

2.8 Summary: The Trapps until early 1938

Georg Ritter von Trapp was born on 4 April 1880 in Zara/Dalmatia (now Zadar/Croatia) to August Ritter von Trapp (1836–1884) and his wife Hedwig, née Wepler (1855–1911). Both parents had been born on the territory of today's state of Hesse/Germany; August's ancestors had come from Lorraine in the first half of the seventeenth century. The family had no connection with Tyrol, especially not with the noble family Trapp there.

August apparently had come to Austria-Hungary to join its navy. In 1874, as a captain, he managed to save nearly the entire crew of the brig "Säida"; as a reward, he was ennobled and made a hereditary knight in 1877, becoming August Ritter von Trapp.

A year earlier, August had married Hedwig; besides Georg they had another son, Werner (1881–1915), who would die on a Galician battlefield during the Great War, and a daughter, "Hede" (1877–1947), who became a known painter and poet. The family was Lutheran in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, although Werner converted to Roman Catholicism in 1907, and Georg in about 1925.

After August's death, the Trapps finally settled in Fiume (Rijeka/Croatia) where Georg attended a navy high-school from 1894 to 1898. After graduation, he was enlisted in the Austro-Hungarian Navy and went on a year-long journey to the Pacific. Having come back in 1899, Georg was called up to leave on 23 June 1900 on the torpedo cruiser "Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia" for China as part of the rather small Austro-Hungarian squadron sent to help international forces to quell the Boxer Uprising. Most of the time Georg lived there "like in peacetime", but on 20 September 1900 he saw some of the horrors of war when he participated

in taking the Peitang (Beidang) Forts in today's Tianjin. In May 1901 he transferred in Nagasaki/Japan from the "Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia" to the "Donau" and returned to Austria-Hungary. (On neither journey did he "circumnavigate" the globe.)

After his return he slowly rose up the ranks. In 1908 he was promoted to ship-of-the-line lieutenant 2nd class and despatched to Fiume to supervise the construction of submarines there. Apparently at the launch of the submarine "U 5" in 1909, Georg met Agathe Whitehead.

Agathe's father, John Whitehead (1854–1902), the head of the Whitehead torpedo factory in Fiume, was the son of the inventor of the torpedo, Robert Whitehead (1823–1905), and, although British, had been born in Fiume. In 1887 he married Agatha countess Breunner-Enkevoerth (1859–1945), a member of the higher Austrian nobility, and had six children with her, all raised as Catholics, like their mother, not Anglicans, like their father.

Agathe, who was born on 14 June 1891 in Fiume, was their third child; especially her brothers Frank "Uncle Franky" (1889–1950) and Robert "Uncle Bobby" (1893–1961) would later play a role also in Georg's life.

On 14 January 1911 Georg and Agathe married in Fiume, but then lived in Pola/Istria (now Pula/Croatia). On 1 November 1911, their first child, Rupert, was born there; on 12 March 1913, their daughter Agathe (II).

Some time after the outbreak of the First World War the family – without Georg, of course, who commanded a torpedo boat – moved inland to Thumersbach/Erlberg near Zell am See in the Austrian state of Salzburg. Here the Whiteheads, who were very rich, had a villa, the Erlhof, where the Trapps now lived with Aga-

the's mother, two of Agathe's sisters, and the widow of Werner von Trapp.

Several Trapps were born at the Erlhof: on 28 September 1914 Maria (II), on 21 December 1915 Werner (named after his deceased uncle), and on 28 July 1917 Hedwig. In the meantime, Georg became a war hero: five days after taking command of the "U 5", which he had helped to launch in 1909, he succeeded in sinking the French battle cruiser "Léon Gambetta" during the night of 27 April 1915. (684 French sailors died.) This helped "convince" the Allied forces to stay out of most of the Adriatic, giving the Austro-Hungarian Navy more room. On 20 August 1915 Georg also managed to sink an Italian submarine, the "Ne-reide". On 10 October he took command of the captured French submarine "U 14" (formerly the "Curie") which, after unrestricted submarine warfare had been declared in 1917, he used to sink eleven, mostly British or Italian, cargo ships.

Especially for sinking the "Léon Gambetta" Georg had been decorated with various orders, but only in May 1918 was he promoted to corvette captain, one rank below the one his father August had attained at the end of his career. Already in June 1917, Georg had also applied for the highest military order of the Habsburg monarchy, the Militär-Maria Theresien-Orden, but only in April 1924, after a rejection in 1921, did he receive it. (Here the son outshone the father.) Had Georg received this order before the end of the monarchy, he could have applied to become a *Freiherr*, one rank higher than *Ritter*. Then he would have been correctly addressed as *Baron*. (The rank of baron did not exist in the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy, only the style, i.e., the form of address.) But this was not to be, so neither Georg nor any of his family members ever were "barons" or "baronesses".

In August 1918 Georg became commander of a submarine base in the Gulf of Cattaro; here he had to face in early November the end of the Great War, of the Habsburg monarchy, and of his military career.

With the end of the war, Georg and his family became Italian citizens because Trieste, where Georg had his legal domicile (“inherited” from his father), was annexed by Italy. At first “Deutsch-österreich” (German-Austria), as it called itself briefly, did not allow former Austro-Hungarians from Galicia, Dalmatia and Istria to become Austrians. This was most likely done to prevent Galician Jews from becoming Austrian citizens, with the inclusion of Dalmatia and Istria in the law serving as a figleaf. Georg could have opted for Austrian citizenship in 1920/21, and could have applied for it later, but apparently was not interested. The family stayed Italian, although Rupert would change to Austrian citizenship in 1933, while studying medicine at the University of Innsbruck. Werner would try to do the same in 1936, but Salzburg-Aigen raised the price for the right of domicile there to a level that Georg was unable to pay.

An Austrian law of 3 April 1919, which is still in force, abolished all noble titles: Georg Ritter von Trapp became Georg Trapp, although especially in the 1930s the “von” (or “v.”) was used again.

One more change in 1919 was the family’s move from the Erlhof to the adjacent former hotel Kitzsteinhorn, owned by Frank Whitehead. Yet, Johanna Trapp was still born at the Erlhof on 7 September 1919. When the lower floor of the Kitzsteinhorn was flooded in 1920, the family moved to the Martinschlüssel in Klosterneuburg/Lower Austria, a small castle owned by Robert Whitehead, at the end of 1920, beginning of 1921. On 17 February 1921 Martina Trapp was born there. And in the Martinschlüssel Agathe

contracted scarlet fever in January 1922, which may have led to her death on 3 September 1922.

The following year Georg bought a large house in Aigen near Salzburg, had it rebuilt, and, in April 1925, moved with his family into the “Villa Trapp”. In September 1926 Maria Kutschera went there as an *Erzieherin* or governess for Maria II, who had been ill; in November 1927 Georg and Maria married, on 8 February 1929 Rosmarie was born, and on 14 May 1931 Eleonore, both at the Villa Trapp.

Since about 1920 Georg also had taken up a new career as a businessman. Using the wealth of his wife Agathe, and usually working with his in-laws Frank and Robert Whitehead as well as other members of the extended Whitehead family, he became a director of several shipping companies, especially between 1921 and 1923, but also of other types of company, such as sawmills, or a ceramics producer. From 1928 to 1934 he was a director at a rather large Lower Austrian metalworks with subsidiaries in Berlin and Budapest.

It is not known how successful Georg was as a businessman. He did, however, make one fatal mistake by investing all of his family’s money in the Bankhaus Lammer, the only bank in Austria founded by a woman, Auguste Lammer (1885–1937). Lammer, who had been acquainted with Georg’s wife Agathe, had established the bank in Zell am See with the help of Frank Whitehead, but financial problems developed already in the mid-1920s. A mixture of wrong decisions, fraudulent behavior, and external shocks led the bank to become technically insolvent in 1931, although this only began to be noticed by the public in the second half of 1933.

At least since 1934 Georg was involved in the creditors’ council; at the trial of Auguste Lammer he freely admitted that he had in-

vested because she had promised him a return of eight to ten percent. In 1935 Lammer was sentenced for bankruptcy, fraud and embezzlement, but died before the end of her prison term. Georg likely lost more than 450,000 Schilling – though some money was returned in 1944, possibly only to be lost again with the end of the war. With this amount he could, in theory, have bought in 1934 about eight one-family villas (seven rooms, bath) in Aigen, each with about an acre of garden and forest. Yet, he still had the Villa Trapp, as well as undeveloped real estate in Pullach near Munich.

With the loss of their money the Trapps had to economize and to find different sources of income: They drastically reduced their household staff; rented out rooms in the villa; Georg wrote his wartime memoirs, “Bis zum letzten Flaggenschuß” (“To the Last Salute”); and gave lectures about these, but also other parts of his military career.

And music would provide further income. The Trapp family had been musically interested and talented since the beginning: both Georg and Agathe played instruments well: he, for example, the violin, she, the piano. The children, too, already began playing instruments and singing in the 1920s. While Georg was especially fond of *Schrammelmusik*, a kind of Viennese folk music, Maria brought different kinds of music, especially part singing and madrigals, into the family. From February 1931 to June 1932, Agathe II, Johanna, Maria II, Martina and Werner attended preparatory music classes, theory as well as playing instruments, at the “Mozarteum”, a Salzburg music school that catered to beginners up to near-professionals.

Until autumn 1934 it was mostly visitors to the Villa Trapp who were able to listen to the family playing and singing. Whether encouraged by them, or on their own initiative, the Trapps entered

a regional folk song competition in Salzburg on 1 and 2 September 1934 and won the prize in the group category. (This was very likely the only music competition they ever entered.) On 5 January 1935 the Trapp family sang for the first time on Austrian radio; a broadcast of 6 December 1935 included vocal music and vocal music with instruments, with Georg playing the first violin, and Maria's name missing from the announcements.

Since about Easter 1935 the Catholic priest, organist, composer and conductor Dr. Franz Wasner (28 December 1905 – 21 June 1992) trained the Trapp family choir and soon brought it to a level that would earn it recognition in all of Austria. (In 1937 and 1938 Wasner was also an editor of a regionally important Salzburg church newspaper.)

On 29 January 1936 the "Kulturgemeinschaft der Ostmärkischen Sturmsharen" (cultural community of the Eastern March storm-troopers) – a Catholic-fascist militia turned cultural organization, led by the Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg – organized an "Österreichischer Abend" (Austrian evening), at which Schuschnigg gave the main speech, and the Trapps (with Maria and Wasner, but now without Georg) performed among others.

During 1936 the Trapps gave various concerts under various names, until, towards the end of the year, they decided on "Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp" (Salzburg chamber choir Trapp). In March 1937 they possibly gave their first concert outside Austria, in Berlin, in May Radio Munich featured them in a variety program.

On 21 August 1937 the "Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp" gave an important concert at the "Mozarteum" in Salzburg. Although the "Salzburger Festspiele" (Salzburg festival) was held at this time, the concert was not part of the festival. In fact, the famous opera singer Lotte Lehmann (1888–1976), who seems to have been fas-

minated by the Trapps, tried to get their concert to be associated with the Salzburg Festival, but was rebuffed by the organizer.

Yet, around the time of that concert several invitations arrived for concerts outside Austria, so the “Salzburger Kammerchor Trapp” would sing in London, Brussels, Paris and a few other places in December 1937; an Italian tour followed in January and early February 1938, culminating in a private concert for Benito Mussolini, the Italian *duce*, in Rome, and in the Trapps singing at a public audience of Pope Pius XI.

Concerts with the Austrofascist leader Schuschnigg attending, for the archetypal fascist Mussolini, and for Zita, the former empress of Austria and queen of Hungary, and her son Otto Habsburg, prove that for Georg and Maria, at best, any possible distaste for anti-democratic politics was trumped by business. Certainly neither can be called “anti-fascist”, nor is there any sign that they had an interest in democracy. There is hardly any reliable information on the concrete political views of Georg or Maria, let alone of the by now adult or nearly-adult children. German assessments in 1937 and 1938 saw them as “Catholic-legitimist”, meaning they considered the Habsburg monarchy as the only legitimate form of government for Austria. (The Trapps relation to Germany will be covered in the next chapter.)

To all appearances, the Trapps, especially Georg and Maria, were not uncomfortable with Austrofascism, with its strong Catholic component and regard for monarchy. They certainly did not swim against the tide, although, based on the available evidence, they were not necessarily “propagandists”, either. And the Austrian *Ständestaat* (corporate state), and its press, was comfortable with the (technically Italian) Trapps, although this did not necessarily

extend to such favors as letting them claim to be part of the Salzburg Festival.

Concerning the Trapps' patriotism I argue that Georg was not an "Austrian patriot": his homeland had been the Habsburg monarchy, and here the Adriatic part. I do not see any strong identification with Austria in the geographical limits since the end of 1918; nor, however, with Italy, even though he kept its citizenship after it had been forced upon him. This refusal to take Austrian citizenship, together with his wish to emigrate to the Pacific with his family, already expressed rather soon after the death of Agathe, shows that his heart was not in Austria.

Whether Maria strongly identified herself as Austrian, or at least with a particular region, we do not really know. By the late 1930s her identification with the Catholic Church may even have eclipsed any "patriotism". The Trapp children's views are, again, unknown.