

# Searching for Max

## The engineer, the war and the world's longest cave

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### Abstract

In 1908 the German engineer Max Kämper mapped 35 miles of Mammoth Cave, KY. The “Kämper Map,” forgotten in the archives for half a century, is nowadays considered as a masterpiece of underground cartography. Little was known about Max Kämper despite several attempts of American speleo-historians. Most traces were wiped out in two world wars. Nevertheless the authors could find out details of the biography of Max Kämper in German archives. The text is based upon the radio story “**Suche nach Max,**” broadcasted by Hessischer Rundfunk - hr1 December 26, 1999, audio download available on <http://www.kliebhan.de/kaemper.htm>

### The mysterious inscription

Chuck lifts his lamp and points to an inscription at the cave wall. “Max Kaemper March 1908” is cut into the rock, many miles away from the entrance in a remote section of the American Mammoth Cave, the world's longest cave.

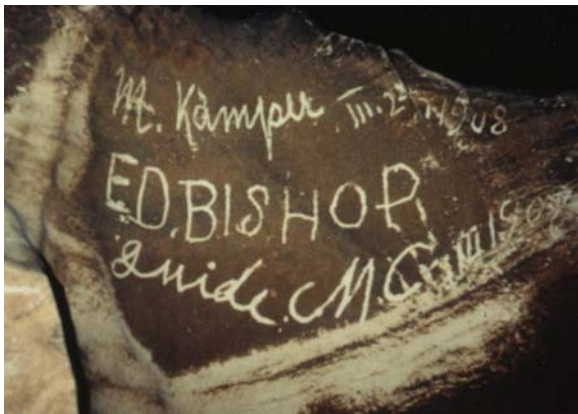


Fig.1 One of many inscriptions of Max Kämper in MMC

“Max Kämper was a German engineer who came to Kentucky as a tourist in 1908” explains Chuck, our guide. “Initially he wanted to stay only for some days, but the gigantic cave fascinated him so much that he stayed on and on. Eight months later he had explored and mapped over 30 miles of the cave. His unbelievably precise map is still considered as a marvel of cartography, decades ahead of his time. On Christmas, 1908 he traveled back to Germany. After this, there was no sign of life from him any more.”

Why did he draw this cave map? Who was Max Kaemper? “That is one of the great mysteries of Mammoth Cave,” states Chuck.

Chuck spreads the map left behind by Kaemper. A tangle of colored lines represents the ramifications of the underground labyrinth. Between them, in tiny, careful writing hundreds of names. Every passage, every dome, every remarkable place was named after persons who were obviously important to Max: many girls' names among them, but also those of the owners of the cave and their families. The notables of Kentucky got their tributes as well as Bismarck and Moltke.

Each name stands for a story. On this map the life lines of people from both sides of the Atlantic cross each other.

Today, Mammoth Cave is the heart of an American National Park and an important object of scientific research. Park ranger Chuck investigated together with historians of Western Kentucky University all the stories behind the names on the Kaemper map - a research in the most unusual historical book imaginable. They called their project “The Kaemper Connection.”

In archives and in the cave itself, where a countless number of inscriptions can be found, Chuck detected many facts about the early explorers of the cave. Only the author of the map, Max Kaemper, remained a phantom: All attempts to find out more about this legendary figure failed.

Innumerable letters were sent by Chuck and his research colleagues to archives and libraries. They asked every German tourist who seemed to be interested in the subject. They sent out calls for help on the Internet: "Let's find who Max Kaemper was." Everything in vain. Two world wars had wiped out the tracks.

Only very persistent research in German archives would perhaps unveil the secret. Meeting German journalists who are interested in caves is like a gift for Chuck: "Can't you find out who Max Kaemper was?" he asks us. We accept the challenge.

### In the labyrinth of archives

Finding out after two world wars the identity of a German tourist who visited a cave in Kentucky at the turn of the last century is everything but simple. Especially as Chuck could give us only some few reference points. An article from a 1909 issue of "Scientific American" with some data, not more.

Nevertheless: We knew that the wanted person was a citizen of Berlin and an engineer. And that he had come to the USA to study American production and mining methods.

The obvious idea to check the University archives in Berlin did not help us: The archives of the former Mining Academy were burned during the second world war. And in the Technical University the situation was the same. But there still exists the old address books of Berlin stored on microfilm in each larger library.

And indeed: In the address book of 1911 we find an engineer named Max Kaemper. However, this discovery does not help us a lot because the municipal archives of Berlin do not show where he had gone. "Everything lost in WW2," we are told laconically.

The central archives of the Evangelical Church in Berlin survived the war, but there is another problem: Under Data Protection Laws only relatives have access to the data. But it's exactly those people we are looking for.

We plunge again into the address books: Max lived in the Hermannstrasse, in close

neighbourhood to Heinrich Kaemper, the owner of an engine factory.

Since the early 20's Elsbeth Kaemper, widow of an engineer, lived in the Grunewald. Obviously Max had not survived WW1.

20 years later, at the beginning of the 40's we find the factory owner at the same address. We develop a hypothesis: Max, the son of a factory owner, travels to the USA in order to make professional contacts. He is killed in the First World War. His widow accomodates her father-in-law at the beginning of the Second World War. It sounds plausible - and turns out nevertheless to be a dead end. After we retraced Heinrich Kaemper's tracks up to his birth place we find that Max was definitely NOT his son.

We start another attempt and plunge again into the address books. We find that in 1931 Elsbeth Kaemper, Max's widow, lived in close neighbourhood to one Lina Kaemper, a general's widow.

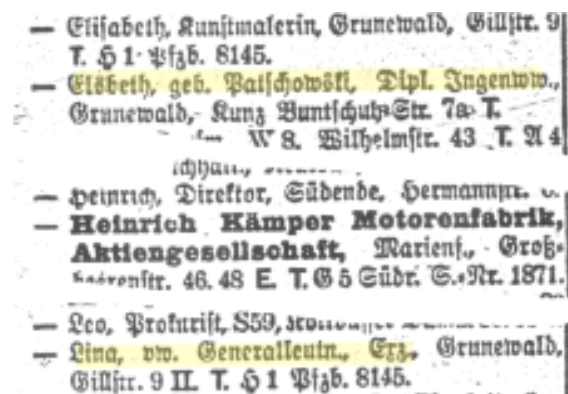


Fig. 2 extract of the Berlin address book of 1931, naming Max's sister Elisabeth, his widow Elsbeth, his cousin's "Heinrich Kämper Motorenfabrik" and his mother Lina.

And Max **must have had** a relationship with the Prussian military; or else he would hardly have given the name "Moltke Dome" to a hall in Mammoth Cave.

Luck and coincidence help us: An archivist in Berlin who became fond of our search discovers the obituary of Lieutenant General Hugo Kaemper. "His only son Max fell 1916 at the Somme" was the crucial sentence for us. Some further lucky coincidences - and nine months after

beginning of our search we have a telephone call with the 87-year-old son of Max Kaemper.

On the following weekend we sit together with Max Kaemper's family. They had heard about his journey to America in 1907/1908. They knew as well that he had visited Mammoth Cave. But that he was a legendary figure to American cavers was unknown to the family.



Fig 3. Max's son Hans and his wife Gerlinde Kämper answering Bernd Kliebhan's questions

Nevertheless: Our assumption that Max had something to do with Heinrich, the factory owner, was not completely false. Heinrich was his cousin. And Mrs. Kaemper, the daughter-in-law of Max, even knows why he went to America:

*"He was to take over the Kaemper Engine Company. But first he should see the world and get a wider view of things. There were probably connections to America. He worked as a trainee at different companies. He should see the world and how they work over there. This journey was a present from his parents, a reward for his successful exam."*

## **Underground hiking**

Like 100 years ago Mammoth Cave is a popular tourist destination. Every year, hundreds of thousands of visitors led by the park rangers walk through the endless galleries and chambers, one ranger in uniform in front, another in the rear. Nobody should get lost in the cave. Quite different routes through the cave are offered - from the short trip to the entrance area up to eight hours of a wild cave trip following the steps of the first explorers.

The participants of this "extremely strenuous" trip must not exceed a chest perimeter of 41 inches. Because of the narrow passages in which they would be stuck otherwise.

The four-hours "Lantern tour" gives the best impression of how the cave visits were run at the turn of the century. With petroleum lamps as the only sources of light, visitors hike along the vast "Main Cave" which is several miles long.

The history of Mammoth Cave is the main topic of this tour. The guide stops again and again, in order to explain historical remains.

Pipes and ruined timber constructions witness the activities of the first European settlers who penetrated into the cave at the beginning of the 19th century. Not driven by curiosity, but for quite practical reasons: The settlers needed gun powder. From the mountains of guano deposited by bats over hundreds of thousands of years saltpeter could be made - an important ingredient in the production of black powder.

Black slaves were sent underground to do the job. Time witnesses describe the scenery as almost infernal: blazing fires, biting smoke, between them hard working exhausted men. In 1812, production was given up, it was no longer profitable. Elsewhere gun powder was cheaper. But the owner of the cave had a new idea: He wanted to show his cave to paying visitors. He had people to do that: The black slaves who knew the cave better than anybody else, got the task of guiding the guests through the underworld.

The black guides became rapidly the brand name of Mammoth Cave which was praised in advertisements as "the longest cave of the world" which nobody could prove, but which could not be disproved either. Working underground, once loathed by the slaves was now a desirable and highly appreciated job to them. Because in this world they had the saying. At the surface the white slave owners decided over right and wrong. Underground everything was different in every regard. Down here the black guides could even make their own money.

The guides were allowed to keep the tips the guests gave them. Therefore they invented always

new attractions, in order to impress their visitors. Masterfully they threw burning torches up to incredible heights, in order to illuminate large chambers. Nerve-strong explorers among the visitors were led across deep pits into passages which few humans probably had seen before. The guests also loved to leave their signatures in the most inaccessible places. Thousands of inscriptions decorate even now the ceiling of "Gothic Avenue," seven feet high and more.

A highlight of the trips at that time was the "Star Chamber," where tips must have been plentiful. Tips are taboo to nowadays rangers. But apart from this, the impressive show in the Star Chamber is exactly the same today as it was described by a visitor 100 years ago:

*"The guide collects our lamps and vanishes with them behind a jutting rock. Then comes the marvelous illusion. The roof seems lifted to an immense height. Indeed, we seem to gaze from a canyon directly up to the starry sky. A meteor shoots across the vault. We behold the mild glory of the Milky Way. Suddenly the guide breaks in upon our exclamations of delight by saying "Good night. I will see you again in the morning!" He plunges into a gorge.*

*We are in utter darkness. The silence is so perfect that we can hear our hearts beat.*

*Presently a glimmer comes from another direction, like a faint streak of dawn. The aurora tinges the tips of the rocks; the horizon is bathed in a rosy glow; a concert of cock-crowing, the lowing of cattle and other barnyard sounds, answered by the barking of the house-dog, seem to herald the rising sun; when the ventriloquial guide appears, swinging his cluster of lamps and asking how we liked the performance. Our response is a hearty encore."*

The hike continues, through enormous chambers in which in former times large quantities of prehistoric remains were lying around. Several thousand years ago, Indians with torches penetrated up to 2 miles into the cave, in order to dig for gypsum and other minerals. The remains of their torches, baskets and sticks had been preserved well over thousands of years in the dry cave climate, but ignorant visitors burned the historic testimonials in order to warm themselves.

The ceiling becomes lower. The soil is covered with rock debris. Finally a wall of chaotically lying rocks blocks the way. "Ultima Thule" the place is called - the end of the world.

Until 1908 the cave visits ended here, reports the ranger. But then a German visitor named Max Kaemper together with his black guide Ed Bishop found a way through the obstacle. Max Kaemper squeezed himself through wobbly rocks and arrived in a large hall. "Ultima Thule" was not the end of the cave, it continued further, to gigantic depths. He named the chamber "Kaemper Hall" - after himself.



Fig.4 Max Kämper, photograph from about 1910

An impressive pit in it was named "Bishop's pit" in honor of his guide.

The next even larger hall got his sister's name. And the next chamber, still larger, was named "Violet City" after the cave owner's wife. Violet City is the spectacular highlight of the Lantern tour. The petroleum lamps are not sufficient to illuminate the huge hall. The true dimensions can only be suspected. By the upper end dripstone formations can be seen. The approaching lamps illuminate series of stalactites hanging down from the dark, curtains and cascades of calcite. Through an artificial tunnel the tourists leave the cave.

## The black box

The Kaemper family became infected by our “Searching for Max” and has looked for further documents. A box emerges. The widow had kept yellowed souvenirs of her husband in it.

We open an envelope and see cave photos. Pictures, taken by Max in 1908 of his discoveries in Mammoth Cave. We recognize the characteristic dripstone cascades of Violet City.



Fig. 5 Violet City, Photograph Max Kämper 1908

We see pictures of canyons and rivers. The quality of the pictures is amazing. They are skillfully illuminated by magnesium light and perfectly printed.

Full of excitement we open a black notebook. The large surprise: it contains entries of Max Kaempers journey to America. It's not a diary in the strict sense of the word, rather a cashier's journal. Day for day Max noted with the utmost care his expenses and incomes. Sometimes he added small comments.

Day for day, location for location, Max's activities in America can be reconstructed. The shape of a real person emerges.

With 750 Marks fare in the bag and 155 pounds of luggage he leaves Berlin at the end of April, 1907. Via Munich and Milano he travels to Genova where he embarks the “Norddeutscher Lloyd” mail-boat “Friedrich der Grosse.” The

passage costs 400 Marks. On May, 16 he arrives in New York.

Max has some problems adjusting himself to the bubbling, booming town. He writes many letters to his family. One of them outlasted the time.

*“According to his letters he had great adjustment problems, mainly with the behaviour of the people. He writes: What Americans call liberty and equality we would define as rudeness. Perhaps I will get used to it in the course of time. It's mainly the behaviour in the restaurants. Something like this does not exist at home. I would bet that a German student who in Berlin tried to behave himself in an “American” way only one day long, would get a dozen challenges to duel. But we are not in Berlin here.”*

But quite quickly Max begins to enjoy New York. The days of the young engineer are devoted to the art of engineering. The evenings and weekends to arts and music. He visits museums, concerts and theatres. No important premiere which he omits. He listens to all the stars of his time in the concert halls. In the Metropolitan Opera in 1907 the tenor Enrico Caruso triumphs. Max sits in the auditorium when technicians record the event for future generations on Edison cylinders.

Max moves to the heart of the theatre quarter, where Madison Square is located today. He takes violin courses and meets with friends for playing music.

Almost each week he buys new notes: the current hits of the turn of the century as well as Beethoven's violin sonatas and other classical works.

In February of 1908 he leaves New York and starts for a journey to the American industrial areas. In Pittsburg he visits several steel plants - on recommendation of his uncle Heinrich Lueg, one of the steel barons in the Ruhr district. The entries in the notebook are scarce, the visits hardly more than rapidly finished duty exercises. For the target of his journey is situated in the south: in the most remote part of Kentucky, in the close hills of a tiny sleepy small town named “Cave City.”

At the end of February 1908 he arrives at Mammoth Cave. An uncomfortable season for a visit. The hotel: badly heated and quite shabby. The weather cloudy, the trees bald. In winter times not an inviting region at all.

We ask ourselves what may have caused him to undertake this journey. In his notes there is no hint that this trip had been planned beforehand. There is not the smallest indication that Max was interested in caves at all. But now - for whatever reasons - he had arrived here.

Black guides take him along the routes which the tourists usually are shown at that time. After two days he has seen the standard program and could have left. But the cave has fascinated him. He wants to see more of this gigantic labyrinth, including the galleries outside of the touristic routes. He wants to go where only few have been before. And he wants to go even further inside the mountain, into new, unknown passages which nobody entered before.



Fig 6 Postcard showing Ed Bishop

The black guide Ed Bishop takes Max to the most remote area of the cave. The trip takes several hours. At the end of a canyon they reach the point where some years before a guest from New York had turned around. A pit in the floor blocks the way. Max and Ed climb over the obstacle and discover a dripstone decorated chamber from which further black openings lead into the unknown.

Max calls the pretty chamber “Gertas Grotto.” Two days later the two men are again in the cave, in order to draw a map of their discovery. Now at last, the engineer is infected by the cave virus. Day after day he is now underground with Ed Bishop, drawing and measuring. His ambitious, almost unattainable target: he wants to explore the whole system of Mammoth Cave systematically up to the most remote parts and he wants to draw a complete map of the largest cave in the world.

In his note book he writes down briefly on which day which cave section is on the schedule. Max and Ed work fast and precise. Mile after mile is mapped with tape and compass. Max knows what is to be done: in the army he had learned, as an artillery lieutenant, to deal with maps and measuring points.

DARE		April 1908	
27	Map Sandstone Ave.		27
15	Sketches, Papers	30	30
28	Violet City discovery		
29	Map facia, Chart, Hutton		
	in the discovery		
16	Pit Memo	25	
17	Postmark	15	40
30	Cataracts		
	Pip Not f. cave	55	35

Fig. 7 Max's diary mentioning the discovery of Violet City on April 29, 1908.

The two men must have been in a very good physical condition because the way to the most remote sections of the cave was a long, long trip. Surely some of their underground trips took more than 24 hours.

In his hotel room Max must have spent long nights drawing and calculating. But beside all this he still has time for an active social life. He is invited to family celebrations. Accompanied by a young lady at the pianoforte he even gives a concert in the cave hotel which is well accepted in the local newspaper.

The handsome guest from Germany must also have pleased the upper class daughters of the region because they even do not hesitate to accompany Max on some of his cave trips. Max

shows gratitude and give Lida and Becky and Maymie a little bit of immortality by naming galleries after them: Lida's pass..., Becky's Alley..., Maymie's stoop.



Fig. 8 Detail of the Kämper Map from 1908

But the woman who is obviously most important for him lives on the other side of the Atlantic: Gerta. After her he named his first discovery. And her name marks also the end of its notes: "Message of Gerta's engagement" is written there, in a somewhat smeared writing. Some days later the recordings end.

Who was Gerta? Mrs. Kaemper, the daughter-in-law of Max, had the answer:

*"Gerta was a cousin, with whom he also made music /... / they were probably youth friends /.. / and I think he also adored her."*



Fig. 9 Gerta Luyken, photograph from about 1910

## Mapping below ground

An inscription of 1912. Somebody perpetuated himself at the end of a side passage. An interesting discovery for Stan and Rick of the Cave Research Foundation. The inscription is photographed, its position is carefully noted and recorded in the inscriptions data base.

In the 60's the members of the Cave Research Foundation started research in Mammoth Cave and the many other caves in the national park. Most of them are amateurs, as far as speleology is concerned. Stan is a physician, Rick is a biologist. They share a great enthusiasm for caves and for the fascination of the dark unknown.

Every year the group organizes expeditions in order to explore new passages. Often the researchers stay underground for several days because the areas to be explored are situated many hours away from the next entrance. Only well-trained and safety-conscious people may join the team. Adrenaline junkies looking for risks are of no use. What if deep inside the earth an accident would occur!

Each discovery is mapped immediately. That's the only way to keep track of the tangle of underground passages. And each year new galleries are added - an end is not in sight. Until today, the group has mapped and entered into computer programs more than 350 miles of cave passages. Thus, Mammoth Cave is by far the longest cave in the world.

As long as 150 years ago, the owners tried to attract visitors with fantastic statements about enormous dimensions of the cave. Over 100 miles length were claimed by an advertisement of the 19th century. The figure was mere speculation, because exact data concerning the extents of the labyrinth did not exist. Different rough sketch plans circulated, but there was no exact cartography of the cave. The owners did not want it. Each attempt to map the cave was stopped by them. And not without reason, as a traveler already experienced 150 years ago:

*"Sir! Is there no map available of your infernal kingdom?" - "Map?" repeated Mr. Proctor, who in wintertimes is not only the owner of the hotel and the cave but also if necessary waiter and*

*guide. “No, Sir! There is no map. The cave was never surveyed. The owners do never allow a survey of the interior of the famous Mammoth Cave.” And he left the room.*

*The man had a sharp nose. Most Kentuckians have one. He smelled that there was an enemy. After some minutes his son came in. I ordered one more drink and let me show the Kentucky rifle (on the wall). Then I asked in an unconcerned way why the cave was not mapped. The boy was less polite than his father: “Dam me! Anyone should try this!” and he knocked the butt-end of his rifle on the roaring floor.*

*“You know, the cave is damned big - we bought 2,000 acres around the entrance, but - dam me” – that’s a complete waste! One branch for sure reaches as far as Cave City, another near Glasgow. On some places the cave is deep under ground. On others it is close to the surface. If anyone in Cave City knew its course he would dig a new entrance and then - good night, Cave Hotel! - it would be our ruin!”*

The young man probably did not suspect how right he was. In 1921 a mining engineer named George Morrison succeeded in opening, from the adjoining property, another access to the cave, called the “New Entrance.” Morrison knew how to make money from his discovery: He built a hotel and, by means of a large publicity campaign and enormous sign posts, he directed the visitors into his part of the cave. And as his “New Entrance Hotel” was closer to the main street than the old lodging house, their business went downhill, while Morrison’s enterprise flourished. A violent controversy broke out, conducted verbally as well as by force of arms - a story which eventually entered history books as the “Kentucky Cave War.” Only the establishment of the National Park in 1941 terminated the battle.

When Max Kaemper started his research in Mammoth Cave in 1908 the cave owners were aware that the cave probably extended far under the adjoining properties. And therefore they forbade categorically each mapping attempt to anybody because an exact cave map would be an extremely explosive document. On the other hand: Without an exact measurement the legal risks in any controversy with the neighbours could not be estimated.

In this dilemma the young German Max Kaemper with his boundless enthusiasm for the cave came in handy: The owners could be quite sure that he would not talk a lot about the results of his measurements. He would go home - and the owners could carefully hide his map.

After some hesitation the owners of cave gave the green light for the mapping. For free food and lodging in the cave hotel Max should draw a cave map.

The owners had an obvious motive for this agreement. But what about Max, what were his motives? What caused him to start his research; how did he get the strange idea to travel in February 1908 to that uncomfortable, cold town of Cave City? His note book does not give any explanation and his family is just as puzzled as we are.

### **Engineering and poetry**

Eight months of research in the world’s longest cave - Max did not keep this experience to himself. We are quite sure about this. He must have shared it with his friends. If we want to know more about his motives we must have a look at his friends. Only there we may perhaps find answers to our questions. We must learn more about Berlin at the turn of the century.

Max was member of a student’s association named MOTIV, so the family tells us. The name sounds like a good omen to our attempt to find a plausible reason for his interest in speleology.



Fig. 10 MOTIV’s logo from 1900

“MOTIV” still exists today, a small association of art-loving students of the Technical University in Berlin with two dozens of active members and a

somewhat larger number of “old boys.” Some years ago the first female students were admitted. Archives do not exist any more. “Everything gone in the last war,” regrets the chairman. Internet helps: In different libraries we can locate copies of some of the early annual reports of the association.

Gradually the academic world becomes alive in which Max lived before he set off for his journey to America.

MOTIV was at that time one of the large renowned student associations at the Technical University. Its curriculum was regarded as one-sided: In order to balance this it was thought it would be “best to waken the interest in all areas of human knowledge and ability” - so the common conviction. And therefore poems were written and theatre was played, students painted and made music.

In Berlin at the turn of the century, MOTIV festivities were great social events with 1000 guests and more. In 1902 the association moved to an impressive home in Charlottenburg - today the former MOTIV house accommodates the “Renaissance Theatre.”



Fig.11 The “Motiv House” in Berlin 1910

In Wuerzburg we discover some pages of music in an archive specialized on the history of student associations. Walter Luyken, Max’s closest friend and brother of the admired Gerta, had contributed to the summer festival of its association a composition, a menuet for violin and piano. We show the notes to two musicians from Latvia, Nilss Silkalns and Terese Rozenberga. They find the piece interesting and perform it for us.  
Mrs. Kaemper:

*“I imagine Gerta now at the piano. And Max Kaemper plays the violin. A composition made by Gerta’s brother Walter. I imagine that the two had*

*played this piece together. And when you play music together you have a close relationship to each other. And this is perhaps why he dedicated his discovery in the cave to Gerta.”*

*“There was no television and not many other diversions. They played music at home. They also composed music. This was part of their leisure activities; self-made music, not only listening.”*

The ways of Max and Gerta separated because she had married another man during his America journey. But among the families of MOTIV members there were many other young ladies of marriagable age. The old gentlemen did not object if their daughters looked out for well suited husbands among MOTIV members - quite on the contrary. During a MOTIV party Max became acquainted with his later wife Elsbeth, the sister of a MOTIV brother.

Mrs. Kaemper:

*“One day, on the tennis court, he asked her: “Are you still free? ” and she answered: “Gladly, Mr. Kaemper.” “But that was after the America journey.”*

MOTIV was a rather unpolitical association. Arts and social life were in the center of attention. There was no meddling with political issues, however harmless. But references to “patriotic enthusiasm” were a must in every one of their yearbooks. With special pride it was noted that a MOTIV delegation attended the ceremonies celebrating the 80th birthday of Bismarck, the former chancellor. The student’s song for this jubilee had been composed by a MOTIV member - a fact which was to be reiterated in MOTIV’s annals for years to come.

A neighbour of the Kaemper family in the Grunewald was Alexander Conze, an archaeologist, who had become famous for his research on the Pergamon altar. The families were good friends. A photo shows the Kaempers and the Conzes playing cards, with Max and his sister Elizabeth as spectators. Max took this picture using an autorelease. Max’s sister Anna later on married Conze junior.

The spectacular archaeological discoveries of the neighbour were certainly a frequent topic in the hospitable house of the Kaempers.

And there was cousin Karl, who could also tell exciting stories of his journeys of discovery. Karl Luyken, a distant relative of Max and also a MOTIV brother, was a member of the German Antarctic expedition from 1901 to 1903. On the Kerguelen islands he studied the magnetism of the Earth, by Imperial Order, under the most difficult conditions.

Mrs. Kaemper:

*“All the Luyken cousins were very interested in the things around them. One of them made this South Pole trip /... / They all photographed and also processed their negatives. That was this time of fundamental change and they were very interested in everything, in these technical novelties. And also very talented in music. That was quite common in the family.”*

The interest in scientific research existed in the family. But what impact drove Max just into Mammoth Cave?

Coincidence helps us. A publication of the caver and local historian of Nuertingen, Hans Binder, comes on our desk. Its title is “The engineer and poet Max Eyth and his plan of Mammoth Cave of 1866.”



Fig.12 Max Eyth

Max Eyth was an engineer who travelled all over the world in the middle of the 19th century and wrote many books about it. 40 years before Max Kaemper he had visited Mammoth Cave. In his book “In the Current of our Time,” published in Berlin in 1905, Max Eyth described his experiences in Mammoth Cave.

Max Eyth was a prominent figure in Berlin at the beginning of the century. He had become famous as the founder of the German Agricultural Society and was highly esteemed among engineers. In 1904 he gave a speech at the general meeting of the Association of German Engineers about “Engineering and poetry”

*“In Germany it is widely assumed that poetry and engineering are two spheres between which a contact is hardly conceivable. The major part of the educated class is colour blind to the poetry of engineering. The fact that a vase or an amphore can be beautiful is not denied. Nobody can indicate a good reason why in a similar way a machine - this device with an independent movement, with a certain independent existence - could be not beautiful as well. Technicians see this beauty. They see the beauty of a locomotive, of a machine tool sketched with technical taste. The formation of taste in this sense is missing almost completely outside the world of experts, among the so-called educated people. Technicians may be patient of this phenomenon, because the future belongs to them.”*

That was exactly how the members of “MOTIV” felt. Max Eyth was surely a sort of shining example to the young engineers who had gathered in MOTIV.

We point out this possible connection to the family and they check again their library. And indeed: Max Eyth’s description of Mammoth Cave is there, and must have been there since Max Kaemper’s times. We do not have any doubt: Max Kaemper’s journey to America was a journey on the footsteps of his idol Max Eyth, the famous engineer and poet, whose travel descriptions led the young engineer finally to the largest cave of the world.

## Death at the Somme

At the Kaemper family three tin boxes emerge. They contain negatives. Format six to nine, obviously shot in the First World War. We can hardly expect to get the prints from the laboratory.

We are quite familiar with Max after all our research. But now almost one year of his life is spread in front of us, seen by his own eyes. We cannot find any written testimonials from him

from this period. But what he saw, what he considered worth preserving on pictures tells perhaps more than a box full of letters.

The departure from Berlin: Photos show family members, carefully posing for the camera. The ladies seem to be somewhat anxious, the gentlemen look serious and resolute. A speaker's platform, oak leaf decoration, many somberly dressed and top-hatted gentlemen, many in uniform. In the background the Brandenburg Cathedral. No. 239 Artillery Reserve Regiment goes to war. Cannons are loaded on waggons. In front of the train the unit poses for a memory picture.

The journey goes to the East. Max is interested in technical details, in signal towers and railroad junctions, cannon loading and locomotive types. In Poland, Max and his comrades are quartered in a small village. An accumulation of straw covered wood huts. It is bitterly cold but obviously this does not affect the good mood. In the living room of the farmers the officers have their coffee. Outside in the snow the lower ranks provide firewood and make the laundry. No feeling of war, strain or fear in the pictures.

Spring comes and Max goes West. A stately French farm in the Vosges Mountains is chosen for quarters and again there is little evidence that we are in the middle of a world war. Max photographs fields and meadows, calves and pigs. He takes a picture of himself on his horse. We see merry German soldiers cutting asparagus and feeding rabbits, drinking coffee under fruit trees. The first medals are celebrated with champagne: the war - a grand pleasure.



Fig.13 French farmer's wife. Photo Max Kämper 1916

Max makes the old farmer's wife pose beside the cast-iron stove and directs his lens toward the young girls making hay. One of the beautiful ones sends a coquettish glance from under her large straw hat to Max - only the ever present guard in the background reminds of the fact that there is war.

A new scene. Max has shifted to Northern France. At the river Somme there has been raving for some weeks a bloody trench warfare with hundreds of thousands of victims on both sides. The German High Command had given order to resist the attacking Frenchmen and Englishmen at any cost. More and more fresh units are sent to the front.



Fig. 14 Shelter during the battle of the Somme 1916

Engineers like Max are important in this war. Their cannons, their tanks, their logistic skill shall bring about the decision. All their art of engineering is now used in order to kill on an industrial scale.

Max experiences the true face of the war. He takes pictures of bomb craters and grave fields, destroyed farmhouses and shot-up church towers, wounded comrades.

Whether Max wrote down his experiences in letters is unknown. But on the right and left of him there were some, who found words for the horrific scene:

*"Hill No. 60 is blown into the air by the Englishmen, together with three men of the observation unit. Many more died, suffocated. Everywhere and never ending the fire of shells exploding and guns firing. The Man of the*

*Century, the Engineer, has caused another Great Flood with leaden hail-storms, with flaming, smoking and cracking fountains, with deadly lightnings and continuous thundering. With men who came here herded together on ships and trains, who were thrown into this inferno only to perish in it before they could even take a breath. The earth brings up ten thousands of new muzzles every hour whose sharp teeth flash and tear up men. Its torn, ugly coat soaks up innumerable precious scarlet drops."*

Fighting around the artillery position commanded by Max becomes more violent now. Max photographs mainly his comrades. From picture to picture the faces turn more serious, sadder, apathetic.

One of the last pictures shows Max in the trench, taken by autorelease. Between high earth walls Max in his wide army coat can hardly be recognized under the steel helmet. High above him a mountain of ammunition. He still had time to process the picture in a shelter and to stow it carefully in a tin box. Later, after the war, he would surely find time to make prints of his war memories he may have thought. But it never came to that. A direct hit ended his life on November 10, 1916.



Fig.15 Last picture of Max Kämper, 1916

The faint photo of a grave, in the same envelope the remainders of a dried flower. For Elsbeth Kaemper a world broke down with the death of her husband. How often will she have looked at this picture and read the letters in which the incomprehensible was described?

Mrs. Kaemper:

*"These are the letters of condolence his father received. /.. / In this one it says: "... mournful and sad at the death of our dear Battery Commander, my good and able friend, Lt. Kaemper, the son of Your Excellency. He died at noon on November 10th together with two other battery commanders when their shelter was blown up by a direct hit .." -- "his corpse was found last night. Helmut, who was on battery duty that week while the others were in resting position, immediately sent people to dig him out. But he could not be rescued. He was dead at once. And the debris of the shelter were full of toxic gas. Helmut adds, that the death of Lt. Kaemper is a severe loss to the Battery. He was like a father to his people and enormously popular."*

We set out to find the grave. The lady at the Tourist Information in Arras thinks she has misunderstood when we ask for German war graves. "Vous êtes allemands? - You are Germans?" That had never happened before. Englishmen, Canadians, even Australians came in order to visit the old cemeteries. But Germans? Perhaps they are embarrassed, she reckons.

We meet a young French historian who explores the details of the "Great War;" with a somewhat strange enthusiasm. He shows us the way to the largest German graveyard. Precisely arranged, endless lines of white crosses on a well maintained green. On each cross three names, three death dates. They died young, many just 18, 19 years old. A monument reminds the living and affirms that these boys did not die in vain. If they had been given similar respect during their lifetime ...

The gardener produces a bulgy catalogue with long lists of the dead buried here and the exact location of their final resting places. Soon we stand at Max Kaemper's grave. A white marble cross, overshadowed by high trees on the War Cemetery of Cambrai. Our search for Max has come to its last stage.



Fig.16 Max Kämper's grave in Cambrai

In the Mammoth Cave National Park, Chuck hung up the picture of Max in the Rangers Lounge. Especially the female cave guides like to have a look at it. Such a handsome man! Rick, the biologist, fixed the picture of Gerta over his desk. Little wonder that Max was so fond of her, he comments.

The Kaemper family plans a journey to America for next summer. Klaus, the grandson of Max, wants to take his cello. He has played in many places. But a concert in Mammoth Cave as a homage to his grandfather - this would be something very special.

### Postscript

In October 2000 three of Max's grandchildren and his daughter-in-law visited Mammoth Cave. They spent some wonderful days with Chuck, Rick and Stan who showed them the places first seen and mapped by Max Kämper 92 years ago.



Fig.17 Max Kämper's grandchildren visiting MMC

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