

Dirk Chervatin

EASTERN FRONT – 500 LETTERS FROM WAR

THE TRUE STORY OF A GERMAN SOLDIER'S INCREDIBLE JOURNEY IN WORLD WAR 2 –
WAR SERVICE, CAPTIVITY, THEN A STAGGERING ESCAPE



We want you to be satisfied with this book!

Dear readers,

First, we thank you very much for purchasing this book. We are a small family business from Germany and are very happy about every sale!

Above all, we want each book to provide **you with a unique and enjoyable reading experience**. That's why your opinion is incredibly close to our hearts!

We welcome your feedback on our book. Do you have any comments? Criticisms? Please let us know. Your feedback is valuable to us so we can make even better books for you in the future.

Write us: info@ek2-publishing.com

Now we wish you a pleasant reading experience!

Monika & Jill Marc from EK-2 Publishing, Germany



Joseph Chervatin in uniform (1943)

Foreword

One day in May 2020, I was visiting my mother. She asked me if I had any use for my grandfather's old cello sheet music. Together we rummaged through the aged music volumes, notebooks, and books. I felt thrown back to the days of my youth when my grandfather gave me cello lessons almost every day. He lived the last six years of his life with us, my parents and my older brother, in the same house. He was an essential reference point in my life during that time because we lived virtually door-to-door. I remembered the many hours we spent together playing the cello or chess in his room. The many books he brought with him to his new home after the death of his beloved wife – my grandmother – also gave me, an insecure boy of 14 to 15 at the time, a refuge in exciting and unknown worlds.

On the one hand, I was fascinated by the many war novels and heroic stories. However, I learned very quickly how terribly cruel and inhuman war is. I was particularly impressed at that time by the novels of Norman Mailer, Remarque, Herman Wouk, Forsyth, and Joseph Conrad.

I often tried to get my grandfather to tell stories about the war. Among other things, I asked him many questions. How could it be that National Socialism came to power in 1933? What did people think about the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews at that time? Why didn't they revolt against the Nazis' activities? Why did they believe the fairy tale of the Bolshevik menace? Only much later did I understand how easy it is to manipulate the masses, no matter where in the world ...



My grandfather Josef Chervatin (right) was a musician in the 1930s

My grandfather was born in Labin in 1903. At that time, the town still belonged to the multi-ethnic Austrian Empire. It was incorporated into Italy after the First World War.¹ My great-grandparents moved to Oberhausen in western Germany before the First World War. My grandfather often told me how important it had been for them at that time to integrate into Germany and become an accepted part of society. It was soon frowned upon to speak Italian, even within the family.

¹ Cf. Zeitung der Arbeit (2021)

On August 15, 1927, he married my grandmother Alma, née Pörschke. The two of them moved to Ahlen, Westphalia, quite soon. My grandfather made a living as a musician in various bands and orchestras and later as an accountant in a factory for roller shutters.

On July 12, 1934, their only child, my father Hans, was born in Ahlen.

In October 1941, my grandfather volunteered for military service in the German Wehrmacht. He joined the 329th Infantry Division (also: Hammer Division), which was formed in December 1941 at the Groß-Born military training area from units in the military district VI (Münster). After deployment (December 1941), the division was placed under the command of Army Group North and operated in the Demyansk area.²



Alma and Hans Chervatin in March 1938

So, while we were inspecting the old notes, we discovered a bulging folder of my grandfather's field post. My mother said: "If you want, you are welcome to take the letters with you." In the following months, the letters and the experiences of my grandparents and my father were my daily companions.

Between February 1942 and August 1949, he wrote 546 letters to his wife and son. He had not missed an opportunity to write home.

During his years as a prisoner of war in Latvia and the Czech Republic, he could only write 36 letters or cards home.

He wrote the last letter before the division's surrender in May 1945³ in Courland on February 15, 1945. That was at least the last letter that arrived home before he became a prisoner of war...

² Cf. Kurland-Kessel (undated)

³ Cf. Molter, M. (undated)

After four and a half years as a POW – seemingly endless years of waiting and hoping to finally be allowed to return home – my grandfather decided to escape. He later wrote down this last and particularly spectacular episode in his life as a German soldier in a report. You will find it at the end of this book.

Most of the time, my grandfather had staff work to perform. Still, he was also ordered to perform special duties in the Latvian hinterland a few times.

Probably because the German field post got censored⁴, he described some experiences only vaguely or not at all. Perhaps he did not want to worry his wife and his boy. However, especially letters from 1944 allow us to conclude that he was repeatedly called up for combat missions despite his age.

My grandmother kept all the letters very carefully. I am convinced that the collection is complete.

Times were also hard and uncertain for the family at home. Daily air raid alerts, reduced food rations, worries about husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, and an uncertain future were the cruel reality for women and children. When my grandmother was hospitalized in Hamm with a severe inflammation of the duodenum, my then 10-year-old father was left alone at home. Although the neighbors cooked for him, he was on his own for many weeks. He traveled almost daily to Hamm by train, 14 kilometers away, to visit his mother in the hospital. Since the freight trains on this route were regularly attacked by British fighter pilots, fear always accompanied these trips. He often told us about it, and we could hardly imagine the fears a 10-year-old boy must have endured on the way to his mother.

My grandfather's concern for his family during the many air raids is omnipresent in the letters. His helplessness and anger at the British and American pilots, who were now putting Ahlen and the surrounding area on alert almost daily⁵, is a recurring theme in his letters home.

Besides, the longing for his family and living together at home in peace is a central theme. The strong desire to see his boy grow up and lead a normal everyday life comes through in his lines.

It was undoubtedly extraordinary that my grandparents probably had an absolutely equal relationship. My grandmother went to work during the war. She made many decisions independently in education, finances, apartment renovation, etc. My grandfather welcomed and supported this and always gave her a free hand. This was probably an exception in the patriarchal 1940s, despite the war.⁶

Most of the letters only found their way into this book in excerpts; it would otherwise have exceeded any scope. Many of the topics addressed in the letters are repeated and run like a thread through the entire correspondence. For this reason, recurring statements have been shortened or omitted in the further course. We have also deleted things that are too trivial for the general public, such as extravagant greetings to acquaintances and relatives and lines that are too personal. Whenever you see a (...), a passage in the text is deleted or shortened.

The interested reader may forgive this.

The book was initially published in German under the title “500 Briefe Sehnsucht”. The book you are reading now contains a faithful translation of the original text. My grandfather wrote as he spoke. We tried hard to keep an original and “very German” touch to the translation. Thus we stick to the German style of writing dates, e.g., 01.10.1944 would be October 1, 1944. The escape report has been slightly edited for better readability. The substance has, of course, remained untouched.

This book is certainly not a typical war story. Instead, it tells of love and connection, family togetherness, and the desire for everyday life. But it also tells in quiet tones of hope and longing, fears and worries, and the great desire for a life together in peace.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents and my father.

Mülheim an der Ruhr, April 08, 2021
Dirk Chervatin

⁴ Cf. Edition zur Geschichte (undated)

⁵ Cf. Stadt Ahlen (undated)

⁶ Cf. Schulte von Drach, M. (2016)



Josef and Alma Chervatin; the photos were taken in September 1940

The Year 1942

№ 1 from 27.02.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

Today I finally got to hear from you. (...) First of all, I wish you with all my heart the very best for your birthday; I assume that the letter will be in your hands by the 11th. Hopefully, we will spend the next one together at home. (...)

We left Arys (*Orzysz, Poland; the author*) on 20.2. and covered the whole distance in a motor vehicle. We did not get to where we were initially supposed to go, but about 200 km to the east. We are located southeast of Lake Ilmen. What else should I write to you about my service? I summarize it in one word, namely horrible. Adolf Hitler said, "My soldiers will and have seen what communism has done to Russia." We have seen it on the way from the border and are in the middle of it now. I'd rather not describe it to you at first. In Arys, we had the worst cold behind us; here we are again in the middle of the worst winter. During the day, 15 to 20° Celsius minus, at night -35° have been measured. We don't look like German soldiers at all, more like Russians. Fur caps on our heads and felt boots, Russian booty, on our feet. But it protects from the cold, at all at night. We have a lot of guard shifts, everybody has to do that, 2 times a night, 2 hours each. Each battalion has to guard its village. In the houses it is interesting. The whole family, nine people, sleeps above the stove. We lie behind it in a fine parlor with 4 officers and 5 enlisted men. During the day, it is a business room, and the whole bunch lies on the floor at night. The heating makes the water run down your body. I can already communicate quite well with people. I diligently study the language. They are good people; they do everything for us that we want. Ivan, the master of the house, goes up in the air with joy when you give him a little tobacco. He immediately twists it in a newspaper and smokes it so that the flame comes out in front.

Last night, four Russian planes were shot down by anti-aircraft guns between 9:00-22:00 pm. One after the other came down. The front is about 30 km away from us, and you can hear the artillery very well, especially at night. The infantry regiments of our division have done well from the first day of the operation and have been praised. The snow here is 1 to 1.5 meters high, and the winter this year is supposed to be severe even by Russian standards. The comrades who come here from the front say that when spring comes and the snow is gone, the Soviets will get blows like the world has not yet experienced. They also think that the Soviets will be finished off this year. You can't think about anything here. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to stand it. Don't worry about me, but you and Hansi, please pray for me every day that I may get out of this country in good health. I'll see you again one day, my dear wife, my dear boy, and our beautiful homeland. Finally, both of you are very warmly greeted and kissed by your so loving

Husband and father
Many greetings to Fam. Budt, Herr Michel, and all acquaintances.
Goodbye

27. 2. 1942

Meine liebe Frau u. mein kleiner Hans!
Heute komme ich endlich dann, von
mir hüten zu lassen. Ich bin noch
genannt, ich hoffe von Euch beiden
hören dasselbe. Amersot wiederum ich
die von gansen Besam viel Glück
zu seinem Geburtstag, ich nehme
an, dass der Brief bis zum 11. in
meinen Händen ist. Hoffentlich von
leben wir den nächsten zusammen
an Hause.

Wir sind am 20. 2. von Arzys
abgezogen, und haben die ganze
Furche im Schritt wegen abgemacht
den den Ort, in die Wäpplingler hin
schauen, sind wir nicht hingekommen
sondern nach dem. Wir sind endlich
in Arzys an der Stelle von dem
See, was soll ich Dir erst über
alles schreiben? Ich fasse alles
in einem Wort zusammen,
nämlich grenzenlos. Was ist
das für ein schreckliches Land

und was können hier doch
für armselige Menschen. Selbst
Hiller hat gesagt, keine Soldaten
werden und haben es gesehen, was
der Kommunismus von Russland
gemacht hat. Wir haben es gesehen,
auf der Fahrt von der Grenze aus,
und wir stehen jetzt mitten drin.
Ich will es Dir lieber erst gar nicht
beschreiben. Im Arzys hatten wir
die bestimmte Platte hinter uns,
hier sind wir wieder mitten in
den schlimmsten Wäldern hin-
gegangen. Tagsüber 15-20° minus,
nachts sind 35°- gemessen worden.
Wir sehen gar nicht nach dem
Schatten aus, aber wie die Russen.
Selbst mitten auf dem Dampf und Fick,
stiefel moosige Bente was, von dem
Füssen, aber es scheint mit der Stelle
in der Hauptsache. Wir haben hier viel
Wasser von stellen und da wird alles
zu heimgangigen, je 2 x im Tag
2 Stunden. So die Wäp. hat ihr Dorf nahe.

Walden. In den Häusern ist es in-
teressant. Die ganze Familie, nun Per-
sonen schläft über dem Ofen. Wir liegen
dadrüber in der guten Haut, 4 Offiziere
und 5 Mannschaften. Tagsüber ist es ge-
schäftsam und nachts liegt der
ganze Haufen auf dem Feuerboden. Gehört
nicht hier, das einem das Kasernen. Die
put so herunterläuft. Mit den besten
kann ich mich schon ganz gut verstehen,
denn ich habe fleißig gesprochen. Es
sind gute Leute, die tun alles für uns, was
wir nur wünschen. Der Kommandant, das ist der
Hauptmann, geht vor Freude in die Luft, wenn
man ihm ein wenig Worte gilt, er schreibt
ihnen sofort in ein Zeitungspapier und
versucht, dass von die Kommando bereits abläge
gestern Abend sind hier in der Nähe in
der Zeit von 2100 - 2400 Uhr, vier mos.
Feldzüge von der Fack abgedrückt
werden, das nach dem anderen kam hier
unter. Die Front ist da 30 km von uns
entfernt man kann die Artillerie sehr
gut hören, besonders nachts. Die Defensiv-

Regimenter unserer Div. haben sich am
ersten Tag des Einsatzes gut betätigt und
sind selbst ermittelt worden. Der ich vor
liegt hier 1-1.50 mtr. bei der Winter soll
etwas über selbst für uns. Verhältnisse im
ersten Abzug sein. Die Kommandos die von
vorn nach hier kommen, wenn das Fick
jahr kommt und der Kommando ist, dann
bestimmen die Sowjets schlage, wie die Welt
es nicht nie erzählt hat. Sie meinen auch,
dass die Sowjets dies in der letzten Stunden
kann darf hier am nichts denken, sonst
würde man es hier nicht aushalten. Macht
kann man nicht keine Sorgen, aber Du
und Hans, setzt jeden Tag etwas für mich,
dass ich gesund am diesem Land komme
und ichm Tages Dicht, Du meine liebe Frau,
und Dich, Du mein lieber Hans und me-
re schön. Ich bin nicht so sehr auf.
Wenn ich das, sind beide viel mehr nach
hause. gegnert und geküsst von Hans,
Hans er lebend in
Hans u. Hans.
Nicht jenseit im Jahr. Nicht Hans nicht in alle die
hauke. Auf Wiedersehen.

For illustration, a scan of the original four-page letter

№ 2 from 07.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

Yesterday evening I received the first letter here in Russia, namely your letter № 19, written on 17.2. So it was on the way for a good 14 days. You wouldn't believe how happy I was to receive a sign of life from you, my two dear ones. Thank God that you are both still doing well. I can report the same from me, taking into account the circumstances. I have already told you in Letter № 1 that we are in the area of Lake Ilmen. Thank God spring is not too far away; to endure a whole Russian winter here is almost superhuman. It's cold here, but as the natives say, it's not too far to spring. The comrades with whom I left Soest are already deployed at the front.

You asked if I need anything? There is no point in sending food. Besides, we get plenty here. There is no lack of it. In Latvia, I got two pounds of butter for a packet of tobacco in one place. I got the butter to gain weight. (...)

Did your brother Hans still not write? He will certainly be somewhere in this area. The fact that you don't hear from a relative for a long time usually doesn't mean anything; even if there is usually not a lack of time, there is a lack of opportunities to write. (...)

It is like this here. An entire formation lies in a village. Three-quarters of the houses have been set on fire by the Bolsheviks and burned to the ground. The people live in the rest of the houses, 10-15 men in a room like our kitchen. You can imagine that one is in the way of the other. I have to work all day. Typewriting, delivering messages, if it's far away, driving there with the car. I've written this letter for two days because I'm always called away in between. When the offensive begins, there will be even less time. But don't worry, I will use every opportunity to write. (...)

What else is new with you? Write me if you received letter № 1 and this one and how long they were on the way. Hopefully, it will be over very soon when things start here in the spring.

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, be both warmly greeted and kissed by your so loving

Husband and father

Many greetings to all acquaintances, especially Fam. Budt and Herr Michel.

Write again soon.

Goodbye

№ 3 from 08.03.1942

(...) My dear wife, I gladly believe Sundays are the most difficult for you. I ask you to be brave and overcome all the gloom. Look, all this will pass one day. The day will come, which will be the most beautiful for us. We still have to do without many things for a while, but all these sacrifices will not be in vain. You write whether you should send me some money? What am I supposed to do with money here in Russia? Here there is no store at all, no economy, but nothing. I can afford what we can buy from our sutlery with my wages. On the contrary, I will have all my money in my pocket transferred to you at the first opportunity. You have no idea what such a Russian village is like, and it would take too long to describe it. I will tell you about it later. We all keep telling each other that we will say "Thank God" when it is over here, and we will enter German land again. (...)

№ 4 from 09.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

Today, on my birthday, I must quickly write you a few lines. (...)

On average, we stand guard every third to fourth night, but only for two hours, then we have four hours of rest. But these two hours in the cold, I will always remember. What do you think we'll all be happy about when the cold and the snow are gone? One of my comrades from Soest got both feet

frozen, as I heard yesterday when I met a comrade from the company. We all assume that the offensive will start any day now. I have only one wish, to see the day of the armistice here in the East and then return to the homeland. I will kiss the earth when I set foot on German soil again. (...)

My dear wife, I beg you, be brave and hold on. Everything will come to an end. The day will come when we will be reunited; it will be the most beautiful day of my life. Pray that we will experience this day. I love you both so much. (...)

№ 5 from 13.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

The day before yesterday, on your birthday, I received your dear letter № 25. I was so happy that you are both still doing well and are both still healthy. With me, everything is also still in the best order. Since we have moved our location again by about 20 km in the meantime, I can only answer your letter today. I take every opportunity to write to you, but sometimes it is not possible with the best will in the world. (...)

The last days it was already quite pleasant outside here. During the day, there were already a few degrees of warmth, but it was already at least -30° Celsius last night. You do not believe how one is tired of this cold and snow, but it has lasted the longest. This morning at 7.30 I went with a message to the next village, about 3 km. On the way, a Russian woman stopped me and pointed to my nose. She then grabbed a handful of snow and must have rubbed my nose for 10 minutes. It must have struck the woman that I had a completely white nose. It would probably have frozen me to death if she had not told me. (...)

15.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

Yesterday evening I received your dear letter No. 26 of 28.02. together with the enclosed photo. My very best thanks for both. The photo is beautifully turned out, really natural, just as I always imagine you two dear ones. My boss is not here at the moment. I write the letter quickly with the typewriter. For the birthday greetings, my very best thanks, they came a few days late, but I accepted them anyway with many thanks. Hopefully, we will spend our birthdays together next year.

I am glad that both of you are still doing well and that you are both still alive and well. I can report the same about myself. They say that man is a creature of habit; you can see it again here in Russia. We have slowly become accustomed to the conditions here.

In regular times, you wouldn't be able to live in a house like this, but today, when you have to rely on it, you're still pleased with a place like this. One has a roof over one's head, and it is also pleasantly warm here in the houses. We comfort ourselves with the thought that one good day it will be different. We have had temperatures of -40 to -45° again in the last few days. You have to wonder if you can stand it. But still a few days, then it will probably finally stop, with all the snow and this nonsensical cold, thank God.

You asked about the request from the collector's desk regarding the high values of the Führer stamps. I recommend ordering the same. They will undoubtedly be good. I will have 50 RM transferred to you around the 20.3. It is money I put aside from my military pay; it is here in my pocket, yet I cannot use it. Let me know immediately when you have received it. Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, I thank you again for the photo. Both of you are sincerely greeted and kissed by your loving

Husband and father
Goodbye



The photo mentioned in the letter

№ 6 from 21.03.1942

(...) For my name day, I got a bottle of Steinhäger and a hundred cigarettes from the commander. We also get a pack of cigarettes daily with our meals. Then we get a roll of cookies and a bar of chocolate, so we live like princes. (...)

We have already been here in Russia for more than four weeks; meanwhile, we have changed our location four times. This week we landed in a bigger place and are accommodated in a half-destroyed bigger school. On the first day, we slept in rooms without stoves, no panes in the windows, and more than 30° cold. In the meantime, we have made ourselves quite comfortable here, installed stoves, sealed windows, and built beds so that it is pretty cozy according to the conditions. The school is located outside the village, and we have a broad view of the flat countryside. The Stuka fighter bombers have been smashing the Russian positions in front of us for two days. Fifty to sixty Stukas attack at once, dropping their bombs from early in the morning until late at night, plus heavy artillery fire at night. It is now 11:30 p.m. I have telephone and fire duty in our division until 12 o'clock, then I will be relieved and can sleep until 8 o'clock. What is nice here is the camaraderie among the people. The officers are in the middle of the men, eating out the cookware like the rest of us and sharing what they have. The day before, when we set up our posts here, they all helped out. A captain carpentered the beds, and two high staff officers sawed firewood and made it small. That's fun for us to see; it's certainly fine, and there's an excellent understanding.

Today is spring's beginning; the sun is shining beautifully, but the cold is still bad. We are all waiting for the cold to finally let up and for the snow to disappear. I have a fabulous Russian cap of gray

krimmer (*fur of the Karakul sheep; the author*), folding down over the ears, directly elegant. Then a pair of polar boots; they're made of sheepskin, fabulous. If all goes well, I'll bring them home with me. One is well protected against the cold, after all. It must be said that the Wehrmacht did everything possible for the soldiers in the East. (...)

One good day this year, all of this will be over, and then comes the day that will bring us together again, and then we have survived all this. And all this had to be, and we all had to take this on ourselves and hold out so that Germany does not go under but can live. (...)

№ 7 from 24.03.1942

(...) It is now night, 3 o'clock a.m. I have telephone duty from 3 to 5 o'clock, which is the best time to write quickly to you a few lines. (...)

Outside, the storm howls, but the wind is not cold at all. The air has been mild for two days, and the frost is no more. The snow is wet, and it thaws. They say that the thaw comes here all of a sudden. According to this, we would have survived the winter, which is what millions of soldiers have eagerly awaited. It is precisely three months to the day since we were unloaded in Groß-Born. I will remember these three months of snow, ice, and cold as long as I live. We have been in Russia for over four weeks now and have not had the clothes off our bodies since then, except when we changed the laundry. Then they are always boiled and washed immediately, and we have a fresh set. Since that time, we have also not seen electric light and whatever else that is a matter of course for us in Germany. Yes, the Russian paradise. We have made ourselves quite comfortable in the school where we are now according to the circumstances. At the moment, they try to wake up half a company of mountain riflemen billeted for the night in the room next to us. The poor guys just won't wake up. I can hear everything through the thin wooden wall. They have to move out now, go after the Russians, who are being pushed back further and further in the front section in front of us.

I am just thinking about something. I always wanted to write to you about it but had always forgotten. That morning, when we left Arys, we passed through Possessern (Warmia-Masuria, Poland) at about 11 o'clock. It is now called Großgarten. The town sign says Großgarten at the top and Possessern small below. The main road makes a big curve through the village, and at the end of the village, there is an old mill on a hill to the right. The small town makes an excellent, clean impression; many new houses have been built there. Also, there are houses outside the settlement. While driving through the town, I had a strange feeling when I remembered that you spent some time in this very town as a child.

What's new at home? Do you still have so many air raid alerts? (...)

№ 8 from 26.03.1942

(...) I have telephone duty from 2 to 4 o'clock, and it is, therefore, the best time to write to you, my dear ones. How are you still? I hope everything is fine. (...)

Finally, the long-awaited thaw has begun, but also very immediately in a way that is only possible in Russia. At the same time, there is a strong storm, but the water quickly dries up. We are currently still in the school building. Actually, we wanted to leave the day before, but it has been postponed. I am curious to know if my rheumatism will return now, with the wet weather like last year, but I haven't noticed anything. In our front section, fierce fighting has been going on for eight days, and it is always going forward despite the lousy weather. Once it is dry and the warm weather sets in, I think it will soon be over for the Russians. I wonder what it will be like when they say it's a truce in the east one good day. I think we will all be jumping for joy if, one good day, we should be transported back to Germany. We will have had enough of Russia for the rest of our lives. (...)

№ 8 from 27.03.1942

(...) I cannot understand that on 15.3. when you wrote the letter № 30, you still had no message from me in your hands. I wrote the first letter from here on, I think, 27.2. A comrade from Elberfeld, who also wrote at the same time, told me that his wife had already received a letter from him on March 9. I believe that some letters must have arrived in the meantime. I beg you, don't get so worked up, and don't worry so much. It won't get any better. We are all in God's hands; whoever will be hit will be hit. The news that Hans Klosterkamp has also been hit was very close to my heart. Even when the letter arrived, I had such a strange feeling I opened the letter with reluctance. Poor Hans, such a splendid boy that it always has to come across the best. (...)

28.03.1942

(...)

№ 9 from 29.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) I'm still fine, healthy, and lively. I hope the same from you. After the thaw in the previous days, we now have frost again, but it's not so bad. During the day in the sun, it is even nice and warm. At home, spring will probably have arrived by now. You write that it's Saturday and you baked a little cake. When I think of our beautiful Saturday afternoons, I always get homesick and long for you two, dear ones. We don't know a weekday and a Sunday here, one day like the other. Sometimes you don't know what date or day of the week it is here. That's why the announcements on the radio: "Today is this or that weekday and the so-and-so." A few times, we had had the opportunity to listen to the radio in the evening, a portable radio. I felt quite different when some music was heard. But all this will also come back one day.

(...) Herr Budt (*a neighbor; the author*) is sorry that he can no longer get his beloved tobacco. We rarely get tobacco here. Otherwise, I would send him some. We get cigarettes to some extent, so that one just gets by. I have to stop now. My shift is almost over.

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, you are both very warmly greeted and kissed by your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
Goodbye

№ 10 from 31.03.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) I see that you two dear ones are well and that you are both still healthy so far. I am also still doing well, and I am still hale and hearty.

I am so glad you are finally getting mail from me and that our connection has been restored. It can still sometimes take a few days between letters so that you don't hear anything from me but don't worry about that.

I sympathize with you that you have been very anxious for the last four weeks. It's terrible when you wait for something every day, and it doesn't come. Your letters regularly come in a bit of a mess, not in the order you write them, but that doesn't matter. The main thing is that they come and you hear something from each other. I always think about how beautiful it will be when we are together again. You write that spring has already come to you and that the blackbird sings so beautifully in the morning. I

can imagine how beautiful that is. There is still high snow here, and it is cold but not like it used to be. I think that we have survived the worst.

We won't be able to think about a leave for a while. You're right. Once the fighting stops here in the east, it will be okay. I believe that this will not take too much longer. My dear wife, you write that you have endured and gone through a lot lately. I feel you. But I beg you, don't worry so much. Otherwise, I won't have any peace here. Look, I am not alone in this country; millions of comrades are here with me, and we all know what we are here for. After this war, we will all have it better once again. (...)

Greetings and kisses to you both, my two beloved ones, from your ever-loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father

(...)

I wish you a delighted and joyful Easter holidays

Goodbye

№ 11 from 02.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) In the meantime, we have changed positions again. From the (*illegible; the author*) position where we last were located, we have been moved forward about 50 km eastward. We are now in a pine forest, where the Russians were a few days ago. The accommodation rooms are earth bunkers and round, pointed wooden tents about 5 meters in diameter. There is a stove in the middle, so it is pretty warm in there. It's not so cold now, either. Today we had 5° Celsius warm during the day. It's getting better, thank God. This is supposed to have been the coldest winter in Russia for 140 years. In places, this winter has been 52° cold. 45° we measured one night during the shift. We are all glad that this cold is behind us. Actually, we live here quite nicely, so in the middle of the forest. If we stay here for a while longer, the snow is gone, and it gets really warm during the day, we will have the most beautiful summer retreat. At home, it will soon be the most beautiful time of the year again when everything is in bloom. Hopefully, by this time next year, we will all be home and have the war behind us. That will be the most beautiful spring of our lives. (...) You have to get through the war as well as good you can. If there's no other way, as you've already written, take on some orders from the army. (...)

№ 12 from 06.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi

Today on the 2nd day of Easter, I have to sit down to let you hear something from me again. I have not received any mail from you for a few days, but mail may be brought in tonight. (...)

Dear wife, can't you get a good remedy for lice at the pharmacy? We all caught some in the school building where we were last. We constantly check our shirts in the morning, and I have always found 2 to 3 lice in the last few days. I have already rubbed myself from top to bottom with diesel, but that doesn't help either. Maybe you can get something at home. As soon as we are out of the forest and return to a village where there is a sauna that is a steam bath, we quickly get rid of them. The whole thing is half bad, just a little unpleasant. (...)

What else is new with you? Did you have a good Easter?

It's still a bit cold here, and the snow is still there, too. But nevertheless, the front is in motion more and more. The Russians have suffered terrible losses at our front section, mainly by the Stukas. When spring comes, he will probably not be able to do anything, and then he will probably be finished entirely soon. (...)

№ 13 from 08.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hans!

(...) I am also very pleased that Hans received the Iron Cross. If he got it, then he certainly did something for it. Nobody gets it for nothing.

His point of view is already correct. He is also a real soldier. I certainly believe he will prevail, and I am especially happy for him. Yes, I was lucky with my nose; the tip is still a little brown today, but that will heal. The woman was old (*illegible; the author*) but still nice because she saved my nose. Young, pretty ones are almost not seen here. I will, as you write, write to the parents of Hans Klosterkamp. I also felt terribly close to Hans. (...)

Here, the winter is now also over. The mighty thaw has set in, and instantly it rains. Thank God that this winter is over. Sometimes we thought it would never end; sometimes, it seemed so. We were well protected against the cold in our clothes. But the Russians were even better, all quilted clothes, as you can see from the prisoners and the dead. (...)

08.04.1942

My dear Hans!

I received your dear letter and was very pleased that you, my dear boy, always think of me. I am happy that you are well; I am also well. The snow is now firmly gone here, and by the time you read this letter, it will probably be gone entirely, and it will probably be spring here. Uncle Hans can be proud of having received the Iron Cross. I don't need writing paper. I have plenty here. So the movie "Quax, the Crash Pilot" was very nice. If you are always good to your mother and diligent at school, your mother will probably let you go to the movies more often. Did the Easter Bunny also bring you something?

I hope you will always be very diligent and well-behaved at school, also to mommy, and bring her much joy. Finally, be greeted and kissed many times by your

Father

Many greetings to Mom and to your teacher

09.04.1942

(...)

№ 14 from 09.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hans!

(...) With us here in the forest camp, it is directly cordial, everything is outside in front of the tents, and everybody tries to occupy himself with something. One is washing, another is stuffing. Still, others are sawing and splitting wood. Still, others are lazing in the sun. The woods here contain lovely, beautiful stands of pine and spruce. Iron Gustav, a Russian armored plane, is flying away overhead just now. He visits us in the morning at 6 o'clock, at noon between 2 and 3 o'clock, and in the evening at 7 o'clock again. He always gets fired at a lot from all sides. He does it again until they shoot him down; well, it's his own fault.

The area here is constantly under protection from our fighter pilots, but he always comes when our fighters are just gone. The runways and roads outside the forest are now a mass of mud. If you have to go through with the car, you inevitably get stuck a few times.

But until April 14, the Russians have March 28 then, and after Easter, according to people, everything should be dry here. We still can't believe that the unbelievable cold is over and the snow is going away. We are happy about every spot of ground that is seen free of snow. What luck that we finally survived this winter. Hopefully, we won't have to go through a second one here in Russia, but we all don't think so; Adolf Hitler will see to that. Even if parts of us have to stay here in Russia as an occupation army, the main thing is that there will be no more fighting. The coming months will decide that.

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, greetings and kisses to you both from your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
Many greetings to all. Write again soon.
Goodbye

P.S.: I think I got rid of my beasties again. This morning I found only one dead (louse). The diesel seems to have worked after all. I also put on fresh laundry three times in a row. Please still send something for later cases.

№ 15 from 11.04.1942

(...)

№ 16 from 13.04.1942

(...) I am glad that you are both alive and well and that my letters and the 50 RM have arrived. (...)

As you write, things are not looking particularly good at work. The difficulties you have to deal with are all kinds. Fortunately, the war will not last much longer. I think that by the time a quarter of a year has passed, the fighting here in Russia will be over. At the moment, we have the most beautiful spring weather. Larks and starlings are already here. But the roads and paths are in a condition you can't imagine. There won't be that much mud soon, as you can see here. Nevertheless, our supply of ammunition and rations works out. But the mud should be dry in a few days. Our front here is being moved further and further eastward. The Stukas are helping solidly. Hopefully, the day will soon come when I can see my homeland and you two dear ones again. One has a great longing for it. It won't take much longer until the fighting here is over. (...)

№ 16 from 16.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

I haven't heard from you for a few days. Hopefully, you are all still alive and well, and everything is still in the best order?

I can still report the very best about myself. We have here only time, the most beautiful spring weather all day, wonderful sunshine and so lovely and warm. We are now compensated to some extent for the winter. If things were not so serious, one would be tempted to think one was here in a beautiful German seaside resort. It is similar to the forest in Freudenstadt, where we looked for wild berries. The birds are all here already. Yesterday we saw the first butterfly, a giant lemon butterfly. In front of our wooden shelter, we have made a table and benches, and there we can already stand it. Out in the open, all the snow is already gone. Here in the forest, it still lies in places, but that doesn't bother us. This is the most beautiful time of the year. A few more weeks, then come the incredible heat and the dust, but it will be better to bear than the cold of winter. We want to enjoy ourselves in our forest as long as we can. Here the sick can get well. Can you get anything for mosquito bites at home? This plague will probably start soon. It would be nice to have something to dab the bites with. Maybe ammonia or something similar.

(...) Then something else occurs to me. If you can get a simple bathing suit or some kind of gym shorts made of fabric, please send them to me. They will be helpful here as well.

That would be everything again for the time being. If only one could get rid of the longing and the homesickness for you both, dear ones. But you have to fight it; otherwise, you wouldn't be able to stand it. But one day, even that will come to an end. Do you have any news from home? Write soon and often and spare no details.

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, greetings, and kisses to you both from your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
Many greetings to all acquaintances.
Goodbye

№ 17 from 19.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

It is Sunday morning, 11 o'clock. Since I just have time, I want to quickly write a few lines to you, my two loved ones. I am alive and well, and everything is in perfect order. I hope the same from you. I haven't heard from you for about eight days, but that is due to the current transportation difficulties here. There is no way through the muddy roads. It took one of our trucks three days to cover a distance of 12 km, which is the distance from Hamm to Ahlen. You can imagine what is going on here. On the way, the driver also saw our field post truck standing there, and he said that it could still take a few days until it would get to us, but then we will probably get mail in abundance.

I sit in front of our tent at our table. It is lovely sunshine. One can probably stand it. These days you will probably hear various particular reports from our front section because today, the connection with the army corps (10th and 2nd Army Corps), which had been trapped all winter, will be re-established. (*He refers to the soldiers trapped in the Demjansk Pocket; the author.*) There were about 100,000 men trapped there by the Russians. Our division drove a big horseshoe-shaped wedge into the Russians, which has now created some pockets in which the Russians are sitting.

The stukateurs are now back at work again. Everything is shaking from the bomb hits. The comrades coming out of the cauldron today will probably all be very happy. (...) Further, I have another request. But you don't have to be angry and rant. Can you find a camera for me? But only a 35 mm camera in the format 2.5 x 4 cm comes into question. The camera can be used but must have a reasonably good lens and a bag for the camera. Would you once (...) see whether you can find such a camera? (...)

№ 18 from 20.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) Due to transportation difficulties, the letters were on the road for a few days longer. That is, therefore, understandable. You write that Hans was also in the area of Lake Ilmen and was wounded there. It is possible that we were located very close to each other. It is a pity that we did not meet. In the meantime, we have come a little farther south. You can have a look at our map if you find a town called "Staraja Russa" (250 km south of St. Petersburg, government district Novgorod). There we are.

As you write, the money and some letters were on the way for only eight days, which is actually still very fast. Do not save too much. Buy for you and Hansi what you can get and use. I am glad that your stomach is okay again. Can't you get better white bread because of your stomach problem – bread that your stomach will tolerate? Our commissary bread is lovely. It is a pleasure to eat it; it doesn't even need to have anything on it. We can do without a lot of things when it comes down to it, just not bread and cigarettes. As long as we have those two items, we're fine. It was nice that Hansi got something from the Easter bunny and that you had a little cake for Easter. It's a pity that you didn't have nice weather.

Here one day is nicer than the other. We can use the good weather to finally beat the Russians. About your conversation in the bathroom, I was pleased. I'm glad Hansi has such a good opinion of me and is so attached to me.

We often had to wash our bodies with snow. We have always washed with thawed snow until now. We keep ourselves clean here. Shaving every second day and fresh laundry every 8 days for as long as possible. (...)

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, you are both very warmly greeted and kissed by your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
Greetings to all, and write again soon.
Goodbye

№ 19 from 24.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) So Family Kiemann wants to go to the East after the war? When I return home, no one shall say the words "Russia" or "East" in my presence because he will be a corpse the next moment. (...) At the moment, we are still positioned in our beautiful forest. We couldn't be better off. Everything is fine, only I miss you two very much. (...)

№ 19 from 25.04.1942

(...)

№ 20 from 26.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) Every Sunday at this time, I always think back to how nice and comfortable it always was. How fortunate we are that we acquired our beautiful apparatus at that time; you are benefiting from it now. Otherwise, you would have nothing. I am already looking forward to it, if I may (*illegible; the author*) once again. Then you write whether K.d.F. (*Strength through Joy leisure organization; the author*) visits the front? That is not well possible; such a thing is only for home warriors. The front-line soldier cannot think of such a thing for the time being. It is also possible that K.d.F. will come here. (...)

№ 21 from 27.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) It can cost them dearly if the wrong people find out about it. You heard the Führer's speech on Sunday. We had a gathering here, and he spoke clearly enough about those who are in the homeland (*Adolf Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on April 26, 1942; the author*). It is also necessary now that everything is at stake. Also, the announcement of the retaliation of the English bombing raids against our cities and civilian population allows for a deep look, and the English will probably experience our wrath soon. I believe that in the next quarter, the decisive blow will probably be stricken upon the enemy here in the East. (...)

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, greetings, and kisses to you both from your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
(...)
Goodbye

28.04.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) You ask how I am? According to the circumstances, I must say, very well, but I miss you both so much, but that will also be over once our task here is finished. After all, we have seen and experienced here, we will be doubly happy when we return to our homeland and our loved ones.

And we will certainly not have become worse, because people who have had to go through such a hard school can only become better as a result. Only the first time, you will have to take a little consideration for me until we have settled in the home and in the old habits.

In our opinion, the main fighting force of the Russians is already broken. You can see it in the fact that you only see planes one by one because if the planes were available like ours, then the enemy would use them. When our stukateurs and bombers attack, there are always at least eight to nine. But we also counted sixty Stukas once. And we got to the places afterward where they had done their work. It is the same with the Russian artillery. They fire twice a day, then it is over, then they have to save on ammunition because they have no supplies. It's cut off for the most part. We have better chances here in the east; you can imagine they are exploited adequately at the right moment. (...)

№ 1 from 01.05.1942

My dear wife and my dear Hansi!

(...) Today is already the first of May, and we have lovely weather here, one day is more beautiful than the other, but you can't see any tree or shrub that is already starting to turn green. Out of the forest, there are large fields that cannot be overlooked, but everything is uncultivated. The war has passed over it. Everything will be green at home by now, and soon, everything will bloom.

How are you still? I hope you are still alive and well. Everything is still in good order here. One man from the division headquarters can now go on leave every week. First, those who can give very urgent reasons, e.g., deaths in the family, bomb damage, etc., and those who have four or more children and have not been home for more than a year. When those are through, then come the others. One good day, it will probably work out for me too. (...)

Finally, my dear wife and my dear Hansi, you are both very warmly greeted and kissed by your loving and always-thinking of you

Husband and father
(...)
Goodbye

№ 2 from 02.05.1942

(...) Last night we all celebrated May 1. We had plenty of alcohol, even French cognac, and liqueur. (...)