities in an institution are superceded by rehabilitation facilities in the community," he said. The highly successful program would be expanded.

Ronald Kur of the National Parole Board stated, "We are very fortunate we are getting the co-operation from provincial authorities in putting this program into operation."

"It's highly successful and I would certainly like to see it expanded. There's no delay in processing applications."

The 29 men who leave Belmont every morning are taken to the city bus line where they ride a bus to their place of employment.

OUT TO SCHOOL

During the school year one man attended Alberta College, one went to Victoria Composite High School and one to Stony Plain High School.

The inmates work at jobs in the city: one is a chef, several are on construction, two are with the city engineer's department, two are car salesmen, two work in a tire shop, and one is taking a U of A summer school science course.

