SISTERS FROM GURTWEIL WHO SERVED IN THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

Setting the stage: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR: The Germany that we know today did not yet exist in 1870. “Germany” was a confederation of independent states or duchies.

In 1815, following the Congress of Vienna, 39 German States formed the German Confederation. In 1861, King Wilhem I ascended to the Prussian throne. He appointed Otto von Bismarck as Prime Minister in 1862.

In 1866 a war fought between the German Confederation and the Kingdom of Prussia resulted in Prussian dominance over northern Germany. The remaining German states formed the North German Confederation which Prussia also controlled. But still a few southern German states remained independent of Prussia.

Now it is 1870. Prussian Chancellor Bismarck saw a way to frighten the south German states into joining the North German Confederation by raising the prospect of an invasion by France. France viewed a possible coalition of south German states (Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Baden, and Hesse), as being too powerful a nation next to its border.

Bismarck altered a diplomatic telegram to make it seem that it insulted the French. France reacted to the perceived insult by declaring war on Prussia on July 19, 1870. This is the Franco-Prussian War which lasted less than ten months. Prussia defeated France. One significant result was the unification of northern and southern German states into the German Empire. Bismarck became chancellor of Germany and in time initiated the infamous May Laws which compelled the emigration of all of our sisters from Germany. Remember, nine had already gone to America in February 1870. But that’s another story.
Franco-Prussian War, hospital ward, Dieulouard. Etching by A. Lançon, 1870. Credit: Wellcome Library, London. Wellcome Images

The sisters who served in the War were Sr. Theckla Zahner, Sr. Bonaventure Mühlhaupt, Sr. Augusta Schmiedle, Sr. Paula Heinemann, Sr. Barbara Weber, Sr. Amalia Mutter, and Sr. Clementine Zerr.

Little is known about the sisters, other than Sr. Clementine who left O’Fallon in July of 1875 and returned to Belle Prairie; she is considered Foundress of the Precious Blood Sisters in Ruma [Adorers of the Blood of Christ].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>BIRTH</th>
<th>BIRTHPLACE</th>
<th>ENTRANCE</th>
<th>RECEPTION</th>
<th>FIRST VOWS</th>
<th>Age in 1870</th>
<th>FINAL VOWS</th>
<th>DEATH</th>
<th>Age at death</th>
<th>Grave site</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zahner, Thekla</td>
<td>7/12/1847</td>
<td>Kenzingen, Baden</td>
<td>11/16/1869</td>
<td>4/7/1870</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8/17/1878</td>
<td>7/6/1928</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>38:2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schmiedle, Augusta</td>
<td>8/8/1843</td>
<td>Unteralpfen, Germany</td>
<td>4/5/1863</td>
<td>7/9/1863</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10/24/1864</td>
<td>12/5/1877</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zerr, Clementine</td>
<td>12/9/1832</td>
<td>Sassbachried, Amt Buel, Baden</td>
<td>7/6/1928</td>
<td>2/19/1852</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4/14/1853</td>
<td>1/24/1906</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>ASC cemetery Ruma IL</td>
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Adapted from the Chronicles, 1845-1916, 1926-1928, section “1857-1873 Gurtweil," pp 29-30

In the summer of 1870, the Franco-Prussian War began. After the victory of the Prussians over the Austrians in 1866, the rule of the German nation had been given to the Prussians. Soon a number of smaller kingdoms were added and this enlargement was the basis for another war with the French. Under a rather flimsy pretense, Napoleon III suddenly declared war on Germany in July, 1870. This latter nation had become so unified and strengthened that within two weeks half a million soldiers were in the field. Naturally, there would be much to be done in the hospitals. Father Superior, Rev. Anthony Fraessle, decided that the Sisters should volunteer to care for the wounded. Their offer was accepted by the German Government. The opportunity for the sisters to present themselves as working for the welfare of the Fatherland was thought to have come at the right time. Sisters who were willing to do this had to receive instructions from the doctors in Tiengen, 3 miles from Gurtweil.

The sisters had to learn how to bind wounds and, in general, how to take care of the wounded. Mother Clementine and six other Sisters were accepted by the State and at the end of July, 1870, they departed for Karlsruhe.

One may suppose they made the journey by train. If so, it was somewhat round-about, as the map shows. By train, Gurtweil to Karlsruhe was approximately 159 miles. From Karlsruhe to Mannheim was another 45 miles.

In the beginning of August, the Germans crossed the French border and victoriously marched forward. Battle followed after battle, victory after victory. The Sisters were mainly employed in the lazarettes [hospitals for treating contagious diseases] or hospitals in Mannheim. There was much work to be done and Sister Clementine Zerr soon found it too strenuous and, being ill, had to return to Gurtweil. The other six, however, continued to the end of the war.

The war lasted not quite a year. In the following year, the capital city, Paris, was captured and March 1, 1871, the German army marched in victoriously. The humiliated enemy asked for peace. This was declared in May, 1871.

In the spring of that year, the last of the Sisters returned from Mannheim. In recognition of their service to the State, the Cross of Honor was given to all, including Father Superior. All of the Sisters, as well as Reverend Anthony Fraessle, received a certificate of recognition from the German State for their bravery and faithful service. The Countess Louise, the Grand Duchess of Baden, presented each of these brave Sisters with a silver watch in token of gratitude for their faithful service. Medals of merit were also awarded to them.

On the following page are pictures of the medal and cross which the sisters received for their service. The document accompanying the cross [translated by Sr. Marie Klein] says in part:

Friedrich, by the Grace of God
Grand Duchy of Baden, Duchy of Zaeringen

“We have felt ourselves moved, by the esteemed remembrance of the self-sacrifice and devotion in our country during the war which has now ended, by the care of the wounded and the sick, by the solicitude for the troops, and by the support of the families from which the reserves and militia men were drawn to serve, to give a special remembrance recognition and to prescribe as follows:

Section I
“For those men, women, and young ladies who have dedicated themselves in outstanding service to the best of their ability, and in an enduring and profitable manner, a Special Remembrance Recognition will be awarded.”
These are photos of the medal and cross that the sisters received. By Googling one can find many images of the medal but no images of this exact cross can be found.

The obverse [front] shows the Prussian royal crown and Royal cypher [W] of William I over the inscription Für Pflichttreue im Kriege (For devotion to duty in the war). Inscribed around the edge is Gott war mit uns, Ihm sei die Ehre (God was with us, to Him be the glory).

On the reverse [back] is a wreath of oak leaves on a cross with rays between the four arms. In the center of the cross are the dates 1870 and 1871.

The medal for non-combatants was made of steel.

Below is a copy of one of the certificates given along with the medal.

Continued from Friedrich’s document:

Section II

[The Special Remembrance Recognition] consists of a cross made of bronze; in the center of the front side is a circular shield with the cross of the Charitable Society; under the shield is the Baden Coat of Arms, and above it is the crown; to the left is the year, 1870, to the right, 1871, and on the reverse side of the shield there is shown our monogram with the crown.”

Below is a translation.

WITH GOD FOR EMPEROR-KING AND FATHERLAND

Upon the command of His Majesty, the Emperor and King, this war-medal of steel, established by His Excellency for the non-combatant group, is given to

SISTER AUGUSTA SCHMIEDLE

of the Precious Blood at Curtweil in recognition for her voluntary services in nursing and caring for the wounded and sick during the victorious campaign, 1870-1871, of which this certificate gives testimony.

Berlin, June 18, 1872
Royal General Order Commission
Fidelity to Duty in the War, 1870-1871