



**Dr. José Rizal**  
**(1861 – 1896)**

**Doctor, poet, martyr,**  
**national hero**

# His life, his work and his time in Wilhelmsfeld, Germany

*Dr José Rizal*, doctor, poet, writer, patriot and finally Filipino national hero, was born on **June 19th, 1861** as the 7th of 10 children in the small town of **Calamba**, just about 50 kms South of Manila.

Education, social responsibility and an interest in politics played a major role in his family. Rizal's mother recognized little José's great talent rather early and supported him. Even as a boy he experienced the bad sides of the Spanish colonial system and the oppression by administrative bodies and the power of the monastic orders in his own family.

The assassination of three critical Filipino ministers by the Spaniards in 1872 was a major topic of conversation within the family, and it sharpened young José's perceptions of injustice and oppression in an early age.

His parents sent him to the *Ateneo Jesuit High School* in Manila in 1872, where he made rapid progress and impressed his teachers with his talent. He was awarded prizes for being the best in his class. After leaving school, he began studying medicine at Santo Thomas University in Manila, but in 1882 he moved to mainland Spain, where he continued his medical studies at the University of Madrid.

There he experienced a completely different and new world: freedom of religion and opinion, political discourse, progress and recognition also for Filipinos who were not regarded as "inferior Indians", as he had painfully experienced in his homeland.

He took part in political discussions and tried as a journalist to draw the attention of the Spaniards to the grievances and social misery in the Philippines, and to motivate and mobilize his sluggish fellow Filipino students for political commitment.

His mother Theodora suffered from cataracts. This motivated Rizal in 1885 to study ophthalmology at the University of Paris with the renowned Professor de Wecker.

When he learnt about new diagnostic and treatment methods at the new university eye clinic in Heidelberg, he moved to Heidelberg in the spring of 1886, where he studied and practiced with Prof. Otto Becker.

He experienced the 500th anniversary of the University of Heidelberg and gained impressions of a student life in Heidelberg.

In addition to his professional training, Rizal acquired knowledge about European culture, European thinking and education. He learned several languages, a total of 18 in his life, including German, which he was able to speak and write fluently within half a year. He translated Schiller's freedom drama "Wilhelm Tell" into his native language Tagalog, and wrote the poem "An die Blumen von Heidelberg".

During one of his walks on the *Philosophenweg* in Heidelberg, he met **Karl-Ullmer**, a Protestant pastor from **Wilhelmsfeld**, who invited José Rizal to Wilhelmsfeld. He gladly accepted the invitation because he could live there as a family member in a German family.



Vicarage in Wilhelmsfeld, where Rizal with the Ullmer Family lived

In Wilhelmsfeld he found low cost accommodation, more contact with understanding people, recognition and the peace and quiet that he needed for his studies and his literary work. Rizal felt very comfortable in Wilhelmsfeld, celebrated his 25th birthday with the parish family and never forgot his homeland. In the guest room he had pinned a large map of the Philippines to the wall. He spent relaxing and comfortable hours in the Wilhelmsfeld vicarage, went for walks in the beautiful surroundings of the quiet town, experienced the people of Wilhelmsfeld at work and in their free time, accompanied **Pastor Ullmer** to the (also Catholic) clergy in the neighboring towns and experienced an open and enthusiast - tense climate between denominations. He discussed religious, political and social issues, tolerance, democracy and human rights, social responsibility, self-determination, moral values and the importance of education with Rev. Ullmer and his colleagues.

All of this impressed and influenced Rizal so much that he regarded much of what he learnt and experienced here as exemplary and that is why he was later nicknamed “Dr. Uliman”, the “German doctor”, but also sharply attacked because of his liberal ideas.



Title page of the original edition of Noli Me Tangere, 1887

In several of Rizal's letters it becomes clear that he spent an important and happy time in **Wilhelmsfeld**. In 1886 he wrote to Pastor Ullmer: "When you are abroad, may you receive the same treatment and friendship that I found with you..." and further:

"People understood me despite my brown skin ".

In 1888, after Pastor Ullmer's departure from Wilhelmsfeld, he wrote him that "he was sad to leave behind friendships that had just begun and to be separated from people whom one valued without ever being able to see them again".

Here he completed his strongly autobiographical novel "**Noli Me Tangere**" (in German: Don't touch me!), in which the country and the people, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the political and social conditions in the Philippines at that time, partly ironically, partly very sarcastically and also heavily criticized the Spanish colonial rule and the monastic orders. The impressions in Wilhelmsfeld flowed into his work. He writes: "It is true when I say that I have reworked "Noli Me Tangere" there, moderating my most violent statements, bringing many things and sentences back to a just standard, because I was able to survey various things of my homeland more calmly from afar and my passion cooled off in the safe calm of the German people!"

From his exile on the island of **Mindanao** he later wrote: "Oh, those trips to the rural landscapes in Germany! You walk through the woods, collect strawberries, and in the next inn you order wine from the Rhine and make a strawberry punch with sugar or woodruff, if you have it! After that you come to a small town, order a meal in an inn, eat hearty and then lie down to sleep under the fir trees, on the soft carpet of pine needles. Oh, how I would like to feel the coolness of the northern climate now" and further: "How I miss the healthy coolness of Central Europe. How I would like to smell the scent of the fir trees now".

Obviously he later remembered Wilhelmsfeld with a yearning heart.

In a scene in his novel, where the title hero **Ibarra** tells his lover about his stay in Europe, he lovingly describes the people working and singing in the fields in the romantic landscape of Wilhelmsfeld that surrounds them (chapter 7).

In the summer of **1886**, Rizal left Wilhelmsfeld and Heidelberg and made a trip to the Rhine, which he described with many drawings and vivid descriptions that are still worth seeing and reading today. He traveled on to **Berlin**, where his novel was printed in 1887. After a visit to Prof. Blumentritt in Leimeritz, he traveled back to Manila via London, where his "Noli" aroused great interest and attention and was immediately banned by the Spanish authorities.

During another trip to Europe, pursued by the monks and Spanish authorities, his second novel **El Filibusterismo**, the sequel to Noli Me Tangere, was published in Gent in 1891.

With these novels, his articles and his political writings *To the Wives of Malolos*, *The Philippines in 100 Years* and *The Sloth of the Filipinos*, all

heavily influenced by his experiences in Europe, Rizal tried to introduce to the Philippines his ideas of freedom, social responsibility, spiritual and moral self-determination, patriotism, humanism, tolerance and education.

The colonial government and above all the conservative monastic orders declared his ideas to be anarchist and anti-Christian and also banned these novels. He continued to suffer suspicion, hatred, exile and persecution.

Rizal never called for rebellion or violence against the Spaniards, rather he called for understanding, human rights, equality and the rule of law from the Spaniards.

From his compatriots he demanded self-confidence coupled with self-criticism, striving for moral progress and education as well as healthy patriotism, i.e. commitment to the Philippines, the land of his ancestors.

When an armed uprising against the Spanish broke out in the Philippines in the summer of 1886 - which Rizal opposed - the colonial system held him partly responsible for this rebellion, court-martialed him and sentenced him to death after an unfair trial.

On December 30, 1896, José Rizal was publicly shot in front of the gates of Manila, in today's *Luneta Park*, after he had said goodbye to his family and his homeland in his poem "*Ultimo Adios*" without resentment against his executioners and oppressors.

But his thoughts lived on, his voice could not be erased.

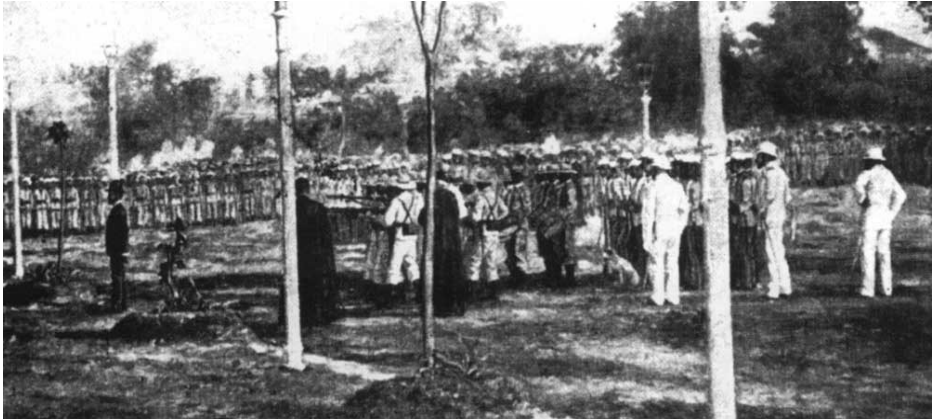
Rizal himself implemented the thoughts and ideas that he demanded of the Spaniards and his compatriots and committed his life to their realization for the benefit of his homeland and its people, sacrificing himself and ultimately contributing significantly to the freedom of his people.

And so José Rizal is celebrated today in the Philippines as a **national hero** and martyr: the anniversary of his death is a **national holiday** in the Philippines ("*Rizal Day*").

Rizal impressed his contemporaries around the world, including and especially in Germany, with his likeable nature and modest demeanor as well as his intellectual brilliance. Extensive correspondence provides information about the intellectual and close, friendly exchange of ideas between Rizal and many people.

Rizal also had great artistic and manual skills. His bronzes, drawings and sculptures still delight us today. Many describe him as a “universal genius”.

When Pastor Ullmer left Wilhelmsfeld in 1888, all traces of José Rizal in Wilhelmsfeld disappeared. They were traced and retrieved eventually in 1959/1960 by **Mrs. Dr. Paz P. Mendez** of the Philippines and by **Pastor Gottlob Weber**.



Shooting of Dr. José Rizal on the morning of December 30th, 1896 on the *Bagumbayan Field* near the gates of Manila



The life of Dr José Rizal shown on Philippine stamps, issued on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

# More than 60 years of relations between Wilhelmsfeld and the Philippines

With the unveiling of a memorial plaque to Philippine national hero Dr. José Rizal at the evangelical vicarage on January 4th, 1960 by **Mrs. Dr. Paz P. Mendez**, educational scientist, historian and wife of the then Philippine ambassador in Paris, relations between Wilhelmsfeld and the Philippines developed. On that day, as Ms. Mendez wrote about the events of that time in her book "Adventures in Rizaliana" (*"Abenteuer mit Rizal"*), "Rizal had returned to Wilhelmsfeld". How did this come about?

In the spring of **1886**, the young Filipino doctor Dr. José Rizal studied ophthalmology at the new eye clinic of the University of Heidelberg with Professor Becker and also lived for three months as a guest of the then Protestant pastor **Karl Ullmer** and his family in the Wilhelmsfeld vicarage, after both had met by chance on the *Philosophenweg* above Heidelberg and **Pastor Ullmer** had invited the young doctor to his house.

The conversations with Pastor Ullmer and his Catholic colleague from Schriesheim, Father **Hermann Bardorf**, the hikes through the surrounding *Odenwald* of the beautiful village and the contact with many people from the rural country had had a strong influence on Rizal and, as he himself wrote, "positively influenced" him.

Here he had completed his first great, strongly autobiographical novel "Noli Me Tangere", in which he criticized the oppression, exploitation and injustice of the Spanish colonial system in the Philippines, and where he also lovingly referred to Wilhelmsfeld, albeit without explicitly naming it.

The Spanish authorities did not tolerate this kind of criticism, years later accused him of rebellion and high treason, sentenced him to death in a show, unfair trial and had him executed by shooting on **December 30th, 1896** at the age of 35.

As Rizal's 100th birthday approached in 1961, **Ms. Mendez** also looked for traces of Rizal in Heidelberg and Wilhelmsfeld in the late 1950s, both of which were known from Rizal's extensive correspondence. Unfortunately, her research in Wilhelmsfeld, where she had come to in 1959, was unsuccessful. By chance, a letter from Mrs. Mendez fell into the hands of the then Protestant pastor of Wilhelmsfeld, Pastor **Gottlob Weber**, who immediately responded and remembered a visit a few years earlier when the elderly and



now deceased son of Pastor Karl Ullmer, Dr. Fritz Ullmer, reported about his youth in the parsonage and also about a young Filipino guest in the parsonage in 1886.

Pastor Weber immediately wrote Ms. Mendez, located and contacted the descendants of Dr. Ullmer in Heidelberg, informed Ms. Mendez and spontaneously invited her to Wilhelmsfeld.



Unveiling of the Jose Rizal memorial plaque by Mrs. Dr. Paz P. Mendenz with the Hack-Ullmer, Steinbrenner and Weber families on January 4, 1960, Dr. Mendez, (9th from right), Pastor Weber, (2nd from right)

At the beginning of **January 1960**, she and her husband, who later became the foreign minister of the Philippines, **Mauro Mendez**, came to Wilhelmsfeld and brought a marble commemorative plaque with them, which was then unveiled on **January 4, 1960** in the presence of the **Ullmer-Hack family** by District Administrator **Steinbrenner**.

It was ceremoniously unveiled to representatives of the Wilhelmsfeld community, many Wilhelmsfeld residents and other visitors.

Back then, in the year of Wilhelmsfeld's 250th anniversary, no one could have guessed how the "Rizal Wilhelmsfeld story" would develop. But just a few weeks later, the first Filipino journalists came to Wilhelmsfeld, many others followed later, and within only a short time and like hardly any other place in Germany, made **Wilhelmsfeld** known as "**Noli Village**" in the Philippines.

In **1965**, the **President of the Philippines Diosdado Macappagal** sent a condolence telegram to his daughter Käthchen Reibold on the occasion of the death of **Adam Reibold vom Eck**. He was the only contemporary witness in Wilhelmsfeld who could still personally remember Rizal, because in 1886 as a boy he had brought Rizal's shoes, which his father had repaired, to the vicarage.

Numerous Filipinos and Rizalists have been visiting Wilhelmsfeld since 1960, including the ambassadors, other high-ranking representatives of the state and society of the Philippines, Rizal researchers, journalists, business people, nurses and simple tourists from the Philippines, all of whom are following in their footsteps national hero Rizal wanted to change.

In **June 1961**, Rizal's **100th birthday** was also celebrated in **Wilhelmsfeld** with a festive commemoration at the vicarage in the presence of the Philippine ambassador *Ingles* and with great participation from the population of Wilhelmsfeld. Rizal was also celebrated with a celebratory lecture at the University of Heidelberg. **Pastor Weber**, who recognized the importance of Rizal and dealt intensively with Rizal, was invited to the great Rizal Centenary Congress in Manila in December 1961, where he gave a lecture on the "Influences of Germany on Rizal".

**Pastor Weber** developed into an enthusiastic Rizal connoisseur. He welcome and informed thousands of visitors about Rizal (as impressively documented by two large guest books) and was the initiator, motor and soul for almost 25 years until his death in **1983**, commemorating Rizal and relations between Wilhelmsfeld and the Philippines.

**Sir Alexander Mushake**, inspired by **Pastor Weber**, later carried on his legacy as Europe's finest Rizal connoisseur, friend of the Philippines and generous patron until his death in **2009**.

In May 1964, for his "outstanding merits" for Philippine-German relations, **Pastor Weber** received, among many other awards, the highest civilian honor that the Philippines bestows on non-Filipinos, the "**Maginoo of the Sikatuna Order**" from the Philippine **President Diosdado Macapagal**.

The same honor was given to **Karl Ullmer's great-grandchildren, Dr. Fritz and Dr. Hans Hack**, who had given a considerable number of priceless memorabilia of Rizal (including a personally dedicated original edition of "Noli Me Tangere", drawings and letters) in Manila to the Filipino people.

In **June 1964**, the "Bachstrasse" leading past the vicarage was renamed "**José-Rizal-Str.**" following the initiative of municipal councilor **Georg Bauder**.

In September of the same year, the sandstone fountain from the rectory, from which Rizal had drunk in 1886, was shipped to Manila at the suggestion of the journalist and artist Gene Cabrera and with the active support of Pastor Weber.



Wilhelmshfeld Rectory Fountain in Luneta Park in Manila

There the fountain was ceremonially erected in *Luneta Park* on December 30, 1964, the anniversary of Rizal's death and the Philippine national holiday, and presented to the Filipino people as a gift from Wilhelmshfeld.

In May 1965, José Rizal's nephew, **Dr. Leoncio Lopez Rizal**, who had known his uncle personally, and his family visited Wilhelmshfeld. As a result, numerous other descendants of Rizal visited Wilhelmshfeld.

On the occasion of a second invitation to the Philippines in 1973, **Pastor Weber** was admitted to the order of the ***Knights of Rizal*** as a *Knight Commander*, and other Knights from Wilhelmshfeld and the region followed over time.

Following the suggestion of Franz Josef Weyand from Mainz, the chairman of the "German-Philippine Association", to erect a Rizal monument in **Wilhelmshfeld**, the then mayor **Manfred Holtzmann** and the municipal council took up this suggestion and placed the site opposite the "*Christian-Morgenstern Elementary School*" for the construction of a "**Rizal Park**" and took over the structural measures of a facility with a water basin in which 7 concrete blocks symbolize the 7000 islands of the Philippines.



Rizal-Park in Wilhelmsfeld

In September 1978, in the presence of **Ambassador Abad and Ms. Rita Weyand**, the Rizal Park with the larger-than-life bronze statue of José Rizal, created by the Filipino artist Prof. A. Caedo and paid for with donations from the many members of the German-Philippine Association, which at that time mostly belonged to nurses, are inaugurated during a big celebration.

From then on, the Rizal commemoration ceremonies, which had previously always taken place at the evangelical vicarage, further on took place at the Rizal memorial.

**Mayor Holtzmann** initiated civic trips from Wilhelmsfeld to the Philippines in 1979 and 1981, as well as a "action group" for humanitarian aid in the Philippines for various projects. In addition to medicines, an ambulance for use in the slums of *Tondo* was handed over to the "Missionaries of Charity" in Manila in 1980.

Mayor Holtzmann was also promoted to **Knight Commander of the Knights of Rizal** at the time. In 1995, the former President of the Philippines, **Ms. Corazon Aquino**, visited Rizal Park in Wilhelmsfeld.

In 1995 the 6th International General Assembly of the **Knights of Rizal** / Rizal-Ritter took place in Wilhelmsfeld in the *Odenwald Hall* with catering and a large program of lectures and entertainment as well as a reception and fireworks at Heidelberg Castle.



Finally, in 1997, the Wilhelmsfeld-Heidelberg Chapter was established for Rizal Knights from the region, which holds Rizal commemorations in June and December together with the Wilhelmsfeld community, which is regularly attended by Filipinos and the **Knights of Rizal**.

**Wilhelmsfeld** is also known worldwide in the order of the Knights of Rizal. The Chapter is involved in humanitarian and charitable projects in the Philippines, giving the Wilhelmsfeld name a positive mention there, and over the years has shipped thousands of dollars worth of medicines and other goods there.

In the anniversary year of the 50-year relationship, part of Pastor Weber's extensive library by and about Rizal was given to the Wilhelmsfeld Library Association as a permanent loan by the Weber family and thus made accessible to the public.

The small specialist library is now kept in a book board in the town hall and is made accessible to interested citizens and visitors upon request.

In 1998, the Philippines celebrated 100 years of independence from Spanish colonial rule with several events in Wilhelmsfeld and Heidelberg in the presence of many high-ranking personalities from Germany and the Philippines.

In the course of these celebrations, the path at Rizal Park was named "*Karl-Ullmer-Weg*".

The Chairmen/Supreme Commander of the Knights of Rizal from Manila and representatives of the Knights of Rizal from all over Europe have visited Wilhelmsfeld several times and have been warmly received here, which means that Wilhelmsfeld has a good reputation in Europe and worldwide.

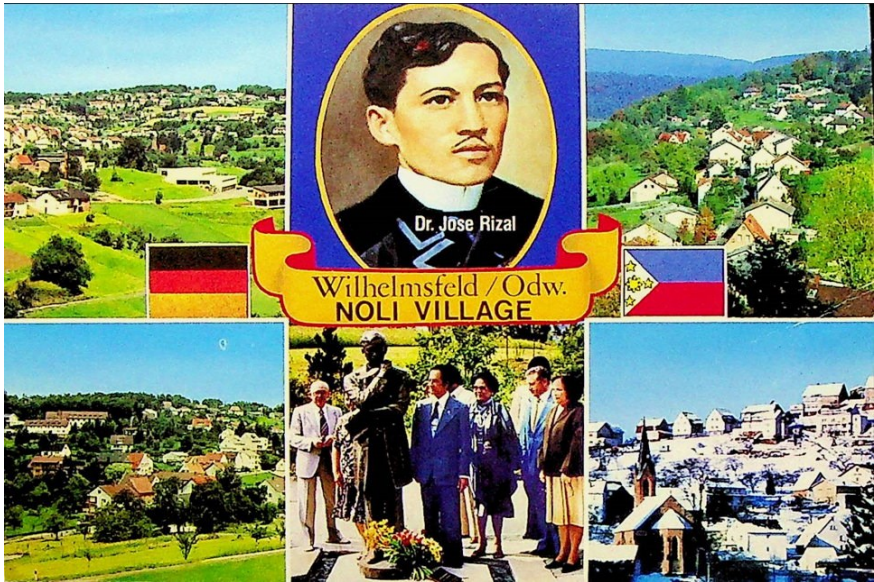
The small but fine Filipino choir "**Manila Vocal Ensemble**" has already given concerts here twice, which have found enthusiastic audiences and admiration.

In June 2003, thanks to the initiative of Karl Ullmer's great-grandson, Dr. Fritz Hack and other sponsors, four sandstone steles with the busts of sponsors and companions of José Rizal in Germany (Prof. O. Becker, Prof. R. Virchow, Prof. F. Blumentritt and Pastor K. Ullmer), created by the Czech artist **Libor Pislak**, to be expanded and embellished. A bilingual information board completes the facility.



Companions and supporters of José Rizal: (clockwise from top right) Pastor Karl Ullmer, Prof. Ferdinand Blumentritt, Prof. Rudolf Virchow, Prof. Otto Becker

In 2006, a chapter Wilhelmsfeld-Heidelberg of the “Kababaihang Rizalista” / **“Ladies of Rizal”** was founded here.



Old Postcard from around 1980 „Noli Village“ Wilhelmsfeld/Odenwald

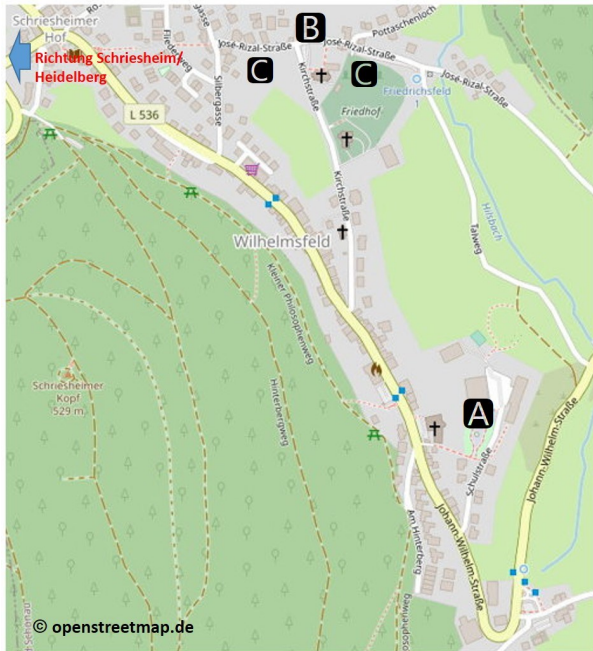
Wilhelmsfeld and Rizal were reported several times on German and Philippine television, most recently in the series *"Pinoy Meets World"* at the inauguration of the new Rizal Park.

In 2008, the municipality of Wilmhelmsfeld was approached with the proposal to enter into a town twinning with Rizal's birthplace of **Calamba**. Mayor **Hans Zellner** and the municipal council agreed to this partnership in 2009, which was sealed with the signing of the partnership agreement on October 7th, 2011 during a ceremony in the presence of Mayor Hans Zellner's colleague, Mr. **Joaquin M. Chipeco**, in the Wilhelmsfeld town hall.

The commemorative plaque for Rizal at the Evangelical parsonage, which was destroyed by the *Wibke* storm in spring 1990, was replaced and was ceremonially inscribed once again on June 19th, 2010, i.e. 50 years after the first unveiling by Mrs. Mendez in 1960, by **Lady Jane Mushake**, the chairmen of the *"Ladies of Rizal"* in Europe.

In **2013**, the then Philippine Vice President **Jejomar C. Binay** came to Wilhelmsfeld with a delegation and laid a wreath at the Rizal memorial.

In June **2016**, the inauguration ceremony for the newly designed **Rizal Park** took place.



A = Rizal-Park

B = Evangelical vicarage in Wilhelmsfeld

C = Rizal Strasse

We wish all visitors, the Friends of the Philippines and Dr. José Rizal, an interesting and pleasant stay in our region.

For more information, visit the **Knights of Rizal** Wilhelmsfeld-Heidelberg Chapter's web page at

[www.kor-wilhelmsfeld-hd.de](http://www.kor-wilhelmsfeld-hd.de)

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