

Jrmgard Otto's War Diaries - 1942 to 1943



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Figure 1: Irmgard in her Red Cross uniform



Riga, Soviet Union (formerly Latvia)

Thursday 1 October, 1942

4 am sitting on a staircase

I am sitting here in the middle of the night in front of a closed door and admire the deep sleep of the occupants of the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz (German Red Cross) guest house. Just last Friday I was sailing and was unaware of the coming changes. Last Saturday at 10:30 am I got the call-up from the district office and then the dance started. I drove immediately to Munich. I couldn't even say goodbye to Mother Beer. I visited the police, the bank, ordered cards, the police again, the state office, the insurance office and the tax office. I'm slowly getting to know Munich. In between I wash, iron and repair. It takes a while but everything is completed. I must leave on Monday evening. I am afraid I will run out of time.

The luggage worries me. Richard comes in again, brings 2 cakes from Mother Beer. We eat one right away. I can't take two cakes on my journey. I also receive a cake from Gretel, my older sister.

I traveled to Berlin in 2nd class in the wounded soldier section. I receive updated instructions from the committee office. I am quickly out again and travel to Babelsberg, where I get a

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backpack and a huge package of warm things. I continue by train and disembark at the Zoo station in Berlin. I arrive with 7 pieces of luggage. How will manage? Finally I have all the luggage with me at the Zoo station. I sweat due to the effort.

I decide to go to Spandau again to visit Frau Otto. I am happy to do it. What else can do but walk around in Berlin. I will be welcomed again and she is terribly nice. She quickly bakes a cake and places it on the table. In the evening I get a large piece of meat and delicious chocolate cream. She offers many things for me to take along but there is no room. Finally I have to put on Jürgen's watch and leave the golden one with her.

Frau Otto and Almuth even bring me to the train at 11:00 pm. At the end ,I have to say, that I very glad. The train had arrived 10 minutes earlier and was stormed by the passengers. I was pushed between on the ground between two train cars. Suddenly I found myself on the tracks. Then I started to complain and the people let me go forward.

I boarded an old second class car and immediately occupied an available space. Then the torrent of people poured over me. Knapsacks were thrown around my feet. Then 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 soldiers climbed in and I could no longer move. But with humor everything works. Finally there were several handshakes, a wave, a goodbye and I was by myself in a wagon full of men and luggage. Slowly the ruckus cleared and I tried to sleep a little while sitting in a cramped space. But one could move an inch.

Two non-commissioned officers were quite nice, treated me with fruit, chocolate and coffee beans. I was still completely filthy from my fall. Only in Insterburg at least I managed to wash my hands.

It was a beautiful day, the country stretched far and wide. There were many horses and cows, bridges, heather and now and then a fir forest. The same landscape for hours and hours.

After Tilsit, East Prussia, we cross the former border to the Soviet Union. Immediately the difference is striking; no more stone houses but dirty little cottages, mostly just a room, a fountain for water. The rather neglected people stare as the train whizzes by. Only the gatekeeper's houses are still made of brick, in front of it stands a woman at the turnout in civilian clothes with the Reichsbahn hat on her head.

In Krottingen is the new border. There is a long catering supply train. I board this train, especially since the soldiers help me carry my luggage. After half an hour it continues. Suddenly the train guard comes and throws me out of wagon. I have to go the : Sister you have to get in front of car 9. The next one says car 7. A first lieutenant takes my luggage and guides me into the officer car. Then the train guard comes again and throws me out. I have to go to the "armed forces entourage" wagon. That annoys me. But I board a 3rd class compartment alone with a staff assistant who is quite nice. Then I move wagons again, into the next compartment where

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there is an iron stove that is currently being heated by a Lithuanian woman. We try to sleep, the benches which are too hard and too short. At 2:30 a.m. we are at the Riga train station. Finally, I stumble into the canteen with my luggage. After a long back and forth they give me someone from the station guard to take me further. Now I have to wait to see when someone wakes up. Something is slowly stirring on the street.



Figure 2: Irmgard's Train Journey – Munich to Riga: 28 September – 1 October 1942

Riga October 2, 1942

At 5 o'clock I finally was let in and was led into the day room, where I could lie down on a sofa, with a coat as my blanket. At 8 a.m. I scrambled up and wash myself; it was a real celebration. At 9 a.m. sharp I go the chief of staff Wuchs. After a long wait he arrives. It was very different from the other departments, very personal and nice.

I was scheduled for a Bavarian unit assigned to Virbalis, on the Lithuanian-German border, where the central and northern eastern front delousing takes place. There are 5 units there. The Bavarian unit was poorly lead and now I should go there. In the afternoon I was allowed to sleep in, and for dinner I was invited to the staff leader's home. It was very cozy and nice, a real German.

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Today I had to report to her again. I was afraid that he would not consider me suitable as a unit leader, above all too young. Now he suddenly thinks that she does not want to let me go to the regiment, but that I use my skills in her staff as a arts and craft worker and I should then travel through the whole unit and advise them how to make their lodgings nicer. I'm fine with it; it's very interesting. Now I'm supposed to take another 10-day handicraft course back home in Schermo. I usually dislike Schermo, but I love going there for that. and will drive again tomorrow if nothing comes up. I am already deloused.

Cottbus, October 4, 1942

On Saturday the 3rd, we actually went back home. I actually wanted to go via Dresden and surprise Krümel. For that reason I would have taken off a night without permission, but the train did not go via Dresden, i.e. I should have gotten off in Cottbus beforehand, and that was an S.F. Train that was overcrowded. So I traveled over Berlin, was there at 8 a.m., quickly met Tina at the Kranzler corner (Berlin) and started my journey again at noon. On the border in Memel (now Lithuania), all those on furlough from the front received a food package with 2 pounds of butter, sausage, sugar, flour etc. as a gift from the Fuhrer. Too bad I'm on a business trip.

Riga, October 27, 1942

Back again to Riga. The ride wasn't quite as exciting as the first time. However, from Berlin to Memel I was only able to secure a 3rd class seat. There was typically no more space here in the guest house. So we stumbled at 11 pm to the accommodation manager, then to Dorpaterstraße. There I was put in a small room with a criticizing mother with a nice daughter.

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Figure 3: View of Riga from the train

Today I was sent to another unit. Now I am sitting in a rear building on the 4th floor in a cleared-out apartment with no light and only a few clean beds. Runny nose, face and arm swollen from stings. But at least it's nice weather today and not cold.

Gatchina, Soviet Union

Nov. 2, 1942

I raced around Riga for two more days to get material. Four times to the supervisory officer for release certificates, then to the approval office in factories, shops, army accommodation management, everywhere 2-3 times. My foot was swollen and soon I had difficulty walking.

My first accommodation had no light and it was dark at 6 o'clock. That was a little bleak. I then moved to the Rosenberg ring. Finally I had: suitcase, backpack, 3 giant packages, folder and water bottle. Then I travel here by train for 20 hours, from Walh as the only female traveler.

I stood here at the platform (train station was too crowded) with my luggage. Eventually I took it step by step to the other platform, climbed over wagons with such high running boards that the soldiers either had to push or pull (a disadvantage of the tight skirts) and landed finally in the VE. From then on, a Russian brought my luggage to the house, a wooden villa, which

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already looked very dilapidated. The main leader received me very nicely, I found a bed made, warm water; it was overwhelming.

The comrades are all very nice. the unit is also very old and already welded together. The inside of the house is covered with plywood, even a piano, a few pictures, and a light blue bathtub. In the afternoon I was allowed to go to a horse hospital, on a former Russian state estate of 4,000 acres, where a senior veterinarian lives with 120 men and 300 horses.

We passed through lots of dirt, went past shot up villages, bombed tanks and partisan forests. Outside we would be welcomed by the poor hermit "Graf Quast zu Guida". A great cake with whipped cream awaited us.

The whole estate has been reorganized and produces a lot of grain. 140 Russians are still working there. The stables are exemplary clean and well-furnished like in Germany. Just no light. In the evening we found the booth already full of guests from the front, 4 people (illegible) from Lake Ladoga were there, 2 assistant doctors and a medical officer. One seemed familiar to me, he also claimed to know me from somewhere. It got really nice and funny with the right "care".

On Sunday morning there were others again and the four bathers showed up again. In the evening there were a few dive bomber pilots with harmonica and lots of energy. People are so happy to find German order and German coziness here again, and they don't want to leave anymore. Last week there was shooting here again, a nurse from the hospital is dead. In broad daylight the Ari (Russians?) sometimes shoots us here. The airfield and train are right next to us.

This morning I helped out at the train station. This afternoon I went to the military hospital in Uikolskoje (perhaps Nikol'skoye Russia). I finally start building crafts.

It is definitely more beautiful here than in Riga. Everything is much more personal, more generous, no such stage spirit. Hopefully I can stay a little longer than 14 days, or come back later. A giant castle and park is here, a summer residence of the Leningrad government. Much is shattered, neglected, without windows, the streets for no reason (probably muddy). On the fourth of November it becomes difficult with too much water. You can see Russian guys here, great people. Soldier accommodations and 2 cinemas are also here.

5th November 1942

Today everything was frozen and it was freezing cold. But that gives us sun and weather that allows aircraft operations. We are waiting for a restless night after our Stukas annoyed Ivan (the Russians). I was at the airfield yesterday. I visited Stukas. Great machines. Lieutenant Pause then flew one in front of me. Taking you on plane is, of course, strictly forbidden.

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This afternoon while I away they were busy building crafts. The Stukas (presumably Stukas' aviators) helped eagerly; it was a nice picture. Suddenly most of them are very eager, especially when sawing.

The day before yesterday we were invited to tea with the lieutenant colonel the "local comedian" in the afternoon for third time. I am typically treated as a "better personality". Hopefully I will get to the front to Krasnowgelo. I am also invited to visit the horse hospital. Important guests are coming again tonight. We absolutely don't live without alcohol. It is passed around the group. The recipe: vodka with raspberry juice.

8th November 1942

But now it has become very cold, at night - 20 degrees, plus it leaks in through all windows and doors, this shack is typically sloppily built. Some of the water is already frozen. The Stukas are once again hard at work, in the evening they usually come over quickly, then sometimes it is said, some staff sergeants so overtaken with their zeal that they make angels en masse. Captain Philipp, who was awarded the oaks leaves with sword, was there too. Most of the time they are very funny, but then it overcomes them again and it hits us too. Out of 36 officers there are only still 5! One understands that they still want something from life. Every day 3-7 missions in the very cold, 3-7 times in danger of death! And afterwards for a cup of coffee with us, they suddenly think they are back home. At 2:45 p.m. the sun goes down, at 4 p.m. it's pitch black, so they all don't know what to do with boredom. We were now in the horse hospital too, drove there in the wagon with 2 apple molds, slightly cool despite blankets and fur, there was then coffee and the like. Cake and whipped cream from Graf Quast. There was also a lot to celebrate, promotions, birthdays, farewells, and returning. It was pretty nice and happy.

11 November, 1942

The day before yesterday the chief of staff came to Riga to visit for 3 days. We drove straight to Shasnoye-Iselo on the front, from where you can see Petersburg wonderfully. It was just a little late and outrageously cold. But you could see as far as the Gulf of Finland and the like. You could see the houses of Petersburg. Two km from the hill there were already various positions, you could hear the shooting and see the muzzle flashes. We had to camouflage ourselves with the hoods and not stand in groups because the enemy sees every movement.

Then we were in the soldiers' home with Sister Friedel, a lively, very nice little woman. Her son is lying there in the cemetery so she doesn't want to leave either. Every day a batch of soldier on day leave come straight from the ditch and get spoiled there. You don't even feel that you're so close to the front, it's so cozy there, even if it's simple. However, the house now has almost no window panes left. Otherwise there is always lots of snoring in the evenings and afternoons. A Stuka lieutenant next door had a son, and he immediately asked me to help him design fairy

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tale characters so that he could bring something home for Christmas. It's nice how eager they are always to help us. Bubi makes background music for hours on the piano. Now there are always some coming from the Krebs Unit. In addition, I have a lot to do. I also have to work for the staff in Riga; everyone has special requests again. In 8 days I am going to Pleskan. Maybe I can fly with the Portju; that would be great.

13 November 1942

I am slowly getting scared that I have too much to do and how the time flies. In the afternoon, when everyone is building something, I try to finish a few things but cannot because then the light goes out every evening and there's and we experience artillery and bombing. The local headquarters got a direct hit, straight into the casino; we took a look. Lieutenant Viertel is busy building something for his 8-day-old son; it's very nice. Everyone who comes here will soon be building... doctors, officers, men, inspectors, everything is mixed up. At first they all don't say anything, but then later, I was alone with Rohde for half an hour. Now he has unpacked and told me all his problems. (In large circles he always claims that he remains a bachelor and is an anti-feminist) and now he explains everything from the other side; he just doesn't know which one in German. I had the feeling that it was good for him to only speak out once; I couldn't give him much advice. But one is happy when someone like that has such confidence in us. I received a real little icon from Miss Krebs, and a real, very beautiful watercolor from the main guide. I was terribly happy about both. Apparently they liked my work here after all.

20 November 1942 Plesques

On the evening of the 17th there was an engagement party, much to everyone's surprise. A ton of people eventually got together. There was much drinking. On my last day I drank a lot of coffee with a farewell cake and the like and celebrated again in the evening. It started with a intensive snowball fight with the Stuka officers. Then wanted to get slightly stupid, everyone was tire as they sat on the chairs. Then I thought of some nice games and the mood quickly improved. Soon we couldn't laugh anymore. In the craziness, 2 wooden spoons broke. The Stukas were with us with both their body. I noticed that they are still big boys after all. Rohde assured them that it was his best evening in Russia. It should be over at 12 o'clock, some had already disappeared, did Bubi suddenly showed with a bottle of tree liquor (??) and a box of biscuits. And now it started all over again. This was followed by caviar with nut liqueur called the "Word of God".

The main leader kept making attempts to close, but was always outvoted. Finally, Borstel got up a little bright and ready and asked for the liquor key. She didn't give up until she had it and then trumped with a green bottle of "rat poison". It was hideous stuff, but nothing like inside of you. The party ended at 3:30 am with a parade march in front of the house. The Stukas had to promise that they would not fly the next day. The next morning, the station leader vowed to

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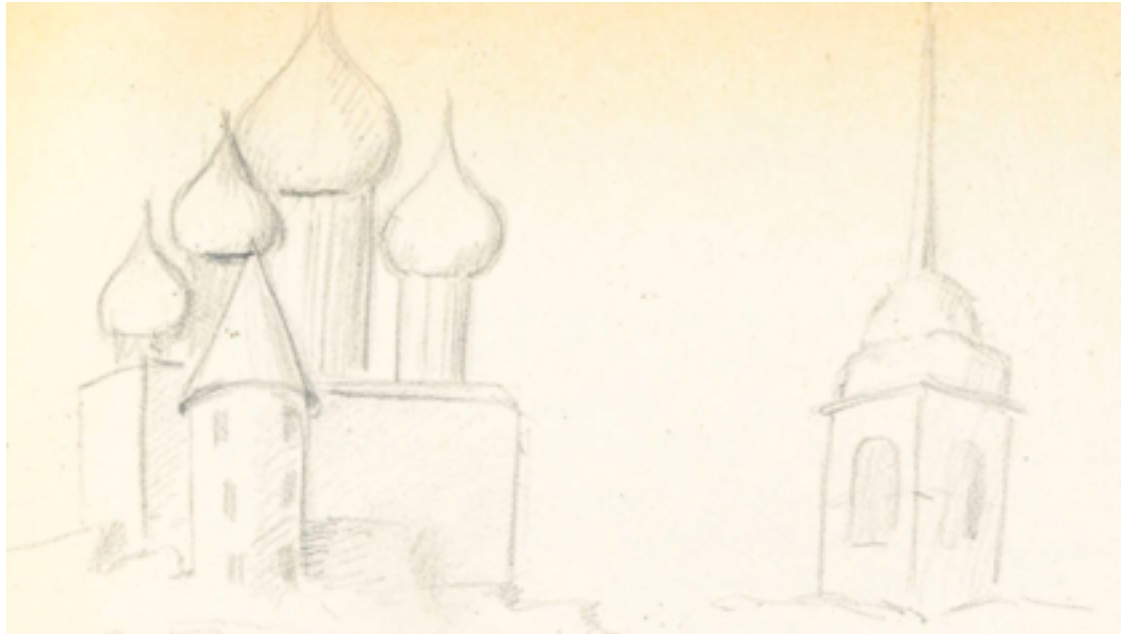
begin a better life and including keeping all men away for a while. I see black, because Bubi will serve as a chauffeur.

The day of departure was magically beautiful. Everything lightly dusted with snow, plus a pale blue sky and black clouds on the horizon. So, unfortunately, nothing is flying, despite the good relationship with the Air Force and the Portjin did not fly. I left yesterday with a firm promise to come back for Christmas, if possible. Everything here is more populated, but much colder. High rooms, cold splendor. My suitcase and backpack were loaded by a Russian boy who suddenly disappeared with both. Everyone predicted that I had seen both. Merry Christmas. Finally it was found back on the station square, just minus a sausage and the biscuits. So at least I got away without a disaster. Now I'm going to struggle again for the first few days, everyone looks at me suspiciously, nobody volunteers to help me. The bedrooms are unheated and slightly cool. But basically you kind of felt a warm spirit when you walked in. Every guest was treated poorly; each table did not care about any other. Even with cancer I noticed that only a few were asked to do so, the others just got nothing.

29th November 1942

I'm feeling better today. My feelings of passive resistance have faded, except those that arise on their own. The latest craze is building cradles, it goes splendidly. The day before yesterday the area leader came back, they were complaining loudly that a lot hadn't worked out. I thought so immediately, the Stübs (unknown) is not energetic enough. Also our two invitations to the H.V.h had stretched too long, especially on the second evening it could not find an end and everything was very tired. The area leader stubbornly finished at 11 a.m. She had a very nice chat with me about leadership issues, etc. I understand her point of view too. Pleskan has been pretty much destroyed in some places. The Russians setup their markets between the ruins, where they trade in sheet metal parts from rusted stove pipes, old pottery shards, etc. And with their elegant felt stockings pulled over their galoshes they look like they have elephant legs.

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Drawing of the Cathedral of Pleskan

November 29 (1st Day of Advent) 1942

Now I've settled in pretty well, the room is heated and the enthusiasm grows. Now I have to go to the other unit during the day, a small, narrow house, but somehow it is more comfortable. It's just cold there. I get on very well with the area guide now, she's really splendid, even if it there is conflict sometimes. I probably have to go to Riga after all. The area leader is also in favor of my staying in the area, hopefully she will put in a good word. I probably won't get any Christmas mail, because the staff has changed the number, the old number is in Dorpat, so the mail goes to Dorpat, from there to Riga, that is Vilnius, from there back here. I'm sure I'll be in Schemo by then. Well, it isn't the worst. If only I knew whether Jürgen got to Canada safely, but he has written that it can take months before a message arrives.

Riga, December 14th, 1942

The staff leader called in Pleskan; she wanted me there; I leave but cursing quietly. I thought it would nice, to go first to Duo (illegible) and then back to Krasnogwardish. But now I'm not unhappy either. I was able to go to the hairdresser's here, take a bath, the laundry is better, a nice apartment. I work all by myself; sometimes it's quiet after the hustle and bustle. The farewell to Pleskan was also quite nice, unfortunately the flight did not work out at the last minute. At Christmas I can actually go back to Riga. The staff leader said so right away. I had drilled with the main leader and also Haschke asked for it, too, she even started the day before yesterday at the birthday party in front of the staff leader in public, whether I could possibly come to Riga. Staff leader refused, however, because she had other ideas for me. When she does, she goes to Hans Baumann's home in Strübig.

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The birthday was really great with lots going on. Around 25 leaders were present. We had planned for 40. Some wanted to request assistance immediately after seeing my little angels. At lunchtime, Petzoldt suddenly said that in Schemo Mr. Wecker had already said that after Christmas I would be back and the teacher would then be assigned to a field office somewhere, where everyone would come together again for a course. But the staff leader immediately said, no, that is out of the question, she is staying here.

When it is possible I will go to the house of Hans Baumann in Strübig. After Christmas I should go to Kämmern. Staff leader's birthday was very nice, but it was a big hustle and bustle. Twenty-five female leaders appeared, but we had even expected 40 people. Great whipped cream cakes and cream cakes arrived from Kämmern, the shipment is enough for 4 guests. They celebrated alone with us on Friday evening. The birthday table was set up and then there was coffee with her mother's birthday cake and the like. Egg cognac from Holland.

The next morning they drank a lot of coffee with her, and she even read a letter from her husband. He was as loving, as full of happiness and joy as on the wedding day, not as after 15 years of marriage. We were very happy that she allowed us to participate in everything. She also lives a little in fear that she will change due to the hard work, and her husband would like to find her less womanly. She is a very great idealist in general and has a kind heart. And you can see that you can also manage such a large district and over 1,000 helpers with kindness.

December 14, 1942

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My birthday is now over. I almost wanted to be unknown to all others. A package from Gretel and Susi, had already come 10 days before, and I had opened early as I was looking for mail that had been forwarded but there neither letters, cards nor parcels. I was a little depressed about it. But they made it very nice for me here. As we gathered together around a bedside lamp, I received from the staff leader a real Bakarat glass from Brussels, from Petzold a wooden bowl, from leader Henrich and Lise a book each.

Hertha got tickets to the opera , so all of us except for the staff leaders, who unfortunately had no time, went to La Boheme, with good singers and a good orchestra but performed in Latvian. But the melodies are so wonderful and I had wonderful memories about it. In the evening a bottle of caviar liqueur was bought, unfortunately I had little time and had to draw a pine branch on 60 letters. I've been working hard now with the invitations to the Christmas party and the like often going to bed late. Hopefully I'll find some time for to make a few small presents. My own people back home all fell short this year - unfortunately.

December 29, 1942

Christmas is over! The party that has been worked on, prepared for and looked forward to for so long! The last few days in Riga were still very busy with the preparations for the Christmas party, I made invitations and place cards non-stop until late at night. Then on the 22nd I left, full of anticipation. A few soldiers were in the compartment, the mood was very cheerful. But with the sergeant one could only talk about serious topics.

It got really cold in Luga. But a little comment was enough and I was wrapped in a whole bunch of blankets. My cold was already gone. Already in Waller (sp?) I was told that the unit would be happy to see me and the welcome was really big. I am treated like a guest here again, but I really wanted to do some service. But because of all the invitations I can hardly get to it.

On the 24th, nobody was allowed into the living room and dining room. Coffee had to be fetched from the kitchen, otherwise we could do what we wanted. Ruthchen came into the room with the coffeepot and a couple of cups with the song "from heaven high, here I come".

At two o'clock the cars came to pick us up for our surprise trips to the positions. I went with Major Lüttgens, Hilde and others. Heinerle. It was foggy and already dawn. A desolate landscape, cabbage, in between houses, tanks and soldiers' graves.

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First we stopped at three houses that had been shot up and went into one. We received a snappy welcome from of the major, who looked at us in astonishment. We were led into the office, which was poorly furnished and decorated.

Finally the comrades who were still at work were rounded up and they came in very sheepish. They had put the parcel under the little Christmas tree and now we sang our songs, some of them newer ones, which we sang alone and then the old ones where everyone sang along.

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Slowly the spell broke and a real Christmas mood set in. When we were leaving, they pulled the major aside and asked again why they deserved that we had visited them. Then the major drove us to Pushkin, as he knew we were very interested which is 1.5 to 2 km behind the front.



In the castle park we walked at bit. Then suddenly tak-tak-tak, on the left an M.G. and then on the right, bursts of fire very close. On the way back we had to stop at a crossroads and then we also heard the artillery. And in the evening the major also told us that the corner was the most important one, good visibility of the enemy occurs often. He sweated a lot.

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Then we went 5 km behind the front to a shelter occupied by a crew of 10. They had already started to celebrate in their little Russian house, had made it really lovely. Suddenly the boss called: The sergeant reported: We have visitors, 3 sisters. The one on the other end of the line didn't believe it. Then Hilde answered the phone, wishing everyone a merry Christmas, a moment's break, because at the other end the mouth probably didn't close anymore then: yes, that's really true. It was difficult to leave around 5 o'clock, everyone still accompanied us on the street, the handshaking never stopped.

At the train station we first saw somewhat depressed faces. What was going on? Yes, the costly merchandise had already worked, some had already reached the group and when the leader said a few words, they shouted in return. But then, when the Christmas carols rang out, they became quiet and everything crowded around us. And "Silent Night, Holy Night" sounded so powerful and beautiful through the great barrack and united everyone. I think we got many, many in a good mood through the songs.

At 7 o'clock the celebration was in the home, just between us and the three brothers-in-laws of the unit. The table barely supported everything. The little silver plates had turned out to be delightful, and I was particularly pleased with the real Meissen china cup, the stockings and the Brussels lace handkerchief from the staff leader.

At 11 o'clock suddenly the Flack department next door came armed with a Christmas tree to serenade us, which went a little wrong, shortly afterwards there was more frivolity, the house was soon full and the fun began. At 1 o'clock we finally got her out of the house with gentle force. On the first holiday we went to the field hospital to help celebrate. The lightly wounded were very happy and eager to join in, singing something to us too. But for the seriously injured ward it was sad, the boys lay very pale in bed and some came to tears. Her comrades who looked after her sat down by the bed, petted her and talked to you well. It was really touching with what tenderness and care they showed.

In the afternoon there was a big official coffee chat, plates, cups and chairs were just enough. Two lieutenants by the headlights(?) came, one wanted to thank my people again for the visit on Christmas Eve, the other complained a little that they had missed out. And now he invited us to one of his positions for the second holiday. It was nice there, too, cramped and small, everything, but cozy, a real "ski hut" atmosphere.

When we got back from it at 7 o'clock, the whole house was already full again. 17 men, we didn't have any more space. Bärbel was taken to the train, and everything went with her. There were 10 Kraxelhuber alone, 3 musicians, some pharmacists and other neighbors. 50 people. There was a lot going on, at times everything met again in the kitchen. Throwing them out took a long time and was quite difficult, mostly they came back in somewhere else.

Scheimo January 8, 1943

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Now I have landed back in Scheimo and have to adjust a lot to be considered a number again, no longer a person. And not a step without lock step, without guard. But I'm only assigned, not transferred. The chief of staff said at once, I'll definitely be back. Mr. Meche also agreed, because he didn't just want to send the bad ones out and keep the good ones. But of course I won't be on the faculty. But will ok with 4 weeks to go.

The old comrades from the last course will be coming in 8 days, in preparation I am making the drafts. But now at last the days are nice in Krasnogwardisk. The staff leader came on the 31st, and brought me Christmas mail with some bad news. She learned on New Year's Eve that she had cancer. In the evening we celebrated with Herrmännchen, the Kagelhuber assistant doctor who were pretty tired as well.

At 12 o'clock the soldiers started a great bombardment, tracer ammunition lit the sky, everyone use the last ammunition they had with them. I withdrew shortly after 12 noon as I was too tired and the old memories came up too much for me to really participate.

On New Year's staff leader went to Siverskaya and took me with her. We visited the house of an Armatriten who had a small wooden house in the midst of trees built in the style of the old Russian culture. The rooms are small and cute and filled with very valuable icons, carpets and furniture. The most notable decoration was a picture in wood with about 8 rows of saints, very finely painted on a wonderful gold tone background. The resident is a young captain who has an understanding of the situation and doesn't want the house to fall into the wrong hands. Now he has offered it to the D.R.K. The staff leader agrees, so it will be a small rest home for about 8-10 helpers. Security officer Krebs is supposed to set it up. She also has good taste.

The next day, it worked out that I and the two press people from the Presidium to Pushkin and Shetzke could take a drive. The two of them, especially Ingrid the photographer, who wore civilian clothes, naturally wanted to experience the front and sweettalked with everybody to be taken along somehow.

I have been to Kresnojesslo and Duderhofer heights before, and had seen the beautiful grave of Lenin. You could also see the sea and even the Neva. But Ingrid soon had enough, it was pretty cold, and she gave up taking pictures. Then in Pushkin the camera stopped working.

After entering the park, we suddenly saw a burning truck in front of us. We stopped, the men ran up, I just heard someone shouting "leave it alone, he can no longer be saved", then the driver came back and said, "I have to go a little further, the car there just got a hit." The driver was badly wounded, the other lightly - and of course we didn't have a first-aid kit with us! Then the next shell whistled over our heads, the lieutenant ran as fast as he could to the car, he was a little pale. "I cannot take responsibility, I think we have to turn around, it's too uncomfortable for us today. " But because of the wounded, we run quickly to the castle, there was a main first aid station for the Spaniards so that he would be taken care of immediately.

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While the first lieutenant was searching the ruined castle for the first aid station, we picked up a German troop doctor and immediately drove him to the scene of the accident in our car. But when he got there the wounded man had already been taken away. We drove one more street to the Alexanders Palace, which was less destroyed but completely looted. The Tsar's family is said to have been arrested there in 1917, and plans to attack Germany are said to have been developed there in 1914.

It had huge rooms, beautiful grounds, the last pieces of furniture overturned, the sofas cut with knives, the windows smashed, the floor full of snow and black ice, it was a bleak picture. Senseless destructive rage lived here, the rest must have been put to shame by the Spaniards who are now in the area. The guard came there to take her beloved photos with a real Russian sleigh, and I had to decorate the scene.

Then we went on to Studzk, past some streets that lead directly to our positions, which were 300 - 500 meters away, past the accident site again, where in the middle of the street lay a couple of bloody boots. Then we went past burned-out villages, where there were no more houses, only a few sad brick ovens showed that people had once lived here.

In Studzk we visited another castle, the division headquarters used to be there until things got too uncomfortable. Now it is half shot up, in the rest of the house or vegetation Spaniards. It had so much dirt and stench that Germans couldn't stand it. The stairs had been used as a toilet, a pile on each step. We all left the place.

The Ari, our troops and the Russians were quite active, M.G. (machine gun) and rifle shots could be heard. The lieutenant tried to convince us that the soldiers had to clean their firearms and only then they would shoot.

Then we went to see Mrs. Kaklaschowa, a Russian a year old painter with a sister of 75, whom the lieutenant described to us as follows: She is 75 years old and has not washed for 30 years! When we saw her, we believed him. Her hands are black as cabbage, and the face is very thin. She had wrapped a large cloth around her, and the painter was walking around in a tattered fur coat from whose sleeves dangled a couple of mittens. Between boxes and rags, we had squeezed our way to the kitchen, which was indescribably dirty and untidy. But the living room was worse. Everything was full of old blankets, carpets, furniture, everything scattered on the table, chairs and floor.

We requested to see her studio, which the lieutenant had set up for her when he was still in Studzk. She didn't really want to answer, but he ripped the carpet off the door and stepped into a dark corridor. I stepped on something soft, stumbled, fell into some dirty rags and got up off the floor. The studio was cold, the window panes broken, the mess was possibly even bigger.

We rummaged amongst the furniture, drawing paper, paints and fabrics and found beautiful old Buddhas, chests, vases, bowls from all over the world. The old woman had traveled a long

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way, spoke fluent German, studied with Kaulbach in Munich and then later painted often for the Tsar's court.

There were large oil paintings on the walls, made really fascinating with a lot of panache and vibrancy. She then pulled out another folder with photos of her old pictures, pictures of Rasputin, tsars, grand dukes, beauties at court. Some paintings had the lighting style of Rembrandt.

As expected, she whined and told about God and the world. "We live like pigs, terrible, terrible, no light, no water, Spaniards bring everything and give nothing, Germans much better, I can't work," etc.

After we stumbled out again, we saw that the other half of the building and the upper floor of the house had crumbled. It really is a miserable to see the fate of the two old individuals but despite the fire, they cannot be driven away.



Figure 4: Catherine's Palace

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In Krasnogwardish there was another pleasant tea, then it was time to pack up and say goodbye. I drove with the guard and Ingrid the spoiled photographer. I was just amazed at what they had organized for the food for the march, cognac, bacon, white bread; they had been so eager to fetch their food for the march themselves. In Pleskan they got portions of bacon and butter again. At the military units they through coaxing they received German travel vouchers for the 14 days.

In Riga they obtained schnapps and cigarettes again; living in the headquarters was not good enough for them, but they did eat with them there. We soon all got angry with them for being so demanding.

They were not able to get seats on a plane so now I drove with them again to Tilsit. Immediately they tried to coax some schnapps from a major, but they failed. In Tilsit they took places in the sleeper cars and I was rid of them.

In Berlin I groaned under my luggage again. I wanted to go "blue" for a day, but then drove on at noon, was glad that I had reached my destination in the evening and, above all, did not have to take an hour drag the heavy suitcases in the evening. When I come back to the staff office will be in Vilnius. If I hadn't had to go to Scheimo, I would have been taken by the staff leader on the rest of the work trip through the northern district by car. I would certainly have seen a lot more.

January 18, 1943 Scheimo

We sit there and wait for the end of the air raid alarm. The last two nights we had to go into the forest into house cellar. Very cold, but when I got home there was a quick grog, how nice that I still have the big bottle of Pleskan rum.

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Sometimes it's so cold in the handicraft barrack that you can't work at all - once the paint froze us. Otherwise we're all pretty engaged. I started painting doors straight away and had 4 female colleagues to keep busy. I always have to paint the first ones myself and then correct the next ones painted by the others.

Mr. Mecke thinks that I should set up a permanent handicrafts room in Russia, teach co-workers there, work with soldiers in the evening and then go on an inspection trip every two months. It just depends on whether we become an independent group or whether I remain subordinate to the staff leader, which I believe will be the case. Then I'll tour the units as directed.

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Setting up a handicraft room with all the material is certainly very difficult, with the wood, accommodations of the helpers, food etc. You don't think of these difficulties when you make such beautiful plans. I'm curious to see if I'll come home after the training. Perhaps the training will end earlier. We sleep a lot here, many go to bed at 8 pm. What else is there to do? The light is bad, you can't go outside and you are also tired.



Figure 5: Scheimo

Hilversum, April 2, 1943

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Now everything has turned out completely different from what I thought. At the last moment I spoke to Colonel Cleve in Scheimo, who initiated this mission together with Mecke and who is fully committed to the cause. I am now supposed to get my things in Riga, in 14 days where I would be newly deployed. But first there was 5 days of special leave.

At home most of the time was filled with washing clothes, tidying up and preparing paperwork, but it was for naught. I requested a leave from work because Susi needed care because her baby was due shortly in mid-February, and Gretel would like to leave with Werner in March before he returned to action. In Berlin, the Presidium only allows me to take my usual annual vacation until March 1st, so only an extra 12 days. On the return journey I stayed a little longer as I had promised with the Otto's who welcomed me again.

The trip to Riga was a drama in itself. The D.M.W. no longer ran, only a few freight trains with a few unheated passenger compartments. In Tamoggen there was storm and a mud. I sank into the ice water up to my ankles (low shoes), as I didn't have any other shoes. But the soldiers provided me with giant slippers, blankets and pillows. The trip was twice as long as usual; it was incredibly boring.

In Riga I arrived as the staff leader's was having her last breakfast in Riga, leaving shortly for Vilna. She said, "It's good that you are here, I've already prepared everything in Vilnius. I actually want to do some cultural instruction now that the construction therapy program is in operation ." She was appalled when I gave her the letter with my transfer. She wanted to reverse the order, but who can beat Scheimo and the Presidium?

For 3 days I packed my clothes in Riga, one morning I drove out to Kaemmern with wonderful fresh snow, first sun and then blizzard, and the traditional whipped cream was not missing either. Then I drove back home, packed my heavy baggage, and at that moment was really sorry. I would have liked to stay with the staff chief.

We arrived in Tamoggen at midnight. Rain, darkness, morass. Nobody escaped delousing. At 7 o'clock it was over, the ceiling was scorched slightly.

The next night back in Berlin. There I was allowed to sleep in properly with Otto's, was pampered, looked at a bit of Berlin, even came to the German Opera House, and got a guide package. Then I went to the presidium again, it was worth it, I got leave from work until March 15th. Finally I called Munich and lo and behold, Susi birth was early and her son, Peter, was already there. I left next day, as there was nothing that kept me in Berlin.

Hilversum April 3, 1943

The work vacation was actually one, I am constantly vaccinated. I had decided to clean the apartment properly, patted the carpet, polished the parquet floor working furiously. Then Gretel left and I had to cook, shop, look after Renate and Hanns-Jochen.

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At first it was okay, even if there wasn't much free time except for an hour after dinner. But then came the major attack on Munich, a window was broken and above all no gas. Cooking for 2 children and 6 adults on a hotplate, you need hot water for bathing, rinsing, and washing diapers. In addition, I felt sick all week, couldn't eat anything, and kept nausea. At home the laundry was still un-ironed and unmatched, but I couldn't get away from the stove.

I arrived one day late in Schenno and got "one on the cap" straight away. In the afternoon we still had to go to Berlin, the next morning the meeting took place at Colonel Cleve's. Then we found out all the details. They would send us to Holland, later Belgium and France.

We had to acquire tools in Belgium. In the evening we drove back to Forst. The next morning in Schenno we were told that we had to report to Berlin to receive our passes. The rush started, from one place to another, all over again. Clothing, transport, money, tickets, repackaging, changing, we no longer thought it could be accomplished. But only the question of funding of Belgium remained unanswered, everything else was resolved through our combined efforts, after all of Schenno had us made rebellious. We were known as the colorful cow.

In Berlin, Bärbel could hardly walk because of blisters on his foot, we didn't walk much either, we left all our acquaintances scott free, only went to the cinema and café and in the evening, traveled in the direction of Cologne, where Bärbel fiancé live. But she went to bed in Cologne to rest her foot and sent us off alone.

It was wonderful spring weather, some things were already blooming, only the ruins were a cruel reminder of the war. Monday afternoon we went on, at 10 o'clock in the evening we were in Brussels and slept in the hotel for the first time, and the next morning we let ourselves be ripped off at breakfast. Then we asked our way through to the staff leader, were welcomed nicely by the staff girls, received money for shopping and a comrade went shopping with us.

We stayed at the D.R.K. housed on the 7th floor on the sunny side with a magnificent view and bathroom. Antwerp was still a rich field, but we ran out of money there. Then we were allowed to drive to Sangatte on the canal coast, where Irmgard Beltingen held a crafting lesson on the Cap Blanc-Neg in the middle of the bunker.

In Calais, Sister Charlotte welcomed us to the officers' quarters, looked after us splendidly, and in the evening the orderlies opened a few bottles of champagne and drank a few Nikolaschkas, but the next day we had a headache.

In bad weather and howling wind, we moved to Sangatte, finally we were met by an L.K.W. picked up and swished between the petrol barrels. We were prepared for a somewhat cool

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reception, but he was very nice and warm. But we were amazed at the primitiveness. The room was previously only about 4x5 meter, in one side a stove, table and chairs, most of the space was taken up by the workbench. Next to it is a narrow incurable room with 2 wooden beds one above the other.

Her sister was still there, very pretty and very nice, really fresh and really Bavarian. A small workshop had just been added. Unfortunately, we didn't see much of the work, everything was still busy with the renovation. In the evening there is also shorthand lessons, there is a library, then pudding was cooked. It felt like I was at the Lenggrieser hut, some things were even more primitive. Only 2 cups, plates and cutlery and ate the "through the garden" stew.

Irmgard accompanied us to Sangatte and told us about her work on the way. Many who got dune fever (??) thought drinking could still save them and get them back to normal. The very young boys in particular are easily put on the wrong track by bad superiors and you can then get them back on the right track. The private will listen to a woman.

The next morning we came to the port of Calais saw with our eyes the rubble, the new fortifications, a wreck and one could see the coast of England. At lunchtime we went back to Brussels via Dunkirk, where we had wonderful coffee with buttercream cake in the officers' quarters.

The next morning I had a kind of lumbago and could hardly walk. But Bärbel took care of me, organized a heating pad, lunch, and dragged the suitcases to the train station. In the afternoon we finally drove to Hilversum, where we were received with accusing looks. Here we are now constantly organizing, grinding wood, tables, lamps, tools.

We have already been to Harlem, Eumuiden, and Amsterdam. Our quarters are not particularly nice, also cold, but we will probably move again. The many flowers here, the pretty front gardens, the nice little houses with the flashing window panes are wonderful. The people are quite unfriendly, the language sounds coarse and rustic. Horst is in Utrecht, today he came over, it's only 16 km. The roses in the briefcase were very typical, ^{just} so that nobody could see that he had flowers.

April 4, 1943

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Now the whole area pounding the streets, partly to hunt for wood and other material, partly because we we were doing it. In Gouda it was storming and raining like hell, so it wasn't fun to walk around. But yesterday it was nice in The Hague, if a little cold. We had no intention of shopping there, just wanted to get to know the city. After a great meal with lots of ice cream, we drove black to Scheveningen, where the whole city was quiet and the beach was walled off with barbed wire. And we really wanted to see the sea.

Finally we arrive at the Palace Hotel, which appeared to be occupied by the Wehrmacht. There was no one at the reception, not one telephone handset was on its the phone. A door in the hall was open. We walked through dark marble halls, over broken glass, past chairs and tables, the splendid walls full of gold and stucco, neglected and partly demolished. The last 2 doors were locked, but had no more panes of glass, so we climbed through.

At the last one you could already see the sea, huge waves with giant foam combs rolled in and ran up the sandy beach. We first checked whether that the terrace was not mined, but all the paving stones seemed solid, then we climbed out of the door with "legs up" and enjoyed as before the fine spa guests, the play of the waves and the roar of the wind on the front Terrace. But the huge empty spa hotels and the barren beach were a bit scary. In Haag we were told that the day before the storm some mines had blown on the beach. Hence the broken glass on the street.

In Utrecht there was a nice fried egg meal for three with a lot of vermouth. Today we went to Haarlem, we soon found the shop, so we still had time and decided to take the tram to Leyden to see the flower fields. The tulips weren't quite out yet, but still there were splendid yellow, purple, pink and white areas that had an unlikely luminosity, in between green meadows with the many canals which reflected the blue sky.

The soldiers home was closed in Leyden, we just got back on the train to Amsterdam and satisfied our hunger there with baked fish, apples and cakes. Tonight it was exceptionally windless and you could feel and smell the spring, a scent from the many flowers and blossoms that soon somehow resulted in a heartache. Then the beautiful is often only melancholy and a feeling of longing. Too stupid!!

April 26, 1943 (Easter Monday)

The course has now been running for 14 days, in 8 days it will be over, but the next day a new course will start. It goes very well, above all you have the feeling that everyone is happy to be there and would like to come back again. Now the question of wood has still not been resolved, so Bärbel is still driving around and telephoning; we have make do with rather inferior wood.

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But still very nice things came out of it. Only drawing always causes great difficulties; the most difficult thing is to deal with those who have already drawn a bit for themselves, but have slipped far too much into the naturalistic style and make it too amateurish for it to look like something recognizable.



Figure 6: Craft Room

Of course, there are ones who are pig-headed; they always secretly start new things, and by the time you come it's already happened. Bärbel once took over the lesson for half an afternoon, whereupon she handed me the key in the evening with the words "Never again war". Sometimes you actually need an angelic patience and you are easily tempted to just let them

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mess around because it becomes too pointless to keep correcting them. Our handicraft room has now become quite nice, it is especially nice when the sun is shining, some people sit on the balcony. Then we can also have lunch in the garden and everyone feels like they are on vacation. Sometimes Bärbel also gets cake, then there is a quick coffee chat.



Figure 7: Singing in the Craft Room

In the morning there is 15 minutes of morning exercise, which is good, then another half an hour of singing.

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The first Sunday we drove to the tulip fields and made a long walk near Haarlem. Now all the trees are green, the lilacs are in bloom; I can't remember when the flowers would have been so mature by Easter. On Good Friday we drove to the Zuidersee to Volendam and the island of Marken. In Volendam the Dutch ran around as one always imagines them to be, the women tall and very slim with lace bonnets, coral necklaces, long skirts and wooden slippers, the men with wide trousers, hats and pipes in their mouths.

The island of Marken has completely different costumes, the people there are also Protestant, while in Volendam they are Catholic. There is inbreeding there, which you can see from evidence in a lot of people; and you also see some cripples. The little houses are very small, only one room and the bed built in behind a curtain, the children in the middle, the parents, and the baby above. They keep their dresses in large painted chipboard boxes, folded up and tied up very small, the skirts and aprons must have these regular creases, and they are proud of them.

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In summer as in winter, a very heavy petticoat is worn, as thick as a winter coat, with the reasoning that "what is good for the cold must also be good for the heat." Their hair is very weird, in front bangs, all very stiff and bent forward on the side where the hair is long and loose. Starting at the age of 18 they are also cut very short to simple bangs and shaved off. A bald head can be seen from under the little bonnet. It's not a pretty thing. The dresses are otherwise beautifully embroidered and very colorful, the women are all very slim with not much of a bosom.

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The infants get a bodice with boning at the age of 2 months and from then on they are dressed to encourage an usual body shape. The little boys wear long hair and girls' clothes for up to 7 years, the only indication of gender is a star on the bonnet.

The harbor with the old fishing boats is wonderful. Soon that will no longer be the case when the Zuidersee has become land. The islanders are pretty spoiled by the many visitors. The souvenirs are kitsch and celebrate triumphs; the people are always looking for tips. Even the children pose when they see strangers with a camera.

In Volendam there were still very nice smoked eels, then came a hike over the dam to Edam. The wind and the view of the lake with the many fishing boats was wonderful, as was the shade behind the dam.

On Easter Sunday at 4 a.m. (of course Bärbel got the idea) we threw everyone out and lambasted them with branches with a nice Pomeranian Easter saying. In the morning, some Easter eggs were hidden, Hans admired the books and a bouquet of flowers in the night pot, there was a cozy coffee and in the afternoon with the wind and with changing weather we went to Looselrecht, where my heart jumped straight away seeing the many saw beautiful boats. One harbor and a launch next to the other, a beautiful sight. Hopefully I'll get to sail, I'm already got in touch with a boat rental company. Bärbel also really wants to learn.

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May 10, 1943

Bärbel has now gone to Schenno, and I'm sitting alone for a few days. The second course is not so nice, boring. I haven't had good feelings about the course for a long time. The students keep their distance and they don't make any great efforts because they act wierd.

The mutiny over food began right away. Some students are very difficult to work with; one is hopelessly clumsy. My drawing of a map of Holland was finished after a weekend with no scheduled courses. The woman manager, Krumbauer, was apparently very happy here. Now she wants to try even more things after seeing how nice our tinkering room and the living

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quarters are. It is planned to send both of us to the island of Schiemonnikoog, where we will hold a handicraft course followed by a competition of the soldiers. The only question is whether if there is enough time.

In Brussels they want to start as soon as possible. Staff leader Wachs wrote to me today that she hoped that I would soon turn up in Paris. Hopefully that will work out too, I would be happy to see the whole staff again. I'm also curious to see what news Bärbel brings and their impression of our work, etc.

Yesterday I was at Liesel Klise née Hücke in Arnhem. I hadn't seen Liesel since she was in Holland, about 7 years ago. She looked bad, a little gaunt, no wonder, as Dutch Germans, they get the Dutch rations, that is 62.5 g (2 oz) of meat a week, almost no butter. Currently all rations are canceled as a punishment for acts of sabotage. We ought to be ashamed of treating our own Germans here like Dutch people and not even giving them the German rations.

We are fine there, but you can see, if you are directed to eat in Dutch restaurants, you will hardly leave full or pay (there is something missing) the beginning has been made with her, and for God's sake won't let us go to Belgium any longer. We were supposed to go there at the beginning of June, now the island commandant asked the troop support team whether they could send him a handicraft course teacher. Otherwise the K.d.F. would supply one; but now this opportunity has been given to us for the first time. So immediately after the course we packed up our belongings, tried to put our personal belongings in order, but of course not everything was dry anymore and we reached the train early on Sunday morning, as usual, running like pigs.

Of course we had to stop in Gronningen near Bärbel's friend Günter, and he had organized a sailing trip for us on the Paterswolder Sea. It was wonderful again with a wonderful strong wind (even if it was otherwise slightly shady) to really heel the boat and annoy all sorts of people e.t.c. However, we had to walk for over 2 hours and were so tired in the evening that we were not able to do anything useful.

We also got to know a soldier who is assigned to the island. He is an architect, and who is in charge of the extension and design of the expansion of the Wehrmachtsheim (soldier's home). Very nice, older, a person with soul and a jolly Rhinelander at the same time.

Monday we traveled to here. The ferry only goes once a day, the time depends on the tide. A mighty wind blew, in the afternoon it rained heavily, twice I got soaking wet. In the evening there was a cinema, 2 films in a row, so that it was worth it.

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The island commander is a little funny, has a big red head and thinks you can always come up with something. At first he always says no, but then he lets talk to him. He himself is very convinced and enthusiastic about his support of the troops, but his soldiers less so.

For the handicraft course, for example, he commanded 80 soldiers who work in 7 groups. Two groups in the morning, two in the afternoon, so we're there from 8 am to 7 pm. Every group has a specialist, we have a wood sculptor and some joiners and pattern maker Heymans, or we have to make the designs and give suggestions. Some of the soldiers are so skillful that they don't need us at all, others have never done anything like that and immediately say "I can't do it", or "I don't feel like it." They don't like any suggestions; the hardest thing is to get people to start and then come up with suggestions for 70 people. When they get beyond the design, many of them enjoy it.

The first day was quite depressing for us, their opposition was great; we ask ourselves what are we supposed to do here; those who feel like doing it, they can do things like that, the others are just reluctant to cooperate. But now it is getting easier from day to day, the soldiers are becoming much friendlier and more cordial, and we don't worry about those who stay away, the others are happy to come.

Some already work in their free time and in the evening. And now we have managed to insure that from next week on there will be a screening so that in the morning a group of good people from the soldier's barrack. In the afternoon only 2 groups, so I'm supporting only half of the starting number. The wood is also running out. There was no wood for carving there, hardly any plywood, just badly cracked pine and some beechwood, including some very nice teak, elm and oak. We wanted to try to get wood in Hilversum; they said that there was enough wood. But with 80 people, you can imagine how quickly it is consumed.

We are staying in the soldiers home; we eat there too, and in the afternoons we drink feudal (sp?) coffee in the battery's officers' mess. The battery, i.e. the accommodation, is half underground, well camouflaged by a net, barracks, painted white on a red-paved street, the "Kurfürstendamm". On the windows lovely flower boxes, on the sides small pieces of lawn, carefully tended and guarded. The canteen and the mess are beautifully developed, designed by Heymans. It is paneled with beach wood from sunken ships.

The first 4 days was very cold, bad weather, there is always a cold wind here. But on Friday evening we went for a quick swim (the binoculars were probably aimed at us from all sides). The water itself wasn't cold at all. And yesterday the lieutenant of the battery took me on a sailing trip, camouflaged under the motto "looking for good wood for the handicraft course and for seagull eggs."

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A senior doctor came along and the boat owner Harry, a Dutchman who used to captain for 15 years, he was a real man. At 5 o'clock we cast off on his small cabin boat with a very flat keel (40 cm draft) and about 20 square meters of sail area and recently installed small engine. In front of the wind we made a nice trip towards the sun, Harry searched eagerly for the nautical chart, where creeks and where flat plates were. Suddenly there was a jolt and we were stuck. We jumped into the water and pushed; it didn't help. We stood on the highest point of the deck and could see the landmarks of Simonszand and Boschplaat, but could not get there. In between there were tidal creeks. This happened at 10 a.m. Before 4 o'clock there was no hope of breaking loose. It was cold, the wind was strong.

First we consoled ourselves with a good snack and some Graanjenever (liquor). The wet trousers were hung in the shrouds, and we lay back and forth in the little cabin to sleep. After lunch there wasn't much to see besides the tidal creek. We took a long walk until we couldn't go any further. Lots of seals swam in the creeks. In the meantime a guard boat had come up and was interested in us. The sailors also arrived with their trouser legs rolled up. Finally we arranged for the guard boat to take us to Simonszand. Harry waited in the boat until it was afloat and he should then pick us up.

With the basket for the seagull eggs in hand, the shoes with us, the skirt and trouser legs rolled up, we set off. All sorts of things were found on the beach. An English mine, navy man coat, aircraft parts, baskets, boxes, boards, straps and also 10 large seagull eggs. We walked around the completely flat island twice. In the distance a large convoy of ships passed with fighter planes circling overhead. There was nothing to be seen of Harry. The wind was getting freshening. In the west the sky became black. We considered what we would do if Harry didn't come.

We gathered wood together and wanted to make a real campfire, but it didn't light. Then Harry came into view. He crept up under the power of the engine. It was high time and we wanted to go home with the tide and not get stuck on another next sandbank. Armed with the clothes we had found, we again had to wade about 400 meters to the boat, around 6:30 pm we started off. There was a heavy swell from the North Sea, the boat rolled heavily, the cabin smelled of gasoline and tobacco smoke; there was little space upstairs.

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After an hour we ran out of gasoline and had to set sail again. We almost reached the same speed. And the boat handled much better. Finally by 9:30 pm we waded another 200 meters to reach land. By this time I inherited Harry's water boots, because I didn't want to be long in the water again. Coming into view of the officers, swimming trunks, buckled up, carabiners on their backs and barefoot, clothes under their arms a was a gift of God. But it had been a nice day, and at least we had an experience. It is said that Harry would never come home according to plan, at least we made it without a disaster, even if we were 5 1/2 hours late.

Eight days ago I received a letter from Teddy that I should take a vacation at the beginning of June and get engaged to him. I was a little surprised, as I had already told him two years ago

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that I didn't want to. Horst doesn't seem to know anything about it yet, I wanted to see his face. He's always pressing the issue, but obviously doesn't achieve success. Up until now I have still not heard his suggestions, but I will soon take a position on them.

June 9, 1943

The course became somewhat tiresome. A great many had gone on vacation; the others had increased duties; then there was a muster, sometimes an alarm, sometimes shooting, sometimes a cinema or variety show. Then the battery was handed over to another department; something different every day. Some of them are very nice and eager to attend, but they are ones who are constantly being taken away again and again.

One would like to give a push forwards , since things progressing so slowly. But of course the service comes first, but this leads one to become sluggish and uncomfortable. Above all you have the feeling that you have not achieved your goal (that is the worst) and to be dissatisfied with yourself. In addition, there was now a lot of bad weather. It was overcast and raining; I had my old complaint; Bärbel has a cold. And yet, a few hours of sunshine in the afternoon makes you forget everything and then it is wonderful here.

Barbel's Günter is here, but it is not really the case. Barbel is torn between him and her duties, he sometimes feels neglected: she is invited to the officers' mess or to a ride, etc.

I'm fine now, 6 letters from the USA, for which I have been waiting painfully. You get restless, ponder too much, when no mail arrives for months. And above all, when you see how others get some every day, or even how they others can meet in person. But there are others who have now lost their loved ones forever; no, you have to be very calm. But when some people say that the war will last another 5 - 10 years, it stabs you in your heart; many tell how much you would become alienated with your wife or fiancé etc. if you didn't see them for a long time. But in spite of all that, I do believe that everything is going well.

Hilversum June 29, 1943

In Shiko, the battery was transferred to another department and is engaged in extensive drills. The craft room is now empty and we have some free time. As always, I had to paint lampshades for the two days of Pentecost. Then we left on Whit Monday (Pentecost Monday, also known as Monday of the Holy Spirit), we wanted to go to Marianne on Vlieland island and to Terschelling.

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Marianne was friendly, but our director was a bit cold; this conflict make us uncomfortable while we were in Marianne and the feeling spread to the entire group. On the other hand, it was very nice in Terschelling, which had been described as the nest of old maids.

We were welcomed with hospitality as a matter of course in the evening to a friendly group of sailors who were on mine duty, drinking red wine; in the morning everyone got up early to take us to the boat. And above all, we had unimagined success there, first in terms of handicrafts, starting with initial resistance resistance, then when they saw the photos of wooden things, changed to enthusiasm, and now they absolutely wanted to have a workshop. In Harlingen, too, the our manager was very much in favor.

Now we wanted to go to Assen, but in Groningen we received the order to return to Hilversum immediately, they had something for us again. Now it was a convalescent home where they wanted a craft room so that the soldiers could have something to do.

Some learned to use their limbs again and gained confidence. It was the first time we had met professional nurses. They were very friendly, but kept their distance. A bit cold in the long run. The castle, too, was a bit of cold splendor. But the park is very beautiful and then transitions to a forest. A grove of Rhododendrons, wonderful beech trees, a moated castle, a mountain garden, and a bathing pond with an ancient boat on which we went on a company outing with the handicraft team. You could also go looking for blueberries, in the evenings you played table tennis or strolled through the park with a few men.

Then Marianne came over and was happy to be able to disappear from Vlieland for a while. Later one of the sisters is supposed to be trained by us. On Friday we came back; on Saturday we went on tour to Ouddorp again, where there was a newly built and somewhat barren home that we should have a look at. There was nothing else to look at, a large hall with hideous iron bars for support, no curtains, no carpet. The building of the barracks that were to be added had not yet started, the responsible ones. People all on vacation. So we had no choice but to kill the time as well as possible.

On Sunday there is no ship or train on the island anyway. A lieutenant greeted us on the way and, since everything in the only hotel was occupied, he offered us a villa, a little summer cottage with a radio, gramophone, cigarettes, books, lads. First we sat comfortably in the soldier's home and had deep conversations, later with a bottle of red wine and candlelight in our villa.

The next afternoon we visited the artillery in located in the sand dunes, which were half underground, crammed together in barracks, really very primitive, not to be compared with the "Kurfürstendamm" in Schiko. But on the other hand they tried to spoil us again with coffee made from real beans and cake, later with liqueurs, with braised cherries, with bacon from the Warthegau, with Mettwurst from East Prussia perfumed with cigarettes. The most delightful

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thing was the 4-man band, which typically played for an audience of 4-6 men. They played really fantastic, with so much swing and rhythm and great melodies. The violin is right in front of us. The band is well known and has given many concerts.

We also visited the positions outside, firing a few shots in the sand with the 2 cm gun. The captain was strange, who suddenly claimed that we were compatible, and would go together, and when he still had a little more alcohol in it, he said in front of everyone that I was his third greatest love! Next he told Bärbel his life story, mainly about his second greatest love. The lieutenant also said funny things: after a strange slightly melancholy look, he said I shouldn't come back, I would only confuse him. The men age 30 and 50 are weird. Was it the impact of island fever?

Our landlord picked us up, it was a long time before we could say goodbye, we had about two hours of sleep, and at half past four we had to get out again. Although forbidden, we went with Trudel to Hoek, where we were warmly welcomed again by a lieutenant. With coffee from real beans, the tiredness chased away, then the partying went on and instead of one o'clock, we did not leave until 3 o'clock. So we arrived here pretty exhausted in the evening. A sleazy life is exhausting!

Someone called from Brussels that we should go there right away, but they were not ready for us yet. We stayed here for two days, then we have to vacate here anyway. Now that we have done our duty, we can go. The rooms are used for other purposes. But the house, where our tinkering room is in, is completely confiscated and we were supposed to get our permanent rooms there.

Our return is already planned, while the staff in Brussels said we still had to go to Paris, Staff Leader Weeks has already had Ilse procure tools at the same time. I'm curious whether there isn't still a controversy surrounding us. Area Manager Kumbbauer V.E. has already complained that we were assigned to the staff leader for soldiers' homes in Brussels.

Munich, July 11, 1943

Vacation! Quicker than I thought. Eight days ago we landed in Brussels, the next morning we went straight to Namur for "shopping" until Monday. Wonderful weather on Sunday. We climbed to the castle, drove 1 hour along the Maas to Profondeville and climbed the rocks from where we had a wonderful view, very similar to the Bastion of Vienna in the Saxon section of Switzerland.

The city of Namur has also very beautiful parts, the district on the Sombre below the bastion is old-romantic. Pretty much destroyed. On Tuesday we drove to Antwerp, looked at the sights there after shopping, a beautiful baroque church, St. Bartholome, then a seven-aisled Gothic church, which, however, looked a bit cold. Then the old castle, the style with mighty walls and gates and a view of the harbor. The next day in Bruges was wonderful, like a dream. The city

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just as it was in the Hanseatic League, with delightful old nooks and crannies, canals, harbors, towers and churches, with curved bridges, with gondolas that slide slowly under the hanging branches.

From the train station, which is a little further away, we walked on the wall to the Minnewater, where a maiden out of love is said to have thrown herself from the tower in olden times, then through an old city gate into the winding streets of the city to the old Romanesque church from the 9th century with mighty walls and bows, as if built to last. A Gothic building has been built around it, and above the Rome crypt church is the Gothic church "zum Little Blut", ie a church on the 2nd floor. A nice light through the colored windows (the originals were stolen by the French and sold to England), a few good pictures of Rubens students, etc. Then we went to the Michelangelo Madonna, the highlight of the day. Really beautiful. One would have liked to look at them from all sides for hours. A faint melancholy about the Madonna, and yet so much love and happiness about the child who hugs its mother so trustingly. The little hand is almost alive and plays in the slender hand of the mother. This church also contained other treasures, a crucifixion by Van Dyk, a picture by David, then a beautiful Mater dolorosa and 2 very beautiful sarcophagi from Charles the Bold and his daughter Margarete.

We continued into the dreamy courtyard of the Johannis hospital, the sun played on the leafy old walls. In the afternoon we gondolaed around on the old canals and enjoyed the dreamy silence and hummed folk songs. Another stroll through a few old streets and corners, another look at 2 churches and the beguinage, then our time was up, but we hope to be able to come back again, because we haven't seen a lot yet, and there are some things that we would like to see again see.

On Thursday we looked at the new tinkering room and apartment, very nicely situated in a high manorial house. The view from the roof garden over Brussels is wonderful. The establishment still makes a lot of difficulty. So it happened that we were sent on vacation after it took at least 10 days to finish everything. Friday morning I did some big shopping, it was wonderful to stroll past elegant shop windows with money in my pocket and shop to my heart's content. But it didn't take long before you got rid of your francs, the prices are fantastic. A walk across the old market square with the beautiful Gothic facades of the town hall and bread house and old guild houses is wonderful. In front of it, flower stands are full of the most beautiful flowers. The church of St. Gudule is also wonderful, a Gothic building with a particularly atmospheric ambulatory with beautiful old glass windows. Yes, and now I am sitting here again, it is pouring rain and I have first washed and ironed, rummaged around and tidied up. Tomorrow I want to go to Diessen. Ambushing Susi for her birthday.

Brussels, August 3, 1943

The days are over, but it was nice. In Diessen as before, the food almost too much and good for these times. Richard had a whole drawer full of food and alcohol and was touching again. He had blood poisoning and had his arm in a sling. Miss Mach was in the hospital and Dorn in bed

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too. Max was there for 8 days to help out and of course I was immediately hired and gave theory again, mended sails, guided people into the harbor, practiced the start of regattas and swung big speeches on the Condor. Many soldiers were there, a course of 30 men from Lechfeld alone, Atlantic pilots paddling around in rubber dinghies. In Herrsching I was immediately picked up by 7 such men with the Condor.

Susis Peter had made a great impression and was allowed to sail to the island of Sweden as the bowman of the O-dinghy at the age of 5 months. A few times we ate the tried and tested sponge cakes there, but our capacity had become smaller, you couldn't say pap after the second piece. Kurt Wieners visited me twice, then Annelise, the good old one, came to the course with her sister and perhaps future Robert, then Kate came from Italy, Bärbel came for two days and Helga Villingen with another woman from Freiburg. It was almost too much of a good thing for me, especially embarrassing towards Richard. Of course he said yes and amen to everything so that I wouldn't run away earlier. Because of Richard's arm, climbing didn't work out, which of course I was very sorry for.

The attacks in the West are getting more and more difficult, more and more refugees are arriving, have to have space, and living close to completely different types of people often creates friction. And yet I have observed the attitude on the train that I admired of a Rhinelander who traveled back to their homeland after the attacks and did not yet know if they lost everything or not; or others who fled in the opposite direction, maybe with just one suitcase and the fear was still in their eyes. I traveled through Cologne, alongside the train I noticed house that wasn't burned out and damaged. And yet people live on in the ruins and don't want to leave. And yet the fatalities are also much lower than one would always like to assume, when you see the devastation and far lower than the rumors say. Yesterday a DRK Colonel and head of women's affairs said there were 3,200 dead in Cologne (she receives the calls after the attacks). I had heard of 3,000, then 5,000 on the train. She spoke of the staff that brings in enormous quantities of supplies quickly to provide good food for the injured because things don't look so bad when you have a full stomach. Each serving includes double portion, 80 g butter and 150 g sausage, and 1 liter of soup with 60g fat and 150g meat.

People are very difficult to evacuate, you have to ask and beg until they leave and often they are back in a few days and just continue to live in ruins. It feels bad to live here almost as if in peace, while even the smallest children in the West have to experience the war so hard. And our work is then called large-scale operations. But many men, besides those whom the West has already completely ruined, are concerned that they cannot fight while their homeland endures such destruction.

Freiburg is as beautiful as before, the dear old street corners, familiar faces, conversations with old friends. And my great-aunt was so kind and even though she is having stomach issues so she

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gives the great-uncle the best food. And she also wanted to pamper me with food. I left a lot of food for her, hopefully great-uncle won't eat everything alone.



Figure 8: Freiburg City Hall

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Figure 9: Freiburg - Cathedral Square

Dorle, too, was heart-warming and old-fashioned. She and Traute uncovered new Freiburg news and scandals with humor. Two days were just too short and quite hectic, without having support from the from the surrounding neighborhood.

August 15, 1943

Today I am in Ghent. I really didn't feel like going, the weather wasn't very promising and then I was with a bunch of girls who have little idea and understanding of art and architecture. But in the end it was wonderfully beautiful; and the weather was also good. The church of St. Bavo was built in beautiful early Gothic style with a wonderful belfry with a view all around.

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Figure 10: Ghent - St. Bavo's Cathedral

The old Romanesque castle S'Gravensteen with a moat from the 10th century, renovated in its original form, wonderful to walk around and inside without a guide. On top of the broad foundation we sat down, dangled our legs and let the sun shine on us. The large béguinage (an architectural complex which was created to house beguines: lay religious women who lived in community without taking vows or retiring from the world) is peculiar, a city in itself, completely closed off from the outside world by a wall. The city encompasses eight streets, all with the same little houses, which are closed off from the street with a wall and gate and each bear the name of a saint. Inside, every Begijn house has a small front garden with an arbor and a few flowers, a couple of small rooms, a small kitchen and a very small vegetable garden with perhaps a fruit tree. Everything is like in a doll town. Each lives so quietly and contemplatively in their little realm.

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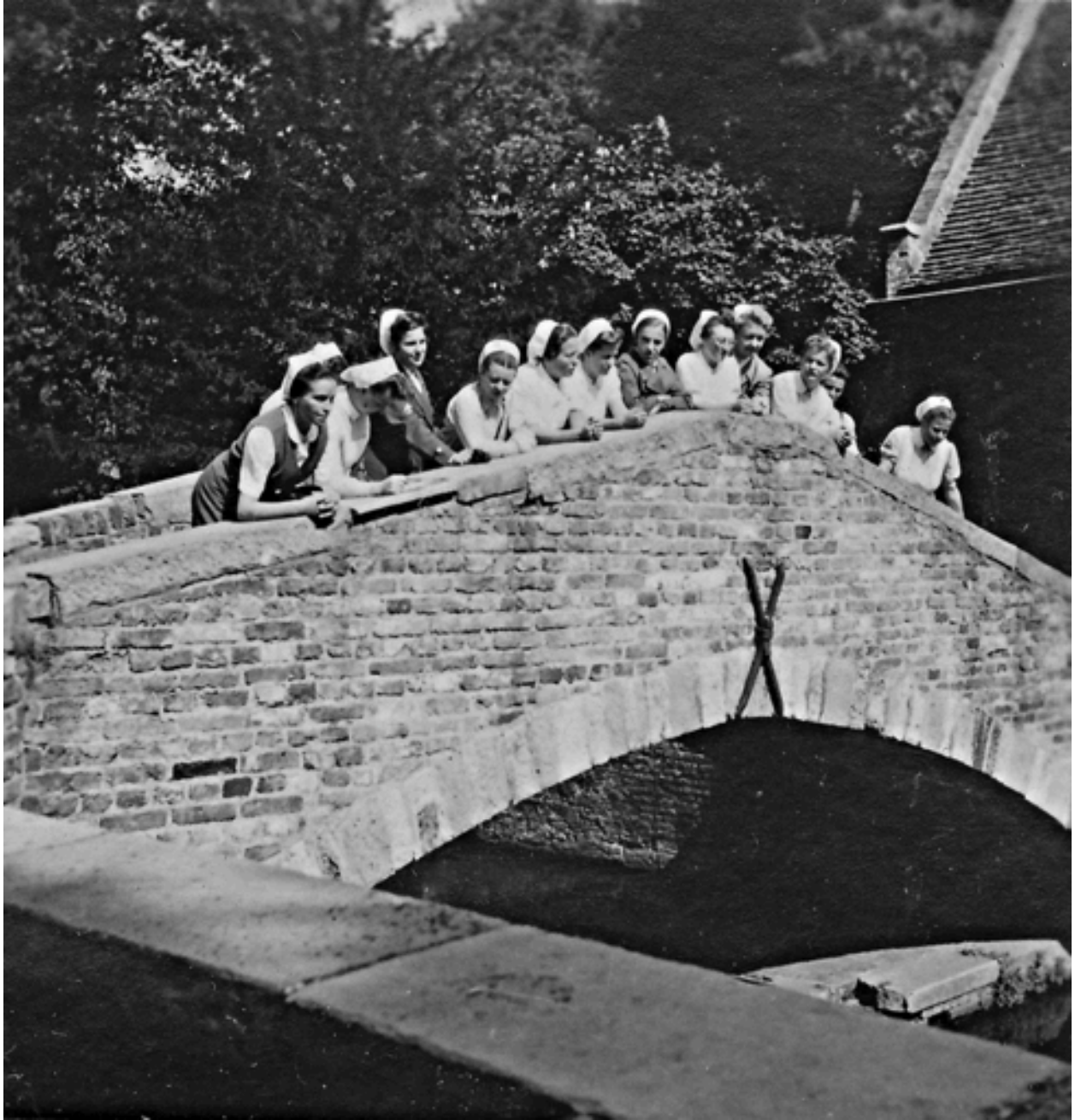


Figure 11: Ghent - Old St Elizabeth Beguinage

In addition to their small household, they make wonderful lace. In the afternoon we ended up in the St. Bavo Abbey, wonderful old Romanesque and early Gothic ruins, overgrown with ivy and vines. Old columns, tombstones and chapters are exhibited here, a sprawling garden with intact vaults. There is also a gravestone from Hubert von Eych.

There are many beautiful guild houses to be seen, along the canals and at the harbor, in the middle of the city a large town hall, half late Gothic, half Renaissance. The churches all seem heavy and bulky, also the churches of Gravensteen and Tuivelsteen are gloomy, the whole city left this impression, in contrast to Bruges, where everything looks more cheerful and contemplative. But both cities are so beautiful, but very different. Ghent recovered from years of decay and is the second largest port in Belgium, Bruges retains a dreamy atmosphere.

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The course has already been underway for 14 days. We were unlucky, two had to go to the hospital, a third is sick again. The course is a little boring, but it doesn't work badly. The only problem is with ornaments, and Staff Leader Weecks attaches great importance to them. Sometimes it doesn't look quite the way you want it to. Then suddenly its forgotten.

One senses how happy he feels in reading every word of the letters he receives and how much it lifts his spirits. I feel the same way often, maybe not even consciously, but letters give you a great boost again.

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Paris 23 August 1943

"Paris. You are the most beautiful city in the world." Yesterday morning at 7 a.m., Annemarie and Anni happened to be at the train station and it was heartwarming. Then a luxurious breakfast with the staff leader, who was very nice as he had been in the past. Then I moved into the "bois?" alone, the others were all busy. But they are all very nice and I already feel at home. They said I should come back after the next course.

In the afternoon I went with the main guide Jennrich to the flea market, almost like a junk market, but with new things that you otherwise cannot obtain. Rubber bands, next to them light bulbs, carpets together with baby clothes, gelatin with letter paper, spices, fabrics, gloves, even furniture, kitschy pictures, cartel women, street singers. There was also a crowd and you could hear almost only German. The soldiers often rushed towards us and asked for advice.

"Schwester" is the wool fabric (in which they displayed as rayon (sp?)). "Schwester" is the fabric that is appropriate for a 35 year old woman; how much do I need? It is the good product here; "please put on your gloves"; and that's how it went all the time. You saw all types: gypsies, negroes, house maids, all with the whole kit and caboodle. The restaurants are along a street, behind destroyed houses. This flea market is a typical thing for Paris.

Then I drove to the East Train Station to say goodbye to Staff Leader Weecks. The drive home by car was wonderful. The driver turned a blind eye to the prescribed route because I didn't know Paris and drove us past the Place de la Concorde, the Arc de Triomphe, the Tuileries, the Eiffel Tower, the castle, the Invalides Cathedral, all with wonderful evening lighting. In the evening again with Annemarie Anni and Maria in the forest around the picturesque lake, where the French bourgeoisie sat on the typical French iron chairs with the curved legs and armrests, largely devoted to fishing.

24 August 1943

Yesterday morning I strolled through the carousel, the Tuileries, Place de la Concorde, splendidly spacious grounds, in the afternoon again quick flea market for fur gloves and wool, then to Notre Dame, where I particularly liked the choir with its fine flying buttresses. Today I walked over to the Trocadero, Eiffel Tower, Invalides, Place de la Concorde, Tuileries, Louvre again to Notre Dame and Sainte Chappelle.

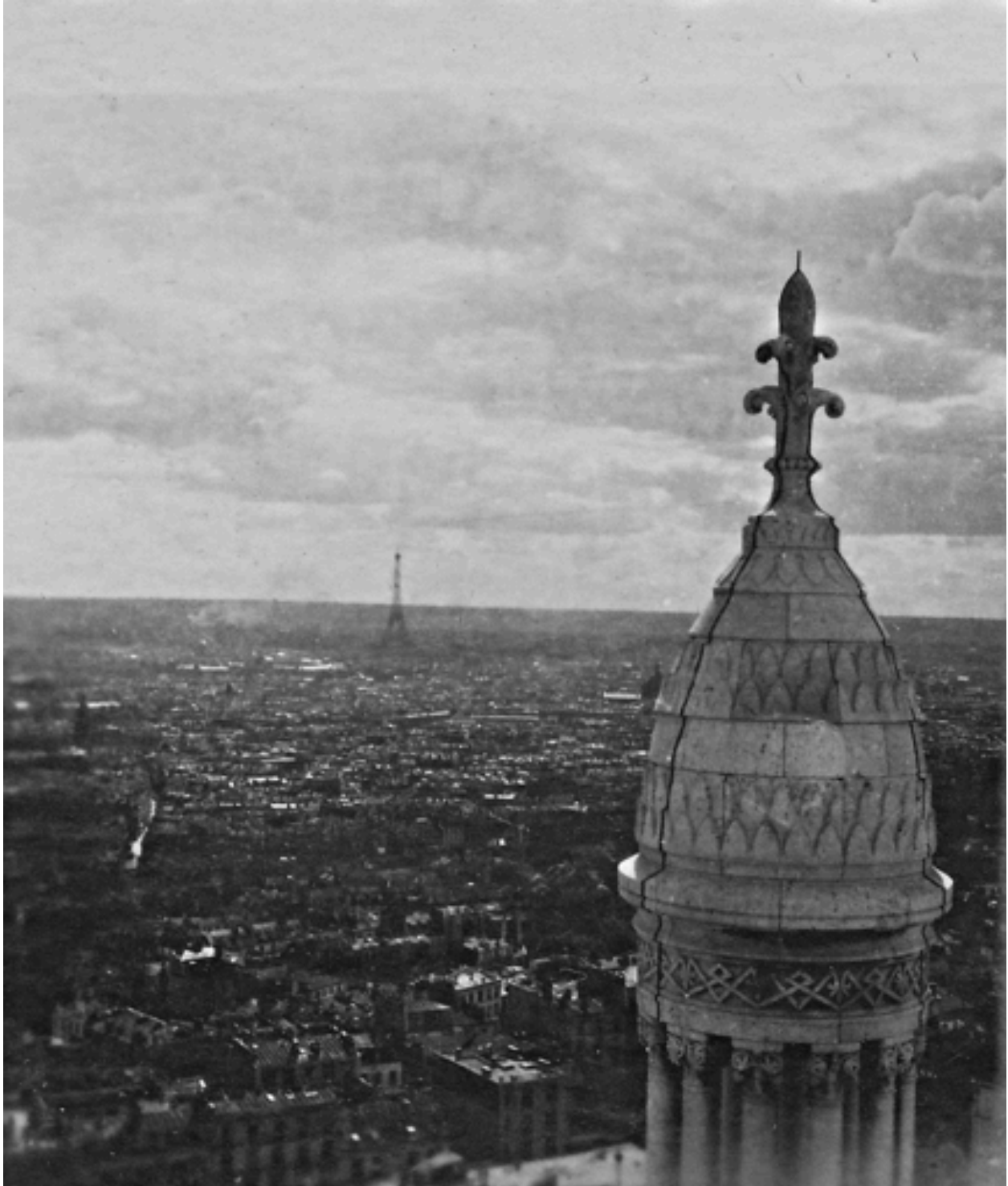
The view from the Trocadero to the Eiffel Tower and the city is beautiful, and I especially liked the Invalides. One became very still in this mighty room. The sun fell from the side and gilded the whole altar, which appeared to be mystically illuminated. And yet the whole room was

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bright, clear, quiet size. Napoleon's tomb also looked monumental, almost too curved. The tomb of Maréchal Foch is particularly beautiful. The Sainte Chappelle in the courtyard of the Palace of Justice is really over-refined Gothic, not stone, but pointed, huge windows that seem to have no support at all on the very thin, slender columns as partition walls. Only it bothered me that the stained glass windows were no longer there, which belong to the genuinely Gothic room and give it the atmosphere.

This afternoon I wanted to go to Malmaison, where a handicraft shop has just been opened, but the bus didn't go today. So I went to the Arc de Triumph and the Sacre Coeur. The Sacré Coeur is built according to the Byzantian pattern, shining brightly like a dream from the Orient, it stands on the highest point of Montmartre and looks most imposing from afar.

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The view of the city from the dome is also nice, but you have to climb hundreds of steps to get there. Main guide, Jennich, actually wanted to take me with a luxurious meal, or to her home, but I was pretty much shot and we wanted to bring Anni to the train. It is also good that I did not go, because the alarm is sounding, there was a lot of shooting just now, and on the left you

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can see heavy billows of smoke rising up. Hopefully the all-clear will be sounded soon, otherwise Anni won't be able to drive.

Brussels 2nd September 1943

Paris was like a dream. And gave us a new impetus and new courage to work. The new course is also much livelier and, for the most part, the soldiers came gladly and voluntarily and makes long faces when they hear "quitting time". Medium talent. This time I decide to make more ornaments, again it shouldn't happen to me that I have to pull out Schemer ornaments because Staff Leader Weecks wants to see them. I was amazed at how quickly and expertly most people sawed out ornaments for cabinets (so compact and firm).



They are good at creating text in script. Yesterday they were especially busy with Christmas angels and such little things. Bärbel is in Hilversum and Groningen for 4-5 days, so I have to do everything by myself, but with work my strength also grows. If you don't think about your own needs, it works very well, and you still feel free and satisfied - and also a little indispensable - if only for the handicraft course, not for wartime.

We had a lot of visitors: yesterday the Army Superior, maybe next week the representative with the President of the DRK, the Duke of Coburg Gotha, will also come.

I found a lot of mail from Jürgen, he wrote almost every week from April to May, he only writes letters, no cards at all. The poor will suffer when they hear that Sicily is evacuated, Tunis (Tunisia) long ago, retreat in the east, German cities constantly attacked. He writes very confidently, certainly doesn't want to reveal anything and certainly has a strong trust and faith. Hopefully he won't lose his trust and faith, it would impact me the most, because that would surely lose his

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knack for life. It is often difficult to write the right thing when I tell him too often that he should just believe and trust. Will he become disenfranchised? But somehow you want to give him something, maybe my words apply to him after all. I would also really like to know whether the time of separation can harm us, whether we have become strangers, but I have the feeling that it will not.

7 September 1943

Today there's another alarm, as has often been the case. Everyone on the roof garden was looking at the contrails in the blue sky, suddenly the bombs crashed, the house was shaking. So it's not really peaceful here in Brussels.

Lately I've had the feeling several times that it could be my turn! But it didn't seem so bad to me, because I didn't take them seriously. Of course, when you hear the bombs dropping like that, and they are getting closer and closer, you realize above all you cannot do anything, you cannot defend yourself, just wait - yes, one is not indifferent to the situation, above all things this morning I was aware of my responsibility.

You couldn't be happy for a long time if something happened to you – something is missing. Yesterday the President of the DRK (German Red Cross), the Duke of Coburg - Gotha was here and visited us and our things. He hardly spoke a few words, walked very poorly and stooped, probably has a back problem. But with majesty and dignity.

Next week there is an exhibit and another coffee party. Bärbel is in bed, very cold and coughing. She's going to Paris next week. Of course I will have bear the full burden. After Christmas we switch with the craft therapy team to Versailles for two courses.

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13 September 1943

Last night another great news item. German paratroopers and S.S. rescued the Duce, who had been abducted and taken to Abruzzo, in a bold coup. That's a typical German approach. This absolute loyalty and then such a daredevil attack. Since this episode the Fuhrer's speech has suddenly become quite optimistic again; previously you heard many said that we lost the game. But it was good when something happened again that shook people up. The fact that Rommel is in Italy is also reassuring. (Note: the **Gran Sasso raid**, codenamed "Operation Oak", in September 1943 was an operation by German paratroopers and Waffen-SS commandos to break out the prison escape of the deposed Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini from custody in the Gran Sasso d'Italia massif.)

20 September 1943

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We have narrowed the English bridgehead (in Italy) and brought in several thousands of prisoners and booty. But now they have landed new troops and those from Calabria are marching up. It can't be held.

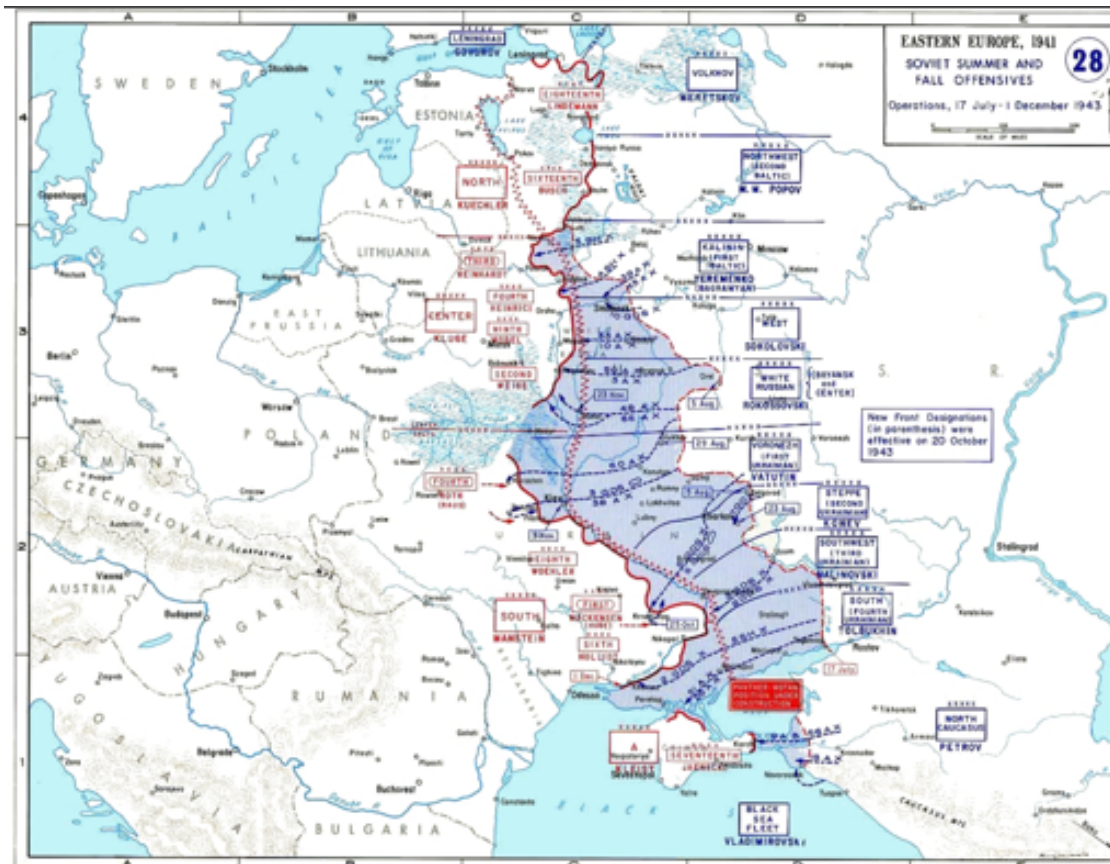


Figure 12: British Eighth Army's XIII Corps Landings on 3 September 1943

Mussolini wants to take up arms again, to what extent will he prevail and how long will it take before everything is back on track? The Italians are definitely not thrilled if they have to keep fighting.

And on the eastern front a continuous withdrawal. Ukraine will soon be gone and will not the bridgehead be cut off? Oh, it's a nightmare at the moment, the crisis is here; we have to hold on. These reports brings to mind the poor boys in captivity who are now suffering; they are sure to be ridiculed as part of the propaganda wax. But it must eventually go well. Why do we always have so many enemies!

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26 September 1943

Today everyone left Bruges except for one sick person who actually wanted to go to Höven. I didn't allow it, now she's pouting a little. But in spite of everything, I'm still too good-natured. In the V.E. it is much stricter with clothing and to leave; there is more freedom in the soldiers' home. I stand in between the two, what shall I do? So far I haven't received a reprimand from my superiors.

Area leader Krumbauer has been transferred to Ukraine. We are of course sorry. She did a lot for us and even cared about our personal well-being.

The day after tomorrow I'll will have been on duty for a year. Everything has turned out differently than I thought, but actually not worse. But still it would be wonderful if it were all over, you can never really enjoy your life again, you keep hearing about sacrifice, suffering, death and destruction.

(Irmgard and Susi were called back to Germany to care for Renate and Hanns Jochen von Ammon, the children of her older sister Gretel von Ammon (nee Oberst) who died in childbirth.

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Figure 13: December 1943 – January 1944-Cap Gris-Nez (Ilsa Beining)



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