

OBITUARY: DR. WERNER SPECKMANN (21.8.1913 - 23.2.2001)

by Colin Russ

The news of Dr Speckmann's death, at the age of 87, causes much sadness within the BCPS. Our condolences go to his family and to our colleagues in **Die Schwalbe**, over which he presided for more than 20 years. His connexion with us took several forms: he was a member of the Society, he made welcome appearances at meetings in this country, and he contributed many compositions to this magazine over the years.

An appreciation of Dr Speckmann's achievements must clearly centre on his status as the doyen of miniaturists. As Goethe tells us, the true master reveals himself as such in his acceptance of limitation. This composer obeyed his national poet's injunction twice over in cultivating a specific form which is itself restricted in manpower. He was led to the field of the miniature by his early encounter with lightweight puzzles published in the Viennese magazine *Das Rätsel*. He went on to produce a wealth of miniatures, and other problems, during a career dating from 1929. His compositions secured many honours: he acquired the IM composing title in 1969, having been recognised as an International Judge 10 years earlier. His creative output was underpinned by the publication of many books, monographs and essays, by editorial work in *Die Schwalbe* and elsewhere, and by translations from the Russian. In later years he took advantage of desktop technology to gather together his own miniatures, both orthodox and heterodox, in several privately published collections, following them up with a selection of some 500 of his miniature and other problems in disk/email form. In these "hyper-modern" enterprises he was able to draw on the expertise of his son Lothar. It was typical of Dr Speckmann that, revisiting his past compositions, he never hesitated to revise them whenever, as he put it in a letter, some new twist occurred to him.

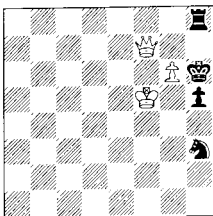
Another focus of Dr Speckmann's career lay in the elegant exposition of New German problem theory. The similarity of title between his *Strategie im*

Schachproblem and Franz Palatz's *Miniatures Stratégiques* is significant (Dr Speckmann told me that he had only once met Palatz, who vanished into Siberia at the end of World War II - what a collaboration they could have pursued). Dr Speckmann's major theoretical work lies in his closely argued and somewhat controversial book, *Das logische Schachproblem*. Regrettably, his territory here is alien to most Anglo-Americans. I suspect that he was troubled by my little venture into the Anderssen/Indian field. His own participation in it reveals the New German corrective hand applied tactfully but clearly enough (see *The Problemist* Supplement, July 1994, p.103).

My own debt to Dr Speckmann is considerable. Our friendship dated from the FIDE problemists' meeting in Canterbury in 1978, when I enquired if I might consult him in the course of assembling my own anthology of miniatures. His response was immediate and co-operative. In the months that followed he afforded immense help with the project. Susy and I particularly recall some days spent under the Speckmanns' roof in Hamm, where I enjoyed access to the vast collection of miniatures housed there, and we received great hospitality from Dr Speckmann and his wife Irma. We could see that, as so often and even in our politically correct times, an eminent man benefits from the support of a warm-hearted, energetic - and in this case typewriting and cake-making - woman.

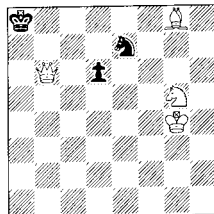
The abiding impression left by Dr Speckmann is that of a greatly gifted, humorous and quietly spoken man - so quietly spoken that this could be a problem! His self-containment created a certain dignified distance which was never disagreeable (no wonder that he was a cat-lover). Many problemists possess academic titles of one kind or another, but the spoken and written use of the doctoral one here was unusually widely observed by others. I was amazed and delighted to hear Norman Macleod address our mutual friend as "Werner", but that was our Norman! Between Dr Speckmann and myself the

A Werner Speckmann
Sp C *Deutsche Schachztg.* 1979



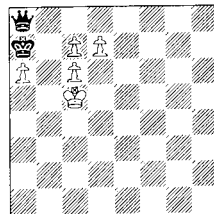
#2

B Werner Speckmann
2 HM *Skakbladet* 1958



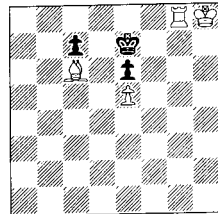
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C Werner Speckmann
Deutsche Schachzeitung 1979



#3

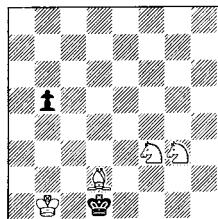
D Werner Speckmann
Westfälische Landesztg 1937



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E Werner Speckmann

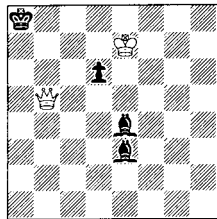
Sp Pr for miniatures,
Magyar Sakkelet 1980



#5

F Werner Speckmann

1 Pr Die Schwalbe 1955



#6

German formal second-person pronoun remained in scrupulous use to the end. Yet the retired judge, Dr Speckmann, was the reverse of a conventional “alter Herr”: an unexpected radicalism sometimes surfaced. Mrs Thatcher was not among his favourites, I remember, and my own enthusiasm for life in the American environment attracted his gentle scepticism. This great problemist will be missed within and far beyond the BCPS. Those of us who had the privilege of his friendship have lost a congenial and stimulating companion. His works remain, however, and I offer, appropriately, some reminders of his cultivation of the miniature.

A 1.g7 (>2.Qg6/gxh8Q) Sg5/R~ 2.Qg6. 1...Sf4

2.gxh8Q. 1...Kh7 2.g8S. 1...Rf8 2.gxf8Q. The use of a double threat is outweighed by the gift of the flight and the promotion play, which includes changes after moves by the R (set 1...R~ 2.Qh7, 1...Rf8 2.Qxf8). 1.Kf6? (>2.Qg7) h4! B 1.Se6? (>2.Sc7) Sd5! So 1.Kh3! ~ 2.Se6. Now White can accept the interference of the B as Black, in one way or another, has deprived himself of the chance to exploit it available to him in the try-play (Munich theme). C 1.d8R Qxd8/Qc8/Qc6+/Qb7 2.cxd8Q/Rxc8/Kxc6/axb7. If 1...Qb8, both 2.Rxb8 and 2.cxb8Q+. Not 1.c8Q,R?/d8Q? Qb8!/Qc8! Miniatures incorporating the BQ constitute an elite class. Dr Speckmann’s own published collection of them, *Schachminiaturen mit schwarzer Dame*, includes this example. He described its clash of BQ and WPs as “Gulliver in the land of Lilliput”.

D 1.Kh7 Kf7 2.Rh8 Ke7 3.Kg8 Kd8 4.Kf7#. Platzwechsel of WK and WR. An agreeable trifle such as this one, which was published in a regional newspaper, is well designed to intrigue the non-specialist public. E 1.Ba5 b4 2.Kb2 b3 3.Sd2 Ke1 4.Sde4+ Kd1 5.Sf2#. The composer surmised that the solver would expect the interference on b4 to be significant, whereas that materialising on d2 is what counts: turning an Indian into an Andersen! F 1.Kd7 (>2.Kc7/Kc8) d5 2.Kc6 (2.Kc7?/Kc8? Bf4+!/Bf5+!) d4+ 3.Kb6 d3+ 4.Ka6 Ba7,f4 5.Qe6+ Bb8 6.Qxe4#. A delightful bi-valve enterprise.