

TEACHER LUDWIG SCHWAN (1920-1945), the Savior of his Students

The untold story of a Danube Swabian hero from Karlsdorf in Banat. By Frank Schmidt

The fair land of Banat in southeastern Europe is bounded by the rivers Theiss in the west, the lesser Mieresch (Maros) in the north, and the mighty Danube in the south. The Carpathian Mountains form its eastern border.

Banat had been part of ancient Hungary for centuries, but was occupied by the Ottoman Turks after the defeat of the Hungarian Army at Mohacs in 1526. In his haste to escape capture by the Turks, the Hungarian King drowned in a nearby river. The surviving nobles then awarded the Holy Crown of Hungary to the king's brother-in-law, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and the German Nation, whose seat was in Vienna. Although Hungary was occupied by the Turks for the next 150 years, the Habsburgs were the nominal kings of Hungary during that time.

In the 17th century, the Turks tried to expand their Islamic empire into Europe but were utterly defeated by Christian armies at the gates of Vienna on September 12, 1683. They were eventually driven out of Hungary by Austro-German armies under the legendary Prince Eugene of Savoy. In 1718 a peace treaty was signed and Banat reverted back to Hungary. For various reasons Banat was administered by the Imperial Council in Vienna until the *Ausgleich* (Equalization) of 1867 when Austria-Hungary was formed.

In order to populate and cultivate the wasteland of Banat, Emperor Karl VI issued an "impopulation" edict throughout his empire which offered certain material benefits as well as personal freedom in perpetuity to those

wishing to settle in Banat.

Because of their proven loyalty and work ethic, Count Florimund Mercy, the able Governor of Banat who was himself a Lorrainer, especially favored German farmers and craftsmen from Lorraine, Alsace, Palatinate and other southwest German principalities. Their settlements were dispersed among other peoples in the hope that these would emulate the industrious Germans. It was the Germans – now known as Danube Swabians – who were the first to introduce the steel plow to the virgin soil of Banat. They planted orchards, vineyards, as well as mulberry trees along the streets of their agricultural villages to provide food for the silkworms that were the basis of a thriving silk industry. They also introduced selective cattle breeding, hog raising, etc. Mainly due to the Danube Swabians, Banat was eventually transformed from a backwater of Europe into one of the world's great breadbaskets.

After the First World War, the victors forced Hungary to give up 2/3 of its territory. Over 90% of Banat was arbitrarily awarded to two royal dictatorships, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (called Yugoslavia after 1929). This was contrary to the wishes of the affected peoples and made a mockery of the Allies' oft-proclaimed desire for "self-determination" of peoples, a propaganda ploy intended primarily to deceive their own people.

Danube Swabian settlements were thus split among three mutually antagonistic states, all of whom denied them certain rights. However, Danube Swabians are a tolerant and resilient people and they soon adapted to the new political environment and life went on much as it had before, albeit with certain precautions.

Karlsdorf was founded in 1802 and was named after Emperor Karl VI who initiated the German settlement of Banat. In 1944 it had a population of 3428 souls, all but 60 of whom were Danube Swabians. Besides being in the center of a rich agricultural area, it had three brickyards and was the home of the world famous Hertz salami processing plant.

Ludwig Schwan was born on September 28, 1920 in the Banat village of Vladimirovac into a Danube Swabian family who were descendants of German pioneers. He became a



Roundup of Danube Swabians "intelligentsia" in front of the Karlsdorf Town Hall on November 4, 1944 to be taken to a place of execution by the bloodthirsty partisans. As seen by graphic artist Magdalena Kopp-Krumes