

MY WARTIME CAPTIVITY 1914-1920.

DR. KARL WYNEKEN

(TRANSLATED BY ALISON O'NEILL)



1 . CAPTURE



On 12th September 1914 my company (7th/RIR 77) along with others received the order to take up a covering position near Champigny, a small village with an estate somewhat to the west of Reims, against the French who were pushing in from the Marne. We rapidly dug a makeshift trench in the hard white Champagne soil. When – towards midday – we had created a more or less adequate cover, the order reached us to make a mock attack against the French who had now appeared to our front. So, with a heavy heart we left our lovely cover under a very thin veil of rifle fire. The fires of Hell greeted us. Our losses were soon so great that to proceed further was unthinkable. A short distance from a few haystacks lay the remainder of the company, mixed with the remainders of other formations who had met the same fate. Every trench and any other cover was used to the full, but without much success: the vastly superior opponent rained down such heavy fire on us in our defenceless situation that soon only remnants of the advance guard remained fit for action. The Reserve Lieutenant leading the company, Gänegen, fell with a shot in the head, just after crying out an order to me. Not far from him lay the next-eldest in rank, Second Officer in Command Grothe, with an injured leg, and so as the eldest technical sergeant¹ I was the “Company leader”. Admittedly I did not have many left to lead: besides my Göttingen compatriot, Reserve Sergeant Specht, who lay a little off to the side behind me, barely twenty men of the company had been fit for action, and in the course of the fighting this number had diminished to barely half a dozen unwounded.

¹Vizefeldwebel, a senior non-commissioned officer. Graded a “Portepeeeunteroffiziere” (lit. “petty officers with swordknot”) who would carry a sword into battle.

We had worked forward to the haystacks, which offered us relative protection against the enemy fire which was gradually surrounding us in a semi-circle. Fortunately for us no shells hit the haystack, otherwise our cover would have been lost, since the straw would certainly – as a row of other stacks showed – have gone up in flames. Afterwards, my comrade Specht ran to this haystack through wild enemy fire, without anything worse happening to him than the mug hanging from his haversack being shot through. Luckily the weather was dull and there was light rain and mist, so that the enemy only saw us dimly, otherwise none of us would have remained alive.

As long as we still had ammunition, we passed the time by shooting to defend ourselves. But gradually one man after the other fell wounded and our ammunition began to run short. At any moment we expected that the French would make the decisive attack, as we certainly would not have hesitated to do in similar circumstances. Yet despite their overwhelming superiority the French remained cautiously under cover; apparently also because behind us and to one side were German trenches whose forces had not had to advance and which had suffered hardly any losses. So as dusk fell, I gave the few survivors the order to withdraw one by one back to these trenches. But it was in fact still too light, because as we ran back we still came under strong fire, above all from machine guns.

As I ran through a sunken lane just behind us I received my first injury, a graze to my neck above the uvula. Just one centimetre lower and I would have been done for! Since I had already used up my field dressing on my comrades, another comrade bandaged me immediately with his. Under fire from machine guns this sunken lane no longer appeared a suitable retreat, so I leapt out to retreat across the open field. It was entirely the wrong move: I had hardly run two steps when I felt a blow to my right cheek as if a dentist was filling every tooth there at once! I can still remember giving an inarticulate yell and then I was lying as the thought flashed in my mind, “You’re done for!” After a few moments I came to again, completely clear in my thoughts, and was able to assess the damage: my horn-rim spectacles hung left and right from my ears – the centre piece was shattered. Meanwhile, in my cheek there gaped a massive hole and along with blood I spat out teeth and bone fragments. I could not speak as my tongue and throat were also injured.

Fortunately for me I had fallen behind a small pile of manure. I now ducked down behind it. First of all I stuffed into the wound a clean handkerchief that I still had. Then I tried to dig myself slightly deeper into the ground with my hands, as I lay right in the middle between the German and the French lines, the most hotly-contested area. Ammunition of all kinds was in fact raining down around me, and I would not have given much for my chances of survival. I can however say that even in this forlorn position I was not willing to disclose a fraction of my – pessimistic – world view. I rejected any idea of whimpering and praying and was totally dominated by the feeling, “What futility!” So I was more inclined to curse than to pray.

It was now getting darker and darker. When I tried to sit upright, I was at first still so weak that I fell back again. Yet after a while I succeeded in raising myself with the aid of my long sergeant’s sword, and to stagger back to the nearby German trench. When I happily

reached it, a voice called to me from the dark, “All full here!” And as I could not of course make myself understood, I staggered on in the direction of the village of Champigny. This took me within a hair’s breadth of landing in the French lines, which I only realised in the last minute by their speech.

So I changed direction again, this time towards a few burning haystacks. At that moment I heard a voice behind me call, “Wyneken, Wyneken!” As incredible as it sounds, my compatriot and company comrade Specht was searching for me on the battlefield at night! (We had both agreed that in the event of something serious we would inform the other’s relatives.)

He was full of joy to see me there in the glow of the burning haystacks, yet his smile quickly faded when he saw me more clearly, I looked so tattered. He himself had nothing to laugh about either, as he had two or three shots in the leg and hip and was likewise only able to move with the aid of his sword. So, we trudged on harmoniously to nearby Champigny.

Right at the entrance to the village there was an “estaminet” which we entered. Specht demanded something to eat from the really very friendly and sympathetic landlord and landlady, while I just wanted a cloth for a bandage. Then I lay down, utterly exhausted, on a bench in the bar room. Just at that moment the door opened and a German lieutenant² glanced in. He was transporting a cart full of wounded to Reims. Specht beseeched him to take us too, and although he did not want to at first, in the end he allowed us to climb on. So then we drove through the now pouring rain with a number of other wounded soldiers on a jolting hay cart into Reims – an excruciating trip!

Towards half past ten that night we arrived at the city hospital there (right next to the cathedral) and were offloaded. When the French nurses saw me, they began to lament loudly, I looked so dreadful (as was later confirmed to me by my fellow prisoners who had seen me at that time). I was shaking like a leaf with cold and traumatic fever, nevertheless I still had the presence of mind to write “coudre!” on a sheet of paper, because I knew how dangerous facial wounds can be if neglected.

First I was put to bed, and I can recall today the feeling of security that came over me when I lay on this neat and warm bed. Very soon however I was taken to the operating theatre. I was placed on the table. Right above me was a huge round clock from which I could see the time (about midnight). Until two in the morning they then patched me up! I sensed little of it although I did not want to receive chloroform. I am still not sure who I have to thank for having taken care of me without delay. The sympathy of the nurses? The sense of duty of the (French) doctors? My knowledge of French vocabulary? Possibly it was a lucky combination of them all. I still believe that this rapid intervention saved my life.

² (As I later learned it was a Lt. d. [illegible] Knoke (from Osnabrück where his father was head of the high school) whom I had got to know years earlier at a wedding [illegible], Else Knoke, daughter of the theology professor Knoke, that I failed to recognise.)

After the operation I was returned to bed and received a shot of morphine. But traumatic fever woke me in the grey of morning and I heard loud cheering from the street outside. I instantly sensed great misfortune, so, in my shirt and full of fever I got out of bed. And halted there below in front of the cathedral, surrounded by the joyous populace, were French dragoons. I was caught! But the nurse had already spotted me and rapidly dragged me back to bed. Seeing my concern, she comforted me – I should be happy, now the awful war was over for me. And yet I was nevertheless desolate. Now followed a grey day, which brought me only the solace that Specht and I were placed together. (*I tried on this day to inform my mother, by writing a few words in outline to the Swiss poet K. Spitteler* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Spitteler] *whom my elder brother knew. However the letter, which I handed over to a nurse, obviously never arrived.*)

The next morning the news was that all wounded men without an injured leg were to be marched off. So that meant me, whilst Specht could remain. References to my condition did not help, and so I was soon standing in the street with a large troop of lightly wounded or sound men. There I was found by my Göttingen colleague and regimental comrade Zimmermann (5th Comp.). He had been captured unwounded with the rest of the company as a result of the incompetence of the company leader. I was partly so weak that I could not manage the great march, partly I was also totally convinced that the Germans would soon recapture Reims. Both reasons caused me to try everything to stay in Reims. So when I was supposed to march, I staggered along with difficulty and when the march was briefly interrupted stayed sitting quite broken down on a kerbstone. Sympathetic citizens surrounded me and asked what I wanted. I wrote again, “Some milk.” Shrugs. None available! But a pharmacist kindly brought me some cola drops. Then a woman pushed her way to me and brought me milk!

Finally the march moved on. I still had my field glasses with me. Then a soldier from the escort came up and grabbed them from me. Straight away an officer was there, who bawled at the man and returned the field glasses to me. Admittedly this did not stop the soldier returning shortly and this time definitively taking my field glasses from me.

After a little while the procession reached an abattoir. There, some of the wounded were selected and placed in a side room. A military doctor came and examined us for fitness to be transported. Only one comrade and myself were identified as not fit for transport, the rest had to move on. We two were now placed on a cart and driven from hospital to hospital. All full! Finally we reached one to the south of the city. There too we were given a negative response by a lady. But then came her husband (one Mr Henriot, Director of the Red Cross in Reims) and when he saw me he took pity and ordered that we be accommodated in this hospital.

We arrived in a room where the German wounded lay. I had barely entered the room when a voice from a bed said, “Here comes Sergeant Wyneken!” It was a corporal from my company, Bergmann from Hildesheim, to whom I subsequently had much to be thankful. The sisters of St. Genevieve there, who were touchingly kind, turned to him to find out who I was. Bergmann praised me to the skies, and as a result I was well received.

We lay about ten seriously wounded men to a room. In the first few days someone died almost daily, even though the care was heart-warming. At least twice a day our bandages were changed and the sisters shared their last morsel with us. The male medical orderlies admittedly were bigoted and left us – especially at night - to our fate. It was nevertheless a terrible week that I spent there. All around me was the din of war: the German machine guns rattled so nearby that we expected at any moment to be liberated. If I had been better on my legs at that time, the Germans were so close to us that I might have been able to escape. But I was so weak that I could not walk fifty metres. Nevertheless I could at least walk a bit! And therefore soon I had to deputise for the French male medical orderlies who were usually asleep if a comrade wanted a drink or was otherwise in need. At the same time, to begin with I had a fever of almost 40 degrees! Especially demanding was the care of a comrade lying near me, who had an abdominal bullet wound and for whom I perpetually had to insert the catheter, whilst he raved in a delirium of fever. And man is so much of an egoist that I almost felt a sense of relief when the poor chap died after a few days and thereby relieved me of my strenuous night-time service.

Another lay there with a severe head wound. His brain was exposed and – so they told us – a piece as large as a chicken's egg had been shot away. And yet the man lived, as long as we were there.

Our situation became even worse when the shelling of the city began. Not that I had any great fear for my life; I was quite apathetic. Nevertheless our nerves rebelled when shells exploded in the city with a uniquely brief and hollow-sounding shock. This din of war pursued me for many months to come in my dreams. At one time they wanted to take us into the cellar, because there was about to be an especially hefty bombardment. I asked the sisters to leave us in peace above, as in my opinion this cellar only offered slight safety. But they were reluctant. And because the bombardment might go on for a long time, we had to be bandaged first. It was touching to see as they did this, how, as the shells crashed, these women – brave despite everything – bandaged us with trembling fingers and at the same time prayed their litanies. Yet never a shell strayed to where we were.

Since I was the only one of the comrades who understood French, I developed a closer relationship with my benefactor, Mr Henriot. He promised me that he wanted to keep me in this military hospital as long as it took until I was able to speak again at least moderately comprehensibly, because that was then still much needed. But circumstances were stronger than he, it is true, and I had to leave sooner. I now learned much from Mr Henriot about the shelling of Reims and its mighty and beautiful cathedral: guns in fact stood behind the church and French observers on the tower. Thus he did not dispute our formal justification for the bombardment, just the moral one. One can of course dispute this issue. In any case, the French propaganda of atrocities which grew out of this bombardment did us great harm. When Mr Henriot's house which stood close to the cathedral and contained glorious collections was hit and set on fire, and he was able to save from his library only the book that he had lent to me, he declared that the burning of the cathedral hurt him still more. But even after that he remained the worthy and gentlemanly person that I had got to know.

In our ward our numbers were diminishing with the deaths of a number of comrades. At the request of the survivors I had to say a Lord's Prayer each time another dead man was carried out. Naturally I did this, because in the end I could not expect of my comrades that they share my differing religious point of view.

After about one week food began to run short in the hospital – as it did in the city as a whole – and the order came that we were to be shipped out. I still was far from healed, however I could make myself slightly understood again. So one morning we were packed into a kind of furniture van and driven to a suburban railway station. There we had to wait a long time for our train, and we came within an inch of far worse, because a load of rabble driven mad by the shelling of the cathedral wanted to lynch us. Only the intervention of a few French comrades in suffering succeeded in preventing worse. Indeed, in the end I was even able to exchange a piece of chocolate for my compass which I remarkably still had.

At last our train came. We got into a waggon in which there were already other German wounded men, making about fifty men in it. These included, beside a few other officers, one captain from my regiment (von Uslar-Gleichen³) who had gone blind with a shot through the optic nerve. A little bit of straw had been thrown into the waggon for the fifty of us, but this did not even cover the floor completely. Fortunately I had kept my coat so I was protected from the extreme night-time chill. We now travelled three endless days through France. On the morning of one of these days we saw Paris. However it was a dubious pleasure for us: almost entirely without care for our wounds, bed and board, we were faced with a screaming and triumphant mob. Even a “merciful” nurse (although not a “religious” one) could not resist showing us chocolate and when a few went towards her to take it, spitting at them. Here, too, an unwounded comrade, who – cut off from our troops – had attempted to escape through the enemy lines in civilian clothing, was taken from the waggon. He was placed before a court-martial and we later read that he had been shot.

³ [aristocratic family from Lower Saxony,
<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uslar-Gleichen>]

2. ANGERS



Postcard to Herr Doktor Wyneken at the Physics Workshops, Göttingen, Hanover, Germany Handwritten on card image: Angers: Ecole d'Arts et Metiers Handwritten beneath card: Card from a [illegible] from Angers who in July 1938 took part in a company course at the [illegible] in Göttingen and with whom I spoke about Angers and my imprisonment.

After a more than two-day journey that was harrowing in every regard, we finally arrived on the evening of 23rd September towards 11 p.m. at Angers. There we were offloaded into carts and driven to Hopital temporaire No. 19. It was a college for the building trade that had been converted into a military hospital. In itself a very suitable building with its large, light rooms, pleasant courtyard and kitchen facilities for the students (housed there in peacetime). Not so satisfactory were the care staff. The head doctor in particular was a terrible bigot who would not stop at tormenting the German prisoners when examining their wounds. Quite evil were some of the male medical orderlies, especially including this time a cleric. By contrast, the surgeon, one Dr. Pointin, was a particularly fair-thinking man.

The food itself was not bad, but for us, terribly starved through the campaign, previous time in military hospitals, and the long journey almost entirely without food, it was far too little. I never starved as badly in my life as in Angers. My bed was next to that of my company comrade, Bergmann, who more capable than I, understood how to obtain all kinds of small advantages, which he faithfully let me share. At seven in the morning there was coffee and white bread. This coffee was sweetened, and never has coffee tasted so good to me as this. Bergmann soon learned that the French military beakers, called quarts (=1/4 litre) held a touch more coffee than in the drinking vessels otherwise provided to us. He therefore “reserved” one each for him and me, which we carefully hid beneath our pillows and only produced when the refreshment was available. This mug subsequently accompanied me throughout my entire imprisonment and stands today still on my desk, to be used in all my wanderings. At midday there was first a very tasty bouillon with softened white bread floating in it, after which came a meat and vegetable course. But with this the French

reckoned neither with our northern appetite nor [with the fact] that we had been delivered to them completely starved. So although the food might have been sufficient for a well-fed Frenchman, for us it was totally inadequate. So our people were almost as hungry as animals and it was no better for me. Our guards occasionally had a little refined fun holding a race for a piece of bread amongst the wounded men who were out of their beds, and I seriously had to restrain myself at those times from joining in with this race.

Once I had reached the stage that I could get out of bed, Bergmann with the aid of a man from Alsace-Lorraine who from the start had enjoyed favourable treatment (he bore the famous name Grünewald) managed to get jobs as potato peeler and kitchen help for himself and me in the kitchens below. Here we sometimes were able to pick up something edible that had dropped. Better yet, we could “nick” things there: as soon as we saw we were unobserved, we slipped into the adjoining room where huge vessels full of delicious milk stood, and rapidly skimmed off the cream with our mugs! We also looked for other ways to supplement our diet down there. Admittedly the fun did not last long, because one day, while I was there attacking the compote which was not intended for us, I was caught by the unfriendly medical orderly who was a cleric in civilian life. He reported me and I was not allowed back downstairs. When he caught me I had exactly the same feeling that I once had as a youngster when my mother caught me snacking. Although I was not quite as ashamed – I was too hungry!

In the military hospital they had taken all our belongings, to keep safe. I still had 65 Marks, but I could do little with them. I permitted myself just one thing, once my wounds permitted it to some degree: I could at last have a shave, because already I was growing a shaggy full beard. Afterwards when I saw myself in the mirror, I noted that I had not exactly grown more handsome: as a consequence of my wounding my whole face was twisted lopsidedly. Nevertheless – even though an almost fist-sized wound had gaped for almost two weeks – I was recovered to the extent that I could walk around the ward.

Since I understood some French, I was soon brought in to undertake interpreting services. In this way I also came to the other German wards, in one of which lay a number of officers, including the blind captain from my regiment. There, to my joy, I found my company comrade and work colleague, Dr. Grote, who, in the belief that his promotion to Lieutenant had taken place (later in fact it turned out that neither he nor I – who had both been proposed – were promoted or decorated, because these things were not implemented after being taken captive) had been placed with the other officers and a very nice ensign, one Count Kielmannsegg⁴ (who later died in Corsica of malaria) and was later transferred with them to the officers’ camp at Cholet. In another part of the building lay the sad remains of a thoroughly battered battalion of the active Reg. No. 74. The unfortunates were so covered with wounds that a large part of them slowly died off.

⁴ [his successor:

<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/jun/07/guardianobituaries.secondworldwar>]

After about one week there was a joyous event: on 29th September we were allowed for the first time to write to our relatives at home. As all letters to me since 12th September had been returned with the mark “missing”, my family had already begun to lose all hope of me still being alive, not least because in the meantime they had also had news of the death of my younger brother. Accordingly my youngest sister wrote to another on 26th September, “No news of K., but Mrs Specht has heard from another that Franz Specht was seriously wounded and the entire battalion was almost wiped out. We have no more hope. He was at Reims* on the 13th or 14th.” The news about our battalion, etc., was in fact more or less true. It had to have come via wounded men who had been brought back.

Well, in any case, we were able to write at last. For safety’s sake I wrote two letters to my mother straight away, which both arrived around 10th October. In order not to upset my mother I wrote that I was only lightly wounded, would be healed soon and was being well looked after. However as I described the nature of my wound, my mother was able to make the necessary image of me. I did not receive any answer whilst in hospital, where I remained only another fourteen days.

** And on 2nd October my mother wrote to my brother Gustav, “It is quite certain that he fell on 14th September (!) when almost his entire battalion was wiped out. I have heard nothing more of him since 4th September ... Then I heard [illegible] had to be sent without cover, whilst the others lay in the trenches.”*

During my interpreting rounds with Dr. Pointin he examined my now – after a good fourteen days – healing wound and said, “Poorly stitched!” Yet he was quite wrong there, because the doctor in Reims had done his utmost to stitch my totally tattered cheek back together. But it is true that my face was completely deformed. Therefore when he offered to undertake an operation to beautify me I consented very gratefully. He would have liked to anaesthetise me, but I laughed at him and told him to cut away without. As a matter of fact he did not particularly hurt me, because the wound had torn many of the major nerves. So he made a cut through the lips and stitched my entire face with great care. I have him to thank for the fact that I do not have the deformed face today that one often sees in people with shots to the jaw. I would gladly have remained in hospital until Comrade Bergmann, who had a leg wound, could have travelled with me, unfortunately that was not possible. And I would have liked to have been in Angers to receive the first post from home, yet on 13th October the order came to be moved to Poitiers.

3. POTIERS



[Our yard Dec. 1915 Barracks ->](#) [<- "Stables" and church](#)

We travelled on a beautiful autumn day through the Poitou, the “Garden of France” to our new destination. Unfortunately we had been given not entirely sound meat, amongst other things, with the consequence that on arrival that night in Poitiers I had terrible enteritis. The march to our first camp, the Chauvinerie, became a dire torture. Initially we were placed in a cold hall, where – after the pleasant warmth of the hospital – we froze wretchedly for a night. However, right away I again wrote two letters to my mother with my new address. In them I asked for money and food and also for (Reclam [publisher of affordable editions of classic works]) books. Our personal details were taken the next morning. As a Sergeant-Major and prospective officer I was placed in the “groupe spécialiste”, i.e. I was placed with a number of other senior non-commissioned officers in a small camp gatehouse. The “room” I arrived in was already occupied by four regular Sergeant-Majors and a Medical Sergeant. It was infinitesimally tiny, crooked, and beneath the crooked roof had a straw litter as a bed. No mattresses, no covers. We froze wretchedly in the first few months and could only keep warm by crowding together tightly. There was no furniture in the room. The first occupants had of necessity knocked up seating from boards. There was likewise no heating. A meagre petroleum lamp served as lighting, the heat from which was also used to make coffee. In brief, what was offered us was more than primitive. And yet we still had it a thousand times better than the junior NCOs and men, who were partly penned in solid-built barracks, but partly also in squalid wooden stables in the most piteous state. Now, in October, it was not yet too cold, but later in the winter it was a calamity how the unfortunate comrades had to live! The special treatment of us as senior NCOs with lanyard took place according to a mutual agreement and was later a hotly-disputed problem for France and Germany.

The first thing I did in my new situation was to convert my 60 Marks in the mess hall. We got an abysmally low rate from the crooked canteen worker, but at least I once again had money in hand and was able to satisfy my most dreadful hunger. In those first few weeks I practically gorged myself! The mess was immediately below our accommodation and we initially had unlimited licence to buy and spend time there. Much there was very cheap: wine 60 centimes a litre (*was very quickly banned*); beefsteak 70 centimes; oysters (!) 50 centimes

a dozen; butter 1.50 francs, etc. Later we cheekily and religiously kept an account with the canteen worker and lived on tick, so that from time to time we could pay a larger amount. Every canteen worker I met in the course of my captivity attempted to cheat us in the worst way, and we always defended ourselves in every way possible. Later I learned a canteen worker who earned tens of thousands from us anyway was occasionally bullied by one prisoner or another into parting with more than 100 francs. However she avoided reporting this to the commanding officer because she had a very dirty conscience herself. In any case this canteen was a great boon to us at first. It was just a pity that my money soon ran out and I was once again on my uppers. Furthermore with unwisely eating too much I had developed terrible enteritis which lasted all of two weeks, and brought me down so badly that I was only able to get down the small staircase from our rooms to the ground floor with difficulty.



Barrack Room 1 of groupe special December 1914:
Wyneken Ernst Stärk Kächel Wolfsdorf Wiese and our orderly



Groupe special Dec. 1914
1st row: Count Kielmannsegg, Goldapp, Holtkätter, Holste, Hellwig, Zander, Scheu
2nd row: Schwarting, Blümke, von Obstfelder, Maglius, Alberti, Küppers
3rd row: Klendgem, Croissant, Hilgendorf, Tornow, Treunner, Wyneken, Wiese

It took until 23rd October before I received my first news from home: a letter from my sister Hilda. By contrast, I only received the first letter from my mother on 31st October, as the censor suppressed all her previous letters in which she obviously expressed herself bitterly about the war that had just taken her youngest son. On 30th October I suddenly received a load of money, as not only that sent by my mother arrived but also a hundred Swiss francs sent to me by the head of the company Carl Francke in Bremen, in whose house I had spent two of the best years of my life as tutor! In this yet again the old gentleman revealed himself as the wise and most deeply kind person ever hidden by a tough outer shell.



Groupe spéciale Dec. 1914 Barrack Room 3
Blümke, Maglius, Holste, Hellwig, Scheu orderly



Groupe spéciale Dec. 1914 Barrack Room 2
Treunner, von Waldenburg, Hilgendorf, Tornow, Küppers, Alberti 2 orderlies



Groupe spéciale Dec. 1914 Barrack Room 1
Wyneken, orderly, Fritz Klein, Wolfsdorf, Lt. Schulze, Lt. Janssen (Wyneken with *Himantoglossum hircinum*)

This 100 francs – precisely because I had not calculated for it in my budget - was a huge help to me at that time! Until then, I had had to do without every comfort, but I could now have a small work table and “chair” built for me by comrades. This freed me from sitting oppressively close together at the makeshift table in our quarters and allowed me to do some cerebral work. And that was hard enough! With the exception of one who hoped to become a paymaster and had completed a one-year training, but who owing to a direct shot through the lung was very delicate, my five comrades were all rugged souls, regular soldiers from Bavaria and from the east, for whom it was usually enough if they could thrash out a game of skat and puff away at their tobacco. Only Medical Sergeant Wolfsdorf (and later also Dragoon Guard Köchel) had a bit more ambition. Fairly soon I began to give French lessons to both. But usually there was a rough and even too hearty atmosphere in our quarters and I soon crossed swords over this with one or another of them, in the same way that they were also often angry with one another. For the first time I had to learn how difficult it is to live together with a large number of people. But this was in fact child’s play compared to the years of barracks life that I later faced.

One great advantage was however that we had a spacious barrack yard at our disposal. The “Caserne de la chauvinerie” (soon to be known as the “Swinery” by our people) lay to the west of the city of Poitiers on a wide chalk plateau, a large part of which is a parade ground. This large yard was bounded all around by buildings of all kinds. You entered through a gate on the left side of which lay a small building, the camp commander’s office along with the interpreters’ office, while the guard house (below) and we, the groupe spéciale (above), were housed opposite. On the other side of the easily 500-600 metre long yard, a gate between the kitchen and store (at the same time “Prison”) led through a gate to the parade ground. Here, directly bordering our camp, lay huge aircraft hangars, one of which was used by us as a “House of God”. This barrack yard was therefore the setting for a large part of our lives: there we walked, really (at least in the first year) exercised, played football

and other games, and on one side there were even a few pieces of gymnastic equipment – close to our building – which we later used very keenly. Looking back on our situation at that time and comparing it with the life that was to follow, then – at least for the *groupe spéciale* – one can only say that, it wasn't bad in the circumstances. Of course in the first few months we had no proper bunks, no bedding, no way of heating or cooking and also no proper care for injuries. (*Medical Sergeant Wolfsdorf did what he could, but there was a shortage of everything: [illegible], bandages, etc.*) But we did have a sound roof over our heads, relative freedom of movement, and didn't have to starve, even if the food was quite monotonous and of course not especially tasty. At any rate things were a thousand times more miserable for us in later camps. I have already said that it was not so good for the rank and file, and this was especially the case for those who were housed in the wooden stables, although these were later vacated. But none of us had really learned yet what war is, and so we were at first extremely dissatisfied with our camp. It was particularly vexatious to us that we could write home "so little", and only cards when we could. Much to our detriment, that too changed later: very soon we were only allowed to write two letters and four cards (*later two!*) a month, whereas from my records of that time I can see that I was allowed to send for example at least 53 (fifty-three!) letters and cards in November 1914 and received at least 57 (fifty-seven!) items of post. So it is hard to blame the translators for one-by-one going on strike and pressing for restriction of such industrious letter-writing when one thinks that there were soon nearly 800 of us occupying the camp!

In order to understand our mood, it is necessary to recall that a large part of us were convalescents and therefore highly-strung, but above all that not one of us had expected to be imprisoned. To be wounded or even die – yes; but to be taken prisoner ... No one had considered that. Consequently the mood – especially in the first few months – was extremely depressed and could only be compared with the one that gripped us all with the collapse of 1918. Therefore it was good that towards mid-December both confessions commenced pastoral care.

As soon as I had begun to get used to the new circumstances, I started to look around for intellectual occupation. At the end of October I received money – and a quite substantial sum of it - for the first time, so that I was able to have a chair and table made up for me, which meant I could escape the roaring of "trumps" coming from the communal table of the unwearying skat players. As long as I still had no books from home, I busied myself with writing down my wartime experiences. (This booklet was sadly later confiscated in Issoudon, although (in 1916!) it did not have the slightest military value. An interpreter will have kept it as a "souvenir", as the French generally collected such keepsakes with almost pathological eagerness, e.g. our pips, so that many prisoners arrived at the camp without any pips!) Apart from that however, on 31st October I began to note down my experiences in key words. This booklet I was fortunately able to hold on to until this day. The second of November 1914 for example reads thus: Weather: changeable. 5:30 reveille. Wash (wash basin! = 1.75 francs!!) with every comfort (washstand, toothbrush, toothpaste, etc.) 7-7:30 walk with Wolfsdorf. 7:30 to 8:30 sleep (migraine) 8:30-9 breakfast. 9-10 conversation, reading correspondence received so far (15 letters and cards, money twice!!!) 10:30 post

handed out. 11 roll call. 11:15 lunch (rice) 1-3 siesta 4:30 post handed out. 5 roll call. 5:15 supper (beans). 6-8 socialising.

On 4th November I then began a greater task: “Culture and War”, in which I sought to give a psychological and sociological explanation of the causes of war: “Initially culture and civilisation two different, opposed, concepts. From over-civilisation (=too extensive specialisation) a state can become a competitor menacing others. Result: war. But threat to the “national honour” (=sense of the work of forebears – i.e. religious impetus – ancestor worship) can also incite war. Where both coincide, it is inescapable” (from a letter dated 1/12/14). Naturally I was then still far too much in the shadow of events to be entirely clear about the origins of this worldwide calamity, but without doubt I had correctly identified some of its causes. Then on the First Sunday of Advent (29th Nov. ’14) I presented this work to the groupe spéciale as my first lecture while imprisoned (it was followed by many more!). As I presented my theses in a very pointed fashion, there was a lot of disagreement and lively debate.

Gradually the ardently desired books arrived, and on 17th December I already had a “library” of forty volumes! I had mainly asked for scientific works from the fields of philosophy, pedagogics, political economics and chemistry – all areas which I had only inadequately touched on in peacetime and knowledge of which I lacked for one reason or another. Besides this however I had naturally also been sent a quantity of light reading. I repeatedly read Fritz Reuter’s “Festungstid” [<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/620492/Ut-mine-Festungstid>, an account of imprisonment during the Napoleonic Wars] with particular appreciation at that time. The most important book however for me was (and remained so for my entire incarceration) Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra”. What I owe to this book in intellectual moral support I cannot express. So it still lies on my desk before me today. Remarkably the French very soon claimed that this book was to blame for the war, because it had prepared the disposition of the German people for a militant enterprise. Consequently, all of Nietzsche’s works were in fact banned for a period, and a volume of Nietzsche sent by my brother was in fact confiscated and must surely now adorn the library of a former interpreter. Well, anyway, I kept hold of “Zarathustra”! Incidentally, in later years this ban was lifted.

We were also forbidden from reading French (and of course German!) newspapers. Nevertheless we did obtain one (or even more!) French newspaper by cunning or bribery practically every day. We watched carefully where our guards for example hid their newspapers. Frequently they kept them in their haversacks or coats, which they left lying around. Then we would lure them away from these spots and rapidly pinch the desired item or at least read them through as fast as possible. The French authorities could however have quite easily have let us have these newspapers, because the censor ensured that there was no news in them that would worry France. We meanwhile quickly learned to read between the lines. In addition German newspapers were smuggled to us – sometimes in bulk – in tin cans and by other means, so that we always had opportunities for comparison with French newspapers. Our belief in the truthfulness of French war reporting suffered a deadly blow through this comparison.



Poitiers Caserne de la chauvinerie approx. July 1915
Lt. Janssen in the front (left v. Guillaume, right Küppers)



Groupe spéciale [playing] croquet
Our housing -> The entire groupe spéciale was housed under the roof of the [illegible] building on the far left



Roll call: Summer 1915 The inspecting officers Before their inspection Left Wyneken, then Blümke

Once the initial shock of being taken prisoner was overcome, the camp began to consolidate. At our head was placed a regular Sergeant-Major Tornow, who had made himself out to be a Second Lieutenant (Feldwebelleutnant) [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feldwebel>] and therefore the most senior in rank. He was a not very pleasant man, of the “bicyclist” type

[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=3fT_AwAAQBAJ&pg=PA103&lpg=PA103&dq=Radfahrrnaturen&source=bl&ots=i0TV5AmCYs&sig=SDs3iTufmsPQYsGBYhj_fuPtI&hl=en&sa=X&ei=pSXuU7FYyJ7sBrnUgMgH&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Radfahrrnaturen&f=false]

(“above they bow, below they kick!”). He was accordingly generally unpopular and regarded as an oppressor and not entirely reliable with regard to the French. Since he understood no French he was assigned a one-year voluntary enlistee corporal, W. Küppers, a Rhinelander. An assistant science teacher (later we called them probationary teachers), he knew his stuff. He was above all responsible for organising camp work, which he managed surprisingly soon and thereby became entirely indispensable. As second adjutant Mr Tornow was assigned Ensign von Guillaume (from the Kings Uhlans in Hanover). This was a thoroughly “put-up job”. The young man had been captured when he had a flat tyre whilst driving his regiment commander by car during the Marne retreat and therefore had to wander around on foot in enemy territory. He was the son of the industrial magnate von Guillaume (of Felten and von Guillaume [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felten_%26_Guillaume]) from the Rhineland, a multi-millionaire and an internationally-renowned man. Tornow, who was obviously hoping for the father’s protection, saw to it that the young man, who spoke fluent French and was a skilled man-manager, was able to move out of the dismal rank and file barracks to be with us in the groupe spéciale, even though he did not even have the rank of a Lance Corporal. Von Guillaume returned the favour by allowing Mister Tornow to share in his comfortable life. Every week he received a large package of the finest delicacies from Borchardt of Berlin [<http://www.borchardt-restaurant.de/en/>]. To do von Guillaume credit, however, I must say that he was only passively involved in this put-up job by gladly accepting this protection (and who can blame him?), and that he shared his treasures very generously. Later, when we had got shot of Tornow, he then also moved post-haste into another barrack room of the groupe spéciale. Also characteristic is how he came home: there was truly no more healthy and robust man in the camp than he. Yet in May 1916 he was exchanged to go to Switzerland as “terminally ill”!!! The fact is he had excellent connections to the Archbishop Cardinal in Cologne, who in turn made contact with the Holy See. Well, the end of the story was that – he had helped a little with a small “cure” – after medical “examination” he reached the beautiful Switzerland as an almost hopeless “invalid”. He is long since “recovered” and is today (about twenty years after that time) regarded as a famous racing car driver. For a while I really liked him, but in the long term his – for me unsatisfactory - social ideology got on my nerves and shortly before I left Poitiers I clashed with him over it. Our relationship never really recovered from this. A pity, because the young chap had a good and thoroughly honourable core.

The groupe spéciale too altered a lot in the first few months of its existence, as a few people were shipped out and new prisoners came in. The new arrivals later on included my

company comrade Dr. Grote, who later moved in to our quarters (No. 1; there were four such barrack rooms up there) and an Artillery Guard Deputy Officer, Blümke. The latter was a civil servant in civilian life – a very prudent and interesting chap, with whom I developed friendly relations that have endured long after our captivity. With him in particular I was able to debate and we jostled with one another as much as we could without our mutual relationship ever actually suffering from these digs. Our paths crossed repeatedly over the course of our lives in captivity and consequently we experienced a large part of our imprisonment jointly, until he finally was sent to Switzerland in 1918 on account of a (real!) lung disease. *(In 1957 (!) I rediscovered him – I had thought him dead – as an Oberregierungsrat [senior civil servant] in Stade [Lower Saxony] and since then he has already visited us in Göttingen!)*

For the rest, relationships also consolidated to the extent that the inhabitants of individual barrack rooms got used to one another and formed communities. This wasn't easy in our barrack room in that we six were extremely different as regards origins and temperament. So to begin with there were all kinds of internal battles. I personally did not find it easy to convince my regular army comrades that I did not fancy myself because of my academic education and more auspicious economic status. It really was not the case that you could “bribe” regular army comrades, i.e. win them over with treats. Naturally there were also such deficient types as well. But in general one had to be cautious if one wanted to pay some small attention to less well-off comrades. They were in this regard sometimes even oversensitive. To the honour of my barrack-room mates I must say that they very soon thoroughly respected my greater intellectual needs and therefore my need for quiet when working. Two of them I soon also began to teach the French language (my “class” later grew to ten students!). Close communal living, however, naturally made occasional clashes unavoidable. And then the unceasing skat players would cease to show any consideration and throw the cards down on the table so as to make a racket. At which stage I would soon flee and wait for “better weather”, which always came soon. I was on best terms with Medical Sergeant Wolfsdorf, who remained my barrack-room comrade for the entire time of his imprisonment (he was exchanged in Summer 1915), while the other four left Poitiers at the end of February, some through exchanges (comrade Wiese – shot in the lung), some as voluntary labour squad leaders (comrades Köchel, Ernst and Stärk). Wolfsdorf kindly took great care of my wound, gave me some good advice and later was able to report my condition in detail to my mother. After his exchange he took part in the campaign in Serbia and sadly died there of typhoid. From which one once more sees how apparent good luck can in reality be great bad luck, since as far as one can humanly judge he would still be alive today if he had remained in captivity.

By and by it now became colder and – despite the southern location of Poitiers - we began to freeze painfully, because we had no stove and at night only our coats to cover us on our straw litters. For my newly-scarred wound naturally it was not the right thing, and so I usually walked around with my face half muffled up. Since I was however now in possession of greater funds, I decided - to the delight of the entire barrack room - to become the first of the *groupe spéciale* to purchase a stove. It was a celebratory and joyful moment when we six

– much envied by the other barrack rooms – were able to sit around a hot stove for the first time on 24th November. Since I finally received the eagerly awaited blanket and besides that a quantity of very lovely post on the same day, I had good reason to call the day “this gala day”. In order to fully understand the importance of the stove, you must recall that until then we had had to make our tea or coffee, or warm up the coffee brought from the kitchen, over our lamp. And as the growing cold made a hot drink into a vital necessity, then you will comprehend what an improvement to our standard of living this small, cylindrical iron stove (costing 14.40 francs) meant to us. Robinson [prob. Crusoe] could not have been happier about his first fire than we were over ours!

The first hundredweight of coal I bought myself (for 2.25 francs; I still have the receipt!), however all the rest of the coal (and over the two winters in Poitiers certainly around one hundred hundredweight migrated to our stove!) we stole from the French with the benign assistance of our gallant Mess Sergeant Alberti. That is, our extremely adept orderly, Fritz Klein, took charge of the thefts. Every barrack room was assigned an orderly and people hustled for these positions, which not only exempted the holders from any other service but also brought with them some amenities.

The close communal life and straw bedding then resulted in a thoroughly unpleasant side-effect: vermin! Not just fleas! You can defend yourself against them to some degree. But lice! This disgusting clothes louse! You notice a suspicious tickle – mainly on the chest. You look. Nothing! And then you examine the seams of your articles of uniform and underwear ... and there they are. And the beasts unfortunately lay their eggs there. Here it was Wolfsdorf above all who set any false shame aside and urged the bashful bearers of lice to outright pursuit. He himself remained relatively free, because he worked at the infirmary (=sick quarters, i.e. sickbay) in the day. But I too copped this plague and I only felt moderately safe when the very urgently requested insect powder arrived from home. But the plague was only really dealt with when we were finally given sacks of straw instead of the loose straw. And for that we had to wait until 17th December.

To be fair it was not the fault of the French camp commander that we were left for so long without the necessary comforts of life. The French had anticipated prisoners of war as little as we had. The camp commander himself was a benevolent old Major (commander) from the reserves and was really a factory owner in – I believe – Lyon. But he was absolutely helpless and let his office staff, above all his interpreters, call the tune. And these interpreters were of extremely variable quality: some were spiteful and deceitful. To this category above all belonged Mr Martin, a journalist from Paris, with whom I often – but only with the greatest of caution – conversed. By contrast, the man who was later head interpreter, the Adjutant Mr Aubin, was a highly respectable man. By profession he was an “inspecteur d’academie”, roughly the same as our “Stadtschulrat” [school inspector]. He was the only one who read “Le Temps”, which requires a higher degree of education. All the others read the penny press, mainly “Le Petit Parisien” and the local newspaper, “La Petite Gironde”. Subsequently I often conversed with Mr Aubin, not usually about politics but about philosophical and pedagogic issues. He remained at all times a high-minded and very pleasant man.

In November we assisted for a while with the work of the interpreters, whereby they passed the letters from the ranks to us for a kind of preliminary censoring, so that we could return the letters beforehand to the people who wrote anything that was forbidden or punishable. Of course it was not the pure human kindness of the translators, but mainly laziness. And of course we had no interest in preventing messages arriving home that were favourable to us and unfavourable to the French. So this role was soon taken off our hands again after a few days.

Censorship was implemented in widely differing ways by the translators: whilst some of the translators were quite human in their attitudes, others raged over cutting out often entirely harmless parts of letters. Some however also had a sense of humour: when the victories in the east and some successes of our U-boats were reported to us in the form of earthquakes and seaquakes, the translator in question (it was in fact the “school inspector” Aubin, who was very pleasant in other ways too) quietly allowed this news to pass, but then called me to him and explained with a smile that he too understood something of geology; such natural science reports would now have to stop. Otherwise it was characteristic that the French barely concealed bad news concerning their allies, especially the British. Some news they even showed us with thinly-disguised schadenfreude. At the same time they were extremely sensitive about their own defeats. When there had been a German success against the French, we noticed it immediately in the behaviour of our guards: there was a bad atmosphere then! If it was at all possible, the French then took revenge by imposing punishment, at least however by harassment. In any case our letters were not only much mutilated or even entirely suppressed by the French but often also by the German censor. The death of my brother, for instance, who had already fallen on 20th August, and that of my best friend on 12th September I learned of only in mid-November, since all letters reporting this were suppressed by the German censor either completely or in precisely this decisive point. Consequently while in captivity I received letters from almost all my relatives and friends sooner than my mother! This report of the deaths of the two companions of my youth, who had been closest to me for decades, moreover weighed heavily on my spirits in the first four months of my captivity.

The extent to which circumstances had consolidated for me by the start of December can once again be seen from a page of my diary, specifically 7th December: “Weather: fine, warmer. 5:30 reveille. 6-6:30 coffee. 6:30-8:30 political economics, philosophy (Schopenhauer). 8:30-9 walk. 9-10 chemistry. 10-11 lunch: potato soup, veal cutlet (from the canteen of course). 11-1 siesta: reading: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer. 1-2:30 waiting for packages: 1) 3 books from Käthe Garke (later my wife, but then “only” my girlfriend!) (Kellermann, Fr. Huch). 2) Christmas package from Mother: sausage, ham, etc., and fir tree sprigs. 2:30 vaccination (against cholera, I think – I was very frequently vaccinated during the time of my captivity!) then until 3:30 reading: “Yester and Li”, Kellermann. 4 received post: letter from Mrs M. Francke; Handing in own post, 1 card each to K. Garke, T. Wyneken, Mrs Wyneken. 5-6 evening meal: cabbage soup. 6-8 reading: “Yester and Li”. From this order of events you can see that there were then barely any wasted hours. The day was divided up into continuing activity and it was of course good to do so. I maintained [this

routine] for the 5½ years of my captivity and so escaped the nerve-racking idleness and loafing that many comrades soon fell into [the habit of]. Doubtless one of the reasons why I withstood the long years of my captivity relatively well.

Christmas was now gradually drawing nearer. On 17th December we finally received straw mattresses as a provisional Christmas gift. This made it possible to master the plague of pests, since even on 14th December I noted the destruction of two lice.

On the day before Christmas Eve I had the pleasure of receiving a visit from Holland ([illegible] of my eldest sibling, van Kool)!

Now the men had also been able to organise themselves somewhat and had already formed “Societies”, above all music-making. Not just a choral society, but even an orchestra, which already gave small concerts on home-made string instruments. It was absolutely remarkable how fast the ordinary German soldier began, once he had adjusted to his situation, to organise his life and make it comfortable: pleasant living areas were set out in these miserable quarters, pictures decorated the walls and here and there appeared the first pieces of home-made “furniture”. On top of this was the inextinguishable humour of the people. This distinguished those from Berlin and Cologne the most. The former were by the way – together with the men from Saxony – the shrewdest. They understood best how to gain small advantages here and there. In general efforts to conduct the Christmas festival in a homely German fashion were clearly visible in all quarters: everywhere fir sprigs sent from home appeared on the walls, and Christmas songs were practised everywhere. I myself received no fewer than 15 (!) Christmas packages. I had requested books, cake and tobacco for my comrades in the barrack room, so that I could arrange a proper little gift giving for them all. But the highlight was a real little fir tree (the only one in the camp!), which arrived just in time with tinsel and lights. In my diary Christmas Eve went like this: Weather: cloudy, colder later. 5:30 reveille. 6-6:30 coffee. 6:30-7 slept some more. 7-10 decorating the tree, correspondence. 10-11 lunch: bean and pork soup (pork as special treat provided by the French). 11-1 reading. 2-3:30 preparations for Christmas. 3:30-4 consulted with the chaplains. 4-5 decorating the tree, preparations. 5 received post: 2 journals from Mrs Fr. Francke. 5-5:30 gift giving: Christmas address. 5:30-6 tea, cake. 6-8 social: Bordeaux wine, confectionary, music by the Christmas tree. – This brief daily summary alone shows that we celebrated the day specially. For me the day also yielded the not insignificant aspect that I got to know the French protestant chaplain a bit better. He at that time asked me to read the Christmas Gospel on Christmas Day, as he only spoke very shaky German. Nevertheless he had learned the Lord’s Prayer in German and spoke it – with difficulty but with great earnestness – at the end of every divine service. In any event he made serious efforts to fulfil his pastoral duties, and although he was just as good a Frenchman as any other, he never allowed himself to be carried away with any spite or iniquity. A truly noble and good man! The outcome of our acquaintance was then that from the end of January 1915 I translated the French sermons of the chaplain into German and in the first few months also read them out. I did this for a whole year every Sunday and learned a lot from it myself.

On Christmas Eve before giving out the gifts I sent my comrades into the courtyard, set out the presents for them, lit the lights on the tree and then invited the whole *groupe spéciale* in to our barrack room. First we sang a Christmas song together, and then I gave a brief speech, eulogising Christmas as the most German of all celebrations. After that I offered confectionary to our comrades from the neighbouring barrack room and guided my barrack room comrades to their gifts. These rough warriors were truly touched and we then spent a lovely harmonious evening by the Christmas tree, and as far and away the best-off I also provided the wine and confectionary.

The next day there was a morning concert in the men's barracks, at which all our beautiful Christmas songs were performed, partly by the "orchestra", partly by the choir. During the church service I read the Gospel and spoke the prayer.

Admittedly, after a few months, my activity as "assistant chaplain" (which of course only occurred because I saw it as in the interests of my German comrades and therefore as a national duty) raised objections from some pious Saxons ("members of the community"), with whom I had often discussed religious issues while in hospital in Angers and to whom I had made no secret of my personal opinion. They felt my behaviour was hypocritical. And they were even angrier when I cited the words of the Apostle Paul to them, that we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. That is, that I felt it was more important that the community was served by my assistance in the divine service and that it had nothing to do with my personal opinion. But in order not to afflict these pious souls, I then surrendered my personal role in the divine service to my – rather more "positively" [religiously] oriented – comrade Blümke, and only – because I really was then the only one who could do it and Blümke absolutely refused - retained the translation of the sermon and the organisation of the divine service. In the summer a young chaplain from Baden arrived with the new prisoners, and he took over reading the sermons I translated, because the French were too mistrustful to allow him to preach himself.

On 30th December we were then allowed to have our photographs taken for the first time. I still have the pictures which were made then of the occupants of the individual barrack rooms and of the entire *groupe spéciale*. Of the 25 or so members of the group, just one shared the entire period of captivity with me (with occasional intervals of separation) (Kleugen) and two others (Blümke and Zander) for the majority of the time. The others were gradually scattered to the four winds. Above all one learned about parting while in captivity, and soon ceased to feel it so tragically, even though it was often farewell for life. After all, many comrades died while in captivity.

New Year 1914-1915 passed beneath the blazing Christmas tree with a lot of alcohol (even sekt [sparkling white wine], which was not very expensive!) and in an optimistic mood. Even if this time we had not been able to celebrate Christmas at home – as we had generally hoped – next time we would certainly be able to celebrate in a victorious Germany. Only one of us "prophesied doom": Blümke. He was a pessimist and consoled us – to general derisive laughter - with hopes of 1916 – at the earliest! How right he was! That is, even his "extravagant" pessimism could not stretch to 1920. At 12 midnight we got up especially and

with a tremendous halo wished the other barrack rooms a Happy New Year. True – similarly to how we had been in peacetime during the officer training courses on the parade grounds - we were already bored sick of one another, instigated “battles” against each other, and even tried by other means to measure one’s own unspent energy against one another. It had generally become the rule to hold boxing matches with one another and the whole small building often shook when such struggles raged. I furthermore often preferred to spend time in Barrack Room 4, the “deputies’ room” (because only the “fine” deputy officers lived there!), to fight it out with its occupants in mainly intellectual fights.

At the start of the year the French prepared a specially apt surprise, introducing the first “reprisals” (“in the interests of reciprocity”!) into our lives: since things were done this way in Germany, we could now only write four cards a month. That meant therefore that I could no longer manage even a tenth of my correspondence. These reprisals faithfully accompanied us for five years of imprisonment: sometimes we had to work, sometimes there was less to eat, sometimes this, sometimes that! Always “in the interests of reciprocity”! We soon got used to greeting such congenialities just with derisory laughter!

At the turn of 1914-1915, life in the camp had become so familiar that there was a quite definite daily programme for the camp occupants. The rhythm of the day was not just set by the “reveille” and mealtimes, but now roll call also began. However, if one was in the *groupe spéciale* one initially only went to these roll calls if one was allocated some duties. Admittedly this exceptional treatment ended later. There were two kinds of “duties”: camp duties and outside duties. If you were “Duty Sergeant” then you fastened on a salvaged belt, checked that the camp had been thoroughly cleaned, and later also oversaw exercises. In the evening you “monitored”, i.e. after Last Post you went round the camp with a French sergeant and checked whether everyone was in “bed”. Exercises were of course not carried out as energetically as at home, but nevertheless even parade marching was “drilled” and we did not forget to hold a parade march of the entire camp on the Kaiser’s birthday and similar red-letter days, whilst the NCOs had to mark time for the music (which accompanied particularly difficult exercises).

Outside duties consisted of taking sizeable (up to 350 men) or smaller groups to specific work sites and supervising them there. In fact such a large group went every day to the “Arsenal”, a massive metal dump, to or from which certain quantities of metal were shipped daily. Our job therefore was to load or offload wagonloads of metal. We were constantly astonished at this “embarrassment of riches”: huge mountains of copper, tin, zinc, antimony – and of course iron bars were heaped in the warehouse up to the roof! And no matter how much we loaded, there was always fresh metal there! Sometimes we thought, “If we in Germany had such resources, the war would have been won long ago!” At that time I soon learned to divide our people up for this work. Naturally everyone worked reluctantly, and so the supervising sergeant had constant quarrels with the French overseers, who always demanded more work than was done. But you soon got a thick skin there, since of course you stuck up for your people as it was impossible to reproach them for working slowly. Owing to my wound I was only brought in to such outside duties in mid-January, because at first my face would still swell up considerably if I exposed it to cold.

As the arsenal made up a substantial complex, as soon as I had allocated my men I tended to tuck myself away in some corner, where I would read a stolen or otherwise captured French newspaper with one NCO or another who had also been sent to supervise. If we had nice guards, then I would happily talk with them too and so improved my French skills.

The route to the arsenal usually passed through the valley of the Clain, a tiny river which had worn its bed through rocky terrain there, so that this was also an opportunity to see a little of the surrounding landscape. The common wallflower grew there in quantities, and later in the spring its fragrance filled the whole valley.

Then on 22nd and 23rd January there was the first major change in my barrack room, with my roommates and besides them many other close acquaintances and a large part of the men being transferred to Corsica or Morocco. I myself had also registered to go, because I would have liked for botanical reasons to get to know southern Europe or Africa. But the assignment of the relevant men and NCOs took place specifically on a day when I was supervising at the arsenal, so that much to my disappointment I was not sent with them.

Later, it turned out that remaining in the camp was my salvation, because the people who were sent to Corsica (which I had primarily registered for) landed in a fever zone, and I learned later that one of my oldest and most treasured comrades, the Ensign Count Kielmannsegg, with whom I had been together back in Angers and whom I had often enjoyed talking to as a very cultivated person, died there of malaria.

I was very sad to part with my colleague, the one-year volunteer Dr. Wenke from Hannover. As he had not yet been promoted, he had to do duties with the men and in addition experienced occasional bullying by some German sergeants who enjoyed assigning him to especially unpleasant duties (cleaning latrines, etc.). At that time I was successful in ensuring that he was treated appropriately for his educational status (he was already an older man and there were enough young people who could do the task as well, without experiencing the sense of humiliation that a man like Dr. W felt) and I regularly invited him from then on to join me in my barrack room or went for walks with him to dispute ideas. To escape the bullying in the camp duties, he registered to go to Corsica and I would gladly have gone with him. In 1920 after our return home I saw him again.

I was less sad to see some of my roommates leave. This idle and dissatisfying lounging around in the camp meant nothing to them. They neither wanted to work towards their future nor had they the slightest interest in anything. So they amused themselves with making a racket and playing skat, and severely disturbed those of us who seriously wanted to work.

On 24th January there were suddenly only three of us in our barrack room: the Medical Sergeant Wolfsdorf, the (recent addition) Deputy Officer Kelm (an educated older man – businessman by profession), and myself. Later the equally nice Swabian Dragoon Sergeant Schmidt joined us too.

From the end of January I began to exercise quite regularly every morning at 7 a.m. The gym equipment was actually kept close to our little house. At first I was still so weak that I could hardly hold myself up on the horizontal bar, but in not so very long a time I was once again able to manage about ten pull-ups and could also display some skill on this equipment. Later we had some legendary gymnasts in the camp, from whom we learned a few tips.

Our diet was quite absurdly monotonous: almost every day PBS, i.e. potato and bean soup. And that twice daily. Naturally the committees that visited the camp found the food first-rate, and I must say that in itself it would not have been so objectionable despite the horse meat that we soon received almost exclusively. But once you have eaten the same thing a couple of hundred times already, then even if you are only slightly sensitive you can hardly stand the smell of such a meal. Consequently I soon only sipped the camp food and either got my supplies from the canteen or cooked myself. In any case I was in the happy position of being well-supported with money and packages from home. But the vast majority of my comrades were not so fortunate. Later we introduced relief operations for them: everyone gave a certain percentage of the money they received from home to an aid fund, which also received larger sums from the Red Cross. Admittedly, the longer the captivity lasted and the more prisoners there were, the less possible it became to cope with the need even passably.

On 10th February our roommates Kelm and Schmidt left us to move to another camp (Issoudun) where we later met them again, and for a short time Wolfsdorf and I occupied our digs alone.

As another transport and with it a number of members of the *groupe spéciale* left soon thereafter – this time for Marseille – our numbers were massively reduced. That meant that we were correspondingly more often assigned camp and outside duties. On the other hand we had the comfort of there being just the two of us in our digs, and accordingly being able to work undisturbed. On 1st March the two lieutenants Schulze (from Mecklenburg) and “Capt’n” – because as company leader and therefore mistakenly taken by the French to be a “capitaine”) Janssen from Osnabrück joined us in our digs. The arrival of these two finally triggered the “palace revolution” of the *groupe spéciale* against the increasingly unloved camp leader Tornow. Since he could not prove that he was an officer (after all, he wasn’t!), the lieutenants refused to be subordinated to a lower rank and we combined to see to it that Tornow stood down and the young regular lieutenant, Schulz, took his place. It was admittedly to his detriment that he undertook this revolution, because as he soon became a nuisance to the French, they subsequently sent him to Morocco, where he was shot by Kabyles whilst trying to escape, in other words: murdered. Whilst Lieutenant Janssen was a quiet older man and a very pleasant roommate, I had to assert myself at first in fierce struggles with Lieutenant Schulze, who was convinced of his Godlike quality. The young man was a dozen years younger than I, but believed he could treat me as an inferior. However he did not succeed in this. Then he was pressured by the entire *groupe spéciale* until he agreed to treat us in accordance with democratic principles. Later he also became a dear and pleasant roommate, who was especially friendly to me. A document of these struggles is my Kant, “Critique of Pure Reason”, which I exchanged with him for books of an

agricultural nature. In this he wrote, “Suum cuique: to the Dr. phil. the philosophy, to me the agricultural. To Dr. Karl Wyneken in memory of war within war and (hopefully lasting) conclusion of peace in the former. Poitiers, June 1915 Schulze, Lt. in the G. Mekl. Fusiliers Regiment 90 Kaiser Wilhelm – Rostock”. Despite his youth he became an outstanding camp leader, who really showed the French his teeth. Later he set up amongst other things a stenography course for us, in which I also took part and for a while really learned to stenograph quite well.

Gradually the spring gained in strength, and a letter to my mother dated 7th March maybe gives the best insight into the mood of a six-month prisoner, “Yet another month less! And one is glad enough of that. At least it went fast for me, because there is more variety here than you would think. My work – especially in chemistry and pedagogics – have come on marvellously. Despite the advancing spring which one feels clearly in every limb! To have to sit around in the house on these lovely days! - When I (once a week) take my 200 or 300 men to work, I pass along a glorious rock face below which runs a small river. The rock ledges are everywhere turned into gardens, where for weeks now all kinds of trees blossom. The last time all the rocks were strewn with wallflowers in bloom, which grow wild here. And up and down the river the meadows were green, and people are rowing there already. But we march in step through this beautiful area and are thus a symbol of the present day, which passes by and must pass by every aesthetic consideration with monotony. – Oh, well, it could be worse! When I sit in the morning with my notebooks filling with chemical formulae or with pedagogic concepts, I resemble the Blessed Hieronymus in his Dürer house to a T. Admittedly, afterwards in the evenings when I make bold claims in my barrack room or a neighbouring room and everyone attacks me, I am far less like the peaceful saint. But these are times of war! Only in the afternoons am I a man among men: then I exercise with the others – and (unfortunately) I still cannot manage 6 metres with the shot-put – or I go walking or read novels and suchlike.

It is astonishing how many books I have already become familiar with in these five months! I also regularly take a homely (heaven knows one even regains a taste for ‘homeliness’ [i.e. Gemütlichkeit, a word that sums up the German love of home and hearth and their comforts] in these remarkable times!) coffee break. Yet that is not the only vice that has been reborn in me, I am also recording the idiotic thoughts from the margins of my life in pathetic verse. For example:

Of two women must I oft think
Since I lie far from my dear home,
Wounded, captured, a stranger amongst strangers.
Their images fill my dreams.
Their words I hear again and again.

Blonde and earnest the one, of clear mind
And in word and all deeds clear.
Dark in thought, hair and eyes
No less often stands before me the other
As she pouts and laughs with me.

Oh! I love both creatures
And I would be in the greatest distress
If I had to choose one ~~for myself~~ as companion!

Yet fortune favours me, for of the two
?Neither - should I say sadly? – wants me,
And thus I have neither voice nor dilemma.

Oh! And yet with every, every torment
Would I gladly burden my heavy heart,
If I could have the choice but one single time!

Well, the verses are historic reminiscences, and therefore more fiction than truth. [...]

Through two lieutenants who moved in to our quarters in place of the comrades that have gone to Corsica or Morocco our meagre barracks have now gained an outward brilliance. We are almost elegantly furnished [...]"

In fact the sexual issue was in the long term one of the most awkward in captivity, and it was not always possible to resolve it with humour. But in other ways too such idyllic sentiments as revealed in this letter became increasingly rare, the longer the captivity lasted.

At the end of March and start of April a red-headed lieutenant appeared in the camp as head interpreter, and it soon leaked out from him that he was a Reichstag delegate from Metz, Weil, who defected to France at the start of the war. One day whilst walking I was called over by the very nice 'school inspector' Aubin, who was walking around the parade ground with this lieutenant, and the lieutenant began a conversation with me, by referring to Wickersdorf

[<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wickersdorf>,
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freie_Schulgemeinde_Wickersdorf,
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav Wyneken](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Wyneken)]

and explaining that – if he was not mistaken - an acquaintance of his, one Miss Guillemain, had been the French teacher in W. for a long time and much treasured the school. Thus, he gradually came to other matters and attempted to draw me out about our replacement formations. Quite apart from the fact that I was not in the picture about them, I was naturally wary of saying anything. And so it became clear that the lieutenant himself was magnificently informed down to the smallest detail, with the result that Mr Aubin somewhat sardonically asked whether I was not amazed at this fabulous knowledge. Well, I duly wondered and considered my part. As I remained extremely cool and reserved, the defector Weil soon gave up any further contact with me. After a little while he disappeared from the camp. Obviously he was attempting in various places to find traitors to the German cause.

After yet another two officers (not recognised by the French) (one of them, my company comrade Grote also really never was one) were placed in our barrack room, the gentlemen

began to make demands for a bedroom, and one day we actually got one! A neighbouring barrack room which was no longer occupied was furnished to this end. This was a massive improvement for me, because, as I was a non-smoker, the tobacco smoke which naturally permanently pervaded the barrack room was always extremely disagreeable to me. Now, the new occupants also began to do a bit more for the comfort of the barrack room, which I had had to take care of on my own until then. Fixed work hours, in which strict silence had to be observed, were now arranged. Meals were also now taken together, with those of us who had just received packages making their treasures – especially the cake – available to the community. Coffee was also taken together and whoever was on kitchen rota also had to prepare the Sunday pudding. On Sundays there was also cocoa with (for want of whipped cream) whipped egg whites. It was also normal for groups to invite one another over. Hence Lt. Schulze and I, as we had birthdays on successive days, paid one another back by inviting the entire groupe spéciale (which had at that time shrunk to 16 men) to a proper dinner! The groupe's orderlies served and it was all very 'mess-like'. The dinner came from the canteen, which also provided flowers to decorate the table and even a tablecloth.



Poitiers Groupe special May 1915

Seated: Wyneken, Treuner, [?]Seilen, Klemngen, Lt. Schulze, Blümke, ? [illegible], Zander
Standing: Wolfsdorf, Küppers, v. Guillaume, Schwartig, Janssen, Alberti, ?, Tornow, ?



Poitiers Barrack room 1 In August 1915
Standing: Hinze, Orderly Klein, Count, and Doctor Stahm
Seated: [illegible], Müller, Grote*, [illegible], Janssen, Lt. Kolshon, Wyneken
 (at Sunday afternoon coffee break)
 * who however [illegible] was '[illegible] only' deputy officer [illegible]



Poitiers Autumn 1915
 Bedroom of Barrack room 3: Schwarting, Klemdgen, Zander, ?



Our orderlies May 1915

The camp was then also not too overcrowded, so that the degrading horse stables had for some time no longer been used for accommodation. In addition we had established a camp library, where between 70 and 100 books were loaned daily. In other ways too, life for those housed in the camp had in some ways improved and when we were occasionally visited by the Ambassador of the United States he declared Poitiers as the best organised camp that he had seen up to then. From my later experiences, I think he was right.

As the year drew on lively sporting activities began to emerge. For instance, the *groupe spéciale* combined to play football against a group of NCOs. Later rounders and fistball also became popular. Gymnastics were also practised enthusiastically. In addition music and craft groups were well-established. And since everyone expected the war to be over soon and –because of the collapse of the Russians – a complete victory of Germany, the mood that summer of 1915 was thoroughly uplifted. This summer was in fact the happiest time that I experienced in captivity and I frequently suffered pangs of conscience on account of my relatively comfortable life. Of course that doesn't mean that I was entirely happy! If a person's life is restricted to a barrack yard then it can only be termed relatively happy. And of course the restrictions of our correspondence and the monotony of our diet as well as the recurring 'reprisals' and other harassment which we were subjected to by our camp administration contributed to us not really prospering. However, that summer we certainly had it better than our comrades in the trenches. And yet we ardently envied them and every one of us would gladly have exchanged his 'comfortable life' for this martial existence.

At the start of July I took a 'holiday' as the summer's heat made proper work impossible. A letter to my mother dated 4th July gives a good insight into our summer life: "Today yet

again a fine Sunday afternoon: after our meal, which differs from the everyday thanks to the canteen and the preserves sent from home, the entire *groupe spéciale* lies in the grass beneath ‘our’ maple tree, because the weather is wonderfully warm and fine. There is an old, grass-covered circular border there which at the same time serves as a headrest. Everyone has brought blankets, coats or cushions, and now the entire company lies there – head to the centre of the circle, legs outwards like a living star, and everyone has fun ... [cut out by the censor] ... but usually we make do with tickling one another with grass stalks and prickly banter. In the course of our get-togethers everyone has divulged some peculiarities and weaknesses, and these are now played back at them in manifold variations: there is one who tries to touch our hearts with sentimental songs. We too have now learned his songs, but also embellish them in suitable places with a heartless ‘tataa’ (like trombones). So now they are sung to him – with embellishment and deep feeling. Another is an articulated government clerk and aware of his important role. Also a gunner. So we tell him the heroic deeds of the artillery, which are in inverse ratio to the wisdom of the government. I am delighted with quotations from Christian Morgenstern’s Palmström [<http://pippoetry.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/christian-morgenstern.html>, translated extract of longer work] which I have popularised here. The most extreme things are also claimed, after starting every sentence with ‘there is now no doubt’, an introduction which I use to introduce my truly credible statements. Then after a while a beneficial calmness of minds arises: the majority of comrades sleep more or less noisily. Only a few – including me – read ...”

The men also often demonstrate that they have not lost their sense of humour. I recall especially clearly a comedy that a few real ‘Cologne lads’ presented in our barrack yard, which to our displeasure some of our guards and interpreters used for quite a while as a tennis court, and thereby limited our already restricted living space even more. The French, and above all a young count, played in an extremely affected way and thereby roused the jocularly of the viewing Germans not a little. One day, then, two of the Cologne lads suddenly appeared in the yard, each armed with a piece of board which was barely reminiscent of a tennis racquet. And then to the general jubilation of the captives who flocked in they began to play tennis with an imaginary ball, copying and of course caricaturing the movements and calls of the French players. Very soon the French also arrived to see what was going on. But they disappeared again very quickly and we never saw them playing tennis on ‘our’ yard again.

Incidentally I was also at that time expanding my scientific knowledge by making every effort to do botany on our yard and at the work sites to which I had to take our people. Of course I couldn’t get much out of this, as the flora in that area differed only little from our southern or western German flora. In addition our people brought me all kinds of animals, which they had caught whilst working. So for some time I observed a mole cricket in a glass. However a praying mantis (*mantis religiosa*) that I allowed to walk around freely on my desk for about six weeks and which was fed with flies and other insects by everyone caused more of a sensation. We called her ‘Cassandra’ and she had become completely tame. Then when she died in an accident, she was mourned by the entire *groupe spéciale*. Also curious were

the giant caterpillars of the Viennese Emperor which proliferated on our maple tree and which we also soon got to know in moth form.

Evenings were generally spent in intellectual and physical wrestling (occasionally I also gave lectures of a pedagogic and scientific nature) and amused ourselves with all kinds of games. This involved keen betting, but of course only for small amounts of money or for fruit or a bottle of beer. But we would then bet at any possible opportunity. For instance, one popular bet was whether you could catch a certain amount of flies in a given time, which was often easier to say than to do. Or whether one of the players of a [jigsaw] puzzle (a game where specific pictures had to be put together from many parts – up to 2000!) could manage it in a certain time. And so on. In addition there was of course heated talk about politics and above all bets on the likely end of the war. These bets were admittedly not even won by our greatest pessimist, the government clerk Blümke, although he assumed that the end of the war was still far off. But he never foresaw that it was still so very far off, even in his worst prophecies.

There were major changes in the *groupe spéciale* that summer: in July our capable camp leader Schulze became so inconvenient to the French that they deposed him and appointed the quieter and more discreet Lt. Janssen as camp leader. Yet if Schulze had become inconvenient to the French through his bravado, ‘Capt’n’ Janssen soon did too through the indestructible calm with which he greeted the agitation of the French. So after a few months they replaced him too. In addition a good many new prisoners arrived, and the senior NCOs landed up with us, so the *groupe spéciale* rapidly grew, and our barrack room, for example, had beds for up to ten men. On the other hand, my room-mate of nine months, Wolfsdorf, finally returned to Germany as a medical orderly, where he visited my mother and informed her about our lives, things we could not tell her in our letters.

Towards the end of the summer I received another important task, as I took on the post responsible for the search for missing men being carried out in our camp. So I regularly received from German headquarters in Frankfurt huge folders containing the names of those they were seeking and I had to find out from my comrades where the relevant missing man was. It was a truly sad labour, as I could deliver positive results in barely one per cent of the cases. My position in the camp had meanwhile become so established what with my translation of the sermon and the work on missing men that even the French placed some importance on me remaining. This didn’t alter even when I occasionally landed in the glasshouse for four days because something had been wrong with my inspection. It was in any case a quite ‘chivalrous’ prison, as I was well looked after, had a proper bed and finagled all the books that I wanted.

About the various changes in the *groupe* and our life in it, I wrote the following to my mother on 17th October 1915: “I am writing today having just brought my work team back, now a regenerated host of comrades. Lieutenant Schulze is no longer there and a range of recent captives have taken his place. Thus we now have in our barrack room a young junior doctor (Stahm) and a deputy officer Müller (a Prokurist in civilian life). Pleasant types, who fit in well in the structure and tradition of our barrack room. [...] For some weeks we have

held discussion and lecture evenings every other day in our barrack room, and the majority of the neighbouring rooms also join in. We are looking at Goethe's Faust. Normally one party is made up of Lieutenant von Wenkster (general director of the chamber of agriculture in Oldenburg) who has been here a long time already, and Comrade Grote, and Deputy Officer Blümke and I the other. Naturally not only the matter in hand but very often even the most abstruse subjects are discussed. For instance, we talked for many hours about the 'essence of art', and I think that I finally brought them all around to my point of view. I emphasised that the essential element of art was the shaping (naturally of an idea), whilst the majority wanted to place the main emphasis on the underlying idea. You see, it isn't exactly world-shaking thoughts that we are poring over here, but nevertheless we are defending ourselves to the best of our abilities against dullness. Since we have not only the Urfaust [earliest version of Faust, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goethe%27s_Faust] but also several commentaries (which I admittedly attack with force), this event is not without positive results. ... For the rest I work and practise sport as usual. We have already been sent a new fistball and many other games by the American federation, the Red Cross (or rather by the YMCA). So now I also often play croquet ...”



Barrack room 2, May 1915 [Actually, Christmas seems more likely in view of small tree in corner, and stars, etc.]: Alberti, von Guillaume, Tornow, [illegible] ?, Küppers



Christmas tree in Barrack room 3 Christmas 1915



General Christmas service in the aircraft hangar Poitiers, Christmas 1915

The approach of the second winter in captivity found us in a well-organised camp with precisely ordered work operations, as can be seen from the extract from my diary dated 2nd December 1915: Weather: cloudy, rainy, warm. 6 Reveille. 6-6:45 Get up. 6:45-8:15

Conversation, coffee, inspection. 8:15-9 Philosophy (Hegel). 9-9:30 Work on missing men, handing in post. 9:30-11 Translation of sermon. 11-12 Lunch: lentil soup (camp kitchen), fieldfare (from home – apparently these were young crows, as my sister who sent them to me later revealed), rice with apricots. 12-1 Race (this was actually a board game with betting by us, which we later called ‘the Tote(alisator)’. 1-2 Inspection, reading. 2-3 Coffee, conversation. 3-4:15 Physics, Chemistry. 4:15-4:45 Latin (Pliny). 4 Delivery of post. 4:15-5:15 Walk. 5:30-5:45 Roll call. 5:45-6:15 Supper: CBS, bread and butter. 6:15-6:30 Roll call, dispute, conversation.” [It appears Wyneken may have missed a few lines here in copying this out, giving the early part of one day and the later of another, overlapping.] One can see that I keenly - not to say desperately - kept myself occupied in order not to spend too much time thinking about my situation. But traces of camp fatigue are already becoming noticeable in me and I begin to play with thoughts of registering myself to be removed from the camp, where things are going well for me but I am shut up as in a ‘golden cage’. Anyway another two months pass, until I am serious about this decision. Before that comes above all our second Christmas celebration in captivity, which this time was far more luxurious than the first. Admittedly there were very few comrades there still who had celebrated the previous festival with me. And the French had dispatched all the officers who were too demanding for them. Comrade Blümke too was sent on a detachment, so I was gradually growing lonely.

Anyway we celebrated the second Christmas festival still full of hope of returning home soon. This is clear from a letter to my mother dated 1st January 1916: “1916 has thus begun and I hope that it will at least be the last full year that I have to spend in the condition of war prisoner.” (What an optimist! In reality there were more than four full years to follow!!!) Since Christmas I had placed myself on a ‘reserve calendar’ and I was at that time expecting a little luck: “Reserve 1917 still has 462 days.” (But in reality this became more than 1500 days!!) That is, that I assume that I have the first half of my war captivity behind me and this slow but steady diminution at least gives my life a brighter setting.



Barrack room 1 Christmas 1915(in Barrack room 3)
 Stahm, Wyneken, Heep, Müller, Count, Hinze



Barrack room 3(in Barrack room 3)
Standing: von Guilleaume, Klemmdgen, ??, ?? Seated: ?????? Zander

Accordingly I celebrated Christmas not just as the winter solstice. (In reality this ‘turning point’ was only due in May 1917, that is at the time that I then roughly assumed would be my return home. On that day I hadn’t even one quarter of my total time in captivity behind me!)

As you know, we were permitted to celebrate the festival in our own way. So, in the large room which otherwise served us as a church (aircraft hangar) we decorated a large pine tree and our local artist created a very tasteful crib out of cardboard, while another comrade painted a very nice altar picture after an original. Our choir had practised quite a number of songs and a German vicar (local war volunteer) had obtained permission to give the official speech. As guests we had the commander with his wife and the gentlemen from the office, both priests and a few doctors. Our celebration went very nicely: alternating choral and communal singing, reading of texts from the Bible, and the sermon also brightened everyone up, and I was very pleased that we were able to offer our men a really homely Christmas celebration. It was a vast difference to the flat and unfamiliar celebration the year before. After the church service we inspecting officers (each responsible for 100 men) handed out gifts to the poorest of our comrades, for whom we had held a collection. (In addition on the day after Boxing Day we received over 700 smaller packages from the Red Cross, so that we were then able to give gifts to almost all of the comrades there.) Then we got together with another barrack room (No. 4, with which we had always been on friendly terms) for a communal party. We had jointly bought a large Christmas tree and also placed our six other, smaller, trees from home on the festive white cloth-covered table, while over us blazed a chandelier woven from fir branches. We had decorated the entire room with greenery, and when we came into the room from outside we were met with such a festive radiance as I have never experienced. Then we ate the communal Christmas dinner: roast goose with potatoes and vegetables, pudding and no end of sweets. Thanks to the courtesy of the commander we were also permitted a little (?)* wine. The Christmas speech, which of course expressed our

great hope for 1916, was made my responsibility. Our mood was quite generally an uplifted and unsentimental one, and this was also a great difference to 1914 ...”

*Afterwards there was a [illegible]

Conditions in the camp had therefore become almost as pleasant as in peacetime, and I may say that I took this with an increasingly bad conscience. In addition, my wound was long since fully healed. One of the most extraordinary side effects of it was that a shattered tooth with the broken crown had penetrated my tongue, and now stuck out of it with the root. No amount of tugging and jiggling could help at first: the tooth was stuck deep and immovably in the tissue of the tongue! At that time it was a popular demand in the groupe, “Wyneken, show us your tongue!” And it excited great joviality when I one night – I think it was in July 1915 – suddenly told my sleeping colleagues in triumph, “I’ve got it out of my tongue!” In any case, our new arrival, junior doctor Stahm, removed from my mouth the last threads of the stitches I had been given only in January 1916.

As I said, in the long term I found this all too comfortable life inappropriate. And owing to increasing tension my work was no longer progressing. I had repeatedly therefore spoken with one of the few long-term comrades in captivity, ‘Deputy Officer’ Zander, about whether we should register for a detachment and so escape the monotony of the camp. Zander had another special reason to want to get away from Poitiers, that is, he was not a deputy officer, but, I believe, only a private. Since, as an educated and cultivated person, he felt he could not bear the poor treatment of the men, he had on being taken captive made out to friend and foe alike that he was a deputy officer, and even landed initially in an officers’ camp and latterly with us in the groupe spéciale. Unfortunately however members of his company came to Poitiers and threatened to ‘unmask’ him. Of course he cannot be blamed in any way for insinuating himself into a better position, because he only injured the French by denying them a worker. But – as always in life – he was more threatened by the envy of compatriots and comrades than by the French. So he wanted to get away from Poitiers. For myself, I understood his motives less, because he did actually receive formal confirmation of being a deputy officer from Germany in 1916. How he managed it is his secret. In any case he obtained the certificate and then until the end of his captivity lived in France as an undisputed ‘deputy officer’. I only learned the true facts long after our captivity. Until the end of 1917 Zander remained a good comrade to me in various camps, and was sometimes valuable to me thanks to his astuteness.

Zander’s encouragement finally moved me to a decision to register to leave Poitiers. I well knew that this would mean an end to the easy life. But I didn’t feel that I could act otherwise in such martial times, if I were not to feel ashamed before my comrades in the field. Therefore on 30th January when two sergeants were wanted as detachment leaders, Zander (who had prepared everything well in advance – above all in discussion with the interpreters) and I volunteered. Since I had no money just then, I obtained a small sum from our aid fund, which I promised to reimburse promptly through my mother. Then I immediately informed my mother, but since I changed my abode no less than five times in the months February to May (Poitiers, Beugny, Turpenay, Tours, Issoudun) this letter – as so

many others - obviously did not reach her hands. (Those that my mother received in this time were almost without exception severely mutilated by the extremely rigorous censor in Tours. A particularly vitriolic spirit against the Germans appears to have predominated in Tours.) At least, much to my embarrassed astonishment I learned in Issoudun that the money had not yet reached Poitiers. So then I wrote from there again and this letter did arrive, because I have it today. The matter was of course thereafter put in order, but I remember even now how very embarrassing this delay was to me for a long time, as it naturally cast me in a bad light. Even though it was a quite inconsiderable sum (about 20 francs), I had always placed such great value on being painfully correct in money matters, that this affair practically soured life for months.

4. BEUGNY AND TURPENNY

On 31st January therefore our departure came to pass. With a detachment of our men we travelled via Loudun and Chinon through a beautiful area to the station of St. Benoist-Rigny [<http://www.map-france.com/Saint-Benoit-la-Foret-37500/>], set in the forest not far from the city of Tours. From there we marched a few more kilometres to the abandoned baroque castle of Beugny, which sat in the densely-wooded Touraine landscape. This castle and a nearby barracks housed a few hundred people, and we were to supervise them at work.

We sergeants were assigned special quarters. We shared out our duties so that one of us always went to work with the men, while the others oversaw indoor duties. As the “junior rank” I started with outdoor duties on 1st February: in what was at first still damp and warm weather we drove in truly primitive cars to our place of work in the forest. The woods there had been little tended; trees were heavily entwined in ivy and the area itself gave the impression of a mountainous plateau, although nowhere did it rise particularly high above the sea which was over 200 km away. Now, in winter, the area was quite doleful as a consequence of the damp and the frequent fogs, yet later in the spring it became quite delightful.

Our work consisted of bringing the wood that had been chopped down by the French soldiers to the cars, and shipping it away from there. I myself enjoyed relative freedom in this, going from detachment to detachment, issuing orders as necessary and conversing with Germans and French (including with a man who was wounded close by me on 12th September 1914!). After the comfort of camp life, this wading around the completely sodden forest floor wasn't pleasant to begin with, of course. First and foremost I had a kitchen built for our men, so that the food did not have to be transported from the camp and arrive half-chilled. This outdoor duty lasted from 7 in the morning to 5.30 in the evening. I was so tired that first week that I could barely function at anything in the evenings apart from conversation and at most card playing. However the outdoor life compensated me for some of the comforts that I now lacked, and thus I wrote to my mother in a card dated 20th February 1916, “This week I was in the forest. The weather [was] usually good and always warm. Consequently [I am in] perfect health. You will hardly believe how much I enjoy being outdoors! Everything is like new to me: trees, farm animals, fresh air ...”. In fact I could be satisfied with my exchange in this respect – whether I was supervising in the forest or had indoor duties, I at all times had a quite different degree of freedom than in the camp. I was not allowed to go too far from the castle, of course, but did occasionally reach the nearby farmstead. And, once, a nice “caporal” from our office whom I had made friends with, and who – although a notary by profession – was a passionate archaeologist, took me to the nearby forest and showed me the remains of ancient Celtic fortifications there. Admittedly not all superiors were as nice. There was the adjutant – “Boss” we called him – who had to be treated with great care. It was said he had previously been a German soldier and had reached the rank of Wachmeister [sergeant in cavalry, field artillery and supply units]. In any case he was well-informed about German military service and spoke perfect German. He treated our men with extreme severity and was generally feared, above all when he had violent fits of temper. However I succeeded in treating him properly, so that he allowed me

to make some protests. An even worse gentleman was our immediate superior in the forest, a lieutenant from the Chasseurs d'Afrique. The man had evidently had a touch of the sun in the tropics, and I later had a severe clash with him.

My time with Zander was in fact only brief. After just one week he received the order to go to the Tours camp. His certificate as a deputy officer and candidate officer had arrived (!!!) [I had had to write to Germany for this too, but mine took longer, because it was obtained via the legal, official route!] and such mighty gentlemen could not be employed on work squads! His place was taken by a nice artillery sergeant, whom I also got on with very well. As I had a lot of spare time during the week of indoor duties, I soon resumed my scientific work, which had been briefly interrupted. So a day in the castle soon looked like this: 16th February: Weather rainy. 5 Reveille. 5-6 Get up, roll call. 6-7 Complaint, read French newspaper. 7-9 Work for the depot. 9-10 Chemistry. 10-11 Pedagogics. 11-11.30 Lunch: CBS (inescapable!), apple. 11.30-12.30 Reading, coffee. 12.30-1.30 Roll call, siesta. 1.30-4 Reading, duties.

Very soon therefore I was taking time in the afternoon too for scientific work, and since I had soon made myself comfortable in the barrack room, I was basically very satisfied that I had escaped the camp at Poitiers.

The respective week in the forest had its down side, of course, not least in that the weather soon became wet and cold. In addition, I fell foul of the French almost daily, because our men did not work fast enough for them, yet I naturally enough did not want to goad them. So then imprecations would rain down and soon we were “damned Boches”, a “filthy race”. Apparently the French NCOs complained about me to the lieutenant, who now began to bully me: he restricted my walks in the forest, banned me from carrying a stick and similar petty things. Eventually this came to a head [when] he began offhand to say “du” [very impolite in the circumstances!] to me. Me: “I object to you using “du” to me! I am a candidate officer!” Him: “I don’t give a damn!” And then he continued to call me “du”. So I called him “du” back. He was flabbergasted: “Oh, so you’re a socialist?” Me: “Yes, lieutenant!” And off he went foaming with rage. Complaint to the forest commander. But nothing happened to me for the time being. And most of the French were pleased, because the lieutenant enjoyed widespread unpopularity.

In our office sat the German philology student, Wagner, who heard the lieutenant telling the story to our highest superior, the forest commander (head forester) and the “boss” with deep delight. And the Boss, who couldn’t otherwise take a joke in matters of discipline, simply had me report what had happened and just gave me a benign warning. So nothing changed in my life for the time being, and on 19th March the Sunday passed like this: “Today I am now sitting in my room at the desk by an open window. Before me is a bunch of primulas (by the way: *Primula acaulis*!) and anemones from our forests, and a warm spring air around me. My room-mate Lackner and I have just finished our feast – cooked by you with the exception of the soup and the pudding! – and it tasted wonderful. In this respect too we are keeping up the traditions of Poitiers: Sunday is passed convivially! Around me are all kinds of fossils and plants, because I am zealously using my relative freedom to enrich my

knowledge of the natural sciences. Through the window I have a view across some fields to the nearby forest, which all round here lies only a couple of hundred metres away. There is a Sunday quiet around me and I am feeling in a calm mood. And this week in the forest, which I partly spent working in a different area (NB: I was sent there so that I didn't get in the lieutenant's way!) was marked by signs of spring. Naturally I feel especially well in such weather. Today I was examined by Swiss doctors (by the way: they handled us without any human interest and obviously wanted to find everything okay. In any case they were almost rough with the prisoners, and in equal measure pleasant to the French!) who found my wound very good, but were not able to deny the broken jaw and 6 teeth that had been knocked out. Whether anything will now happen, I don't know, but I don't believe it's likely. (Nothing happened for more than 1½ years!) [...] I'd like books: Strasburger, Lehrbuch der Botanik [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lehrbuch_der_Botanik, a standard reference] and the first volume of Goethe [...] Well, the permitted 16 lines (another "reciprocal rule"!) are almost up, so a quick note: my address is only: Tours, 9th region, Depot de prisonniers No. 1467 ..." (from a letter to my mother).

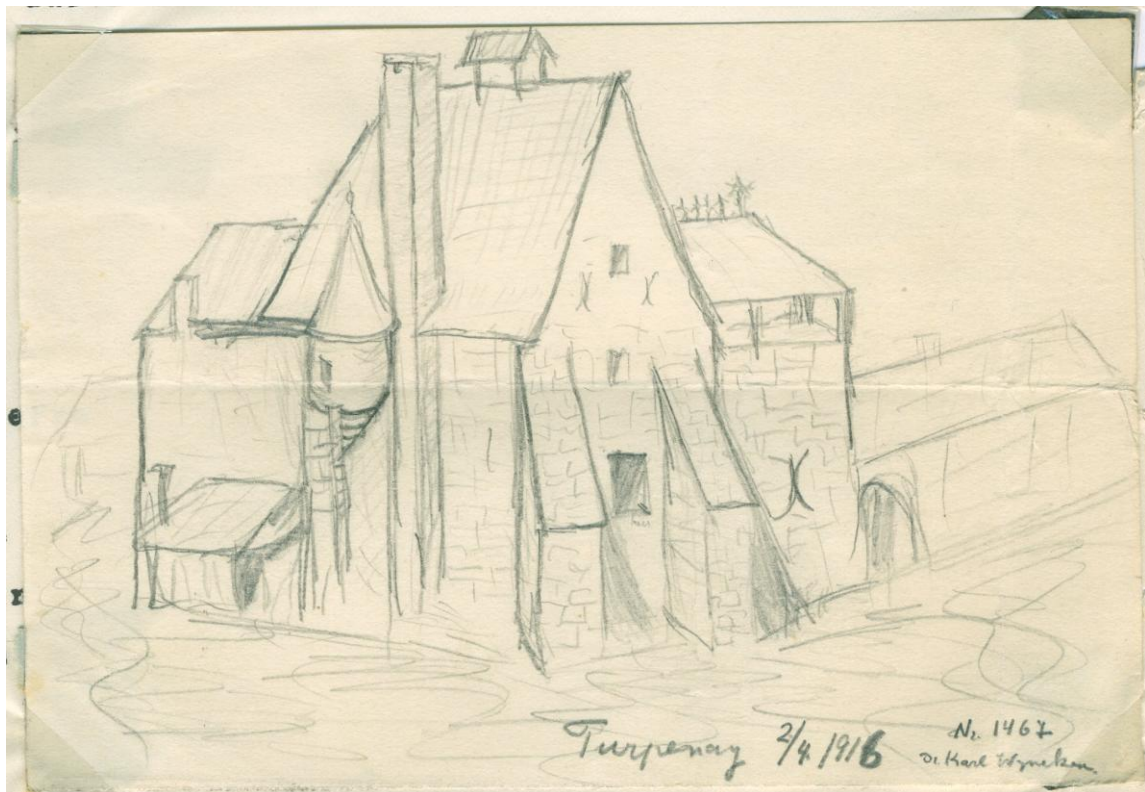
The coming spring was also expressed in verse by me:

The bowl of violets there on my desk
Effuses a soft, sense-beguiling fragrance
And many an hour's sweet reminiscence.
Yet before my window bluster and riot and romp
The boyish high spirits of springtide.
Full of curiosity they tug – indecorously high –
At skirt and blouse of that young woman,
Who, stretching her limbs, red and fresh
There outside hangs her linen on the line:
Some coarse-woven tough men's shirts,
But also a few items of more discreet use
Such as lace vest and panties flutter there.
Timidly she brushes a strand
Of black hair under her headscarf,
Which the miscreant storm has loosened,
Resists also the flightiness of the skirt,
When the youngster gets far too indiscreet.
... ..
And I, the bachelor and sadly also
The prisoner of war look on from afar.
Sense longing for fulfilment of hot desire,
Sense the rapture of springtide and love over all,
And look, and look – oh, from so very far!

Naturally such idylls were the exception. In general raw reality dominated, although admittedly more for our men than for myself, since in accordance with international treaties I was entitled to special treatment. Our men, who had to toil outside day after day in all weathers in the marshy forest and then only enjoyed very mean comforts back in the castle, were not to be envied.

I was particularly sorry for one young war volunteer, who had joined up full of enthusiasm with a “Notabitur” [extraordinary school-leaving exam, granted to would-be volunteers on simplified terms and at earlier ages than normal, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notabitur>], and had now landed here literally in the quagmire. Another of them, a somewhat older philology student, I drew under my wing rather, but I was unable to protect him or his – quite depressed – comrade from the work outdoors. The only thing that I could do for them was to protect them occasionally from punishment by the “boss”. But by and large I always had an uncomfortable feeling when I saw my comrades slogging away, whilst I myself was able to live a relatively pleasant life. This opportunity and others showed me how good it had been that I had re-gained my qualification as a candidate officer with Exercise C beforehand!

By now I believed that the clash with the lieutenant would not have any further consequences, but on 25th March I was informed that I was being transferred to another detachment! I left with rather mixed feelings, and not without dread saw the sign to the “Ruine de Turpenay”. In truth I landed up in a ruin, but a very well-preserved and beautiful one! It was the ancient Abbay de Turpenay dating back to the 11th Century and renowned from literature (Balzac!). A massive stone structure facing a few half-timbered outbuildings of more recent date. The whole was situated extremely picturesquely right by the forest, which was only separated from the ruin by a small pond. I attempted a rough-and-ready drawing of the structure from this side, and attach the drawing here:



We mainly lived in a large room with a wonderful historic fireplace. The light fell through the lower of the windows shown in the drawing. Some of our men had already settled down in a ground-level room, a real oubliette, but I saw to it that they also moved in to our “mezzanine”. For me personally a den was made up of boards, and I was entitled (!) to use this. Above us were still more rooms with fireplaces, etc. (Our carpenters made all sorts of mementos out of the ancient shutters of oak there. Even today I possess a frame of age-darkened oak from our abbey.) In brief, it was a truly romantic situation!

The work squad itself consisted of about 50 woodcutters, builders, smiths, etc. Its sole duty was to chop wood and make it suitable for use in bakeries and field kitchens. It was almost entirely [of] people from the Bavarian forest and the Black Forest, mainly specialists in tree felling. Nevertheless the French were not happy with the men, who said that they would not work for such paltry pay (I think 20 centimes per day!). In fact, everyone was supposed to deliver one “stere” (cubic metre of wood) a day, but instead of the 40 steres demanded they stubbornly delivered barely 20, until my predecessor, evidently a wily type from Alsace, managed to convince the French that the men should work piecework and receive one franc for each stere that they delivered over and above the required forty cubic metres. I arrived in Turpenay at exactly the time when the agreement came into effect. And lo! On the first day I was there the forty men delivered barely 25 steres, but on the first day of piecework they cut 130 cubic metres!!! The French cursed and our men smirked. Finally, they set about the work so hard that the forester implored me to put a stop to this rampage. Well, the men had no long-term interest in over-exerting themselves, but I don’t think they ever cut less than 100 steres on a work day. It was a fabulous performance for me, when these skilled wood cutters would cut wedges out of a whole group of trees downwind, then cause one to fall and this then took the others with it as it fell. This often at a blow cleared a whole section of the horizon which till then had been hidden by trees! Best of all the men liked to chop down really thick oaks, because they held the most cubic metres. However such mighty trees were of course intended for other purposes than fuel. So our men just waited until the forester was yet again full of sweet wine, and then asked him whether this oak or that should also be cut down, and when in his stupor he gave permission they leapt like squirrels on to their victim as soon as he was gone. Soon it was lying on the ground, and they rapidly had it sawn into such small pieces that it could only be used as firewood. Then the once again sober forester would stand there cursing and wailing. All the same, the French always paid the money for the piecework promptly all the time I was heading the work squad.

Whilst I did have to go out every day into the forest in Turpenay, I didn’t find it a burden at all. Apart from the fact that once I had assigned work to my men I could wander around wherever I wanted there in total freedom, there was – in contrast to Beugny – never any friction there, whether between Germans and French, or between the Germans themselves. Whereas the work in Beugny was unsatisfying to our men and this translated into a fractious and grumpy mood, our men in Turpenay were working to line their own pockets and therefore with pleasure. They even offered me a percentage of their profit, but naturally I refused. I was completely satisfied to know that my men were in good spirits, which made my life infinitely easier. So I count the weeks in Turpenay as the most pleasing of my

captivity. And it is characteristic of human nature that I still hold a disproportionately large number of details in my memory from that brief and relatively happy time, whilst numerous unpleasant memories of ten-times longer periods have largely been forgotten and I can only reconstruct them using my letters and diaries.

So, as soon as I had allocated work to my men – in accordance with the wishes of the forester “supervising” us (although he was hardly ever seen!) – I for my part went on journeys of discovery. As spring was now burgeoning with all its might and every nook and cranny was blossoming, I was able to practise botany on this (Atlantic) flora to my heart’s content. In addition I took books to the forest with me, found a suitable spot, and read or worked out there without interruption. I also discovered a sizeable forest stream where I bathed as soon as the weather reasonably allowed. Finally however I had another special intellectual pleasure: the *caporal* who came along to watch over us was a highly-educated man. He was “inspecteur des beaux arts” Thomas, a world-famous cellist and in fact a composer from Tours. Apparently, to avoid the Front (although he was already 48 years old!) he had been assigned to our work squad. Being intellectually a very alert man, who had visited the whole of Europe on his concert tours and held no fewer than eleven decorations, he was excruciatingly bored in our wilderness. He did however allow his little “girlfriend” from Tours come over sometimes and disappeared with her into the deep forest. But these were rare highlights in his existence. So when he heard that I was a “docteur en philosophie” and “professeur”, he rapidly took up with me and we frequently took long walks along the track, discussing political, philosophical and aesthetic issues. (One of these conversations related to the murder of Jean Jaurès. Cynically he declared that justice had prevailed. He had been killed on the order of the-then premier Viviani. Of Poincaré he did not think much as a human despite massive chauvinism: “False like Lorraine – false like [illegible],” he said to me.) This gave me the opportunity – not without aesthetic pleasure – to get to know the elegant diction of a highly cultured Frenchman. I can still vividly recall one such walk on the main forest track when we were talking about “snobbism”. Just then a car drove past us carrying the forest commander and the “bad” lieutenant from Turpenay. We made our honorific bows, as required, and I told my *caporal* about my encounter with the great man. He almost died laughing and thought I had behaved entirely correctly.

In the evenings I sat in my den (because after a certain time we were no longer allowed to leave our building) and read my books by candlelight. At this time the roving spirit would take hold and I discussed all kinds of escape plans with our only NCO. We were quite resolved to get up and go once the season was more consistent, around June probably. Admittedly I had no illusions about the possibility of escape, because we were living in the west of France and would have to try to make it across to the east. In fact I do not know of any escape attempt that succeeded in this way, although I witnessed quite a number. The only escape attempts that succeeded were made on the work squad where the escapees either travelled to another country (Spain, Switzerland) shut in to waggons or were taken on board neutral ships. But we were not even able to take a walk in complete freedom so I would definitely have gone too if I had been left in Turpenay.

Just once I experienced something like a kind of strike by the men. This was when they should have worked on Good Friday. They just wouldn't do it, no matter how the forester raged and cursed. And as they were also supposed to work on Easter Sunday, the men cut down as much wood as was needed on the Saturday before, so that the required forty steres were there and they simply had to stack them on Easter Sunday; the rest of the time everyone spent in whatever way they wanted. Even the forester had no objections to this solution.

In other regards we spent Good Friday in an especially festive fashion, with song from our men and good food. Mr Thomas also received elegant guests from the town, to whom he showed the ruins and us Germans. He asked me to get the troops to sing their German folk songs to them, and since they also liked the gentleman well they did so with pleasure. Finally they had to sing the "Wacht am Rhein" [German patriotic anthem], for which he took his revenge with the "Marche Lorraine". For my part I had a very pleasant conversation with the fine guests, who also included a pretty girl.

Walpurgis Night 1916 also stands clearly in my memory, as I spent it with wine (we could buy as much as we wanted) and Ludwig Finkh's *Der Bodenseher* [<https://archive.org/details/derbodensehermi01stirgoog>; http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Finckh]. The Swabian landscapes of the book, so well-known to me, which featured in it as illustrations, aroused my homesickness and so I wrote the start of a Tübingen student song in this book: "O Tübingen du teure Stadt!" [<http://www.volksliederarchiv.de/text1996.html>]. Mr Thomas also often played his cello for me, and since then Schubert's "Ave Maria" is inextricably linked for me with Mr Thomas and the Abbay de Turpenay.

I would not willingly have left this work squad soon, but on 5th May the order came like a bolt from the blue to go to the camp at Tours, because confirmation had arrived of my being a candidate officer. There was in fact an agreement between Germany and France that this category of candidate officers could not be assigned to work squads. The French did not of course always worry about this agreement, but I assume that our powerful labours in the forest had become uncomfortable for the French (because of the payments!) and they wanted to prepare for a change in this arrangement by changing the command. The NCO with whom I had agreed to attempt to escape did then leave alone (in June) and made it quite a long way to the east, but he was finally caught there.

5. ISSOUDUN (INDRE)

The camp at Tours presented itself as an unwelcoming barrack town, where the normal edgy mood of such barbed wire encampments prevailed. From the first moment I longed to be back in “my forests”. I learned there that my comrade from Poitiers, von Guillaume, had just passed through on his way to Switzerland as “seriously ill” (he was certified unfit by the [illegible - intervention?] of the Archbishop-Cardinal in Cologne and then exchanged and sent to Switzerland. Anyone who has the Pope as a cousin, or in other words “for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance”). It was amusing to see the extent to which theft of French state property had already been elaborated in Tours. One work squad in particular, which had to sort the pieces of equipment coming from the Front, was famous for it. From them you could “order” practically everything: articles of clothing, watches, etc. I was shown a pond in the centre of the camp, on the bottom of which rested hundreds of French lace-up shoes which our men had all thrown into it one time when they faced a roll-call to be searched for French footwear.

I only remained one week in Tours, and then I was transported on, to Issoudun (Indre). This was the start of one of the most horrid times of my captivity. Admittedly, it seemed at first to indicate an improvement. We were again gathered into a *groupe spéciale* which enjoyed the “*régime de faveur*”. And I also encountered a great number of good old friends there again, above all my regiment comrade and colleague from Göttingen, Zimmermann. Zander, Blümke and Kelm too were there, and with these three I immediately made up a dining company, because we lay (up to 18 men) in one large room in a barrack.

There was already a library, so you had peace and stimulation to work, etc. Two and a half hours of strict silence mornings and afternoons were then introduced. And finally Zimmermann took us firmly in hand and gave about six of us P.E. – to the extent that at first all my joints ached! But all these amenities were nothing to the loss of freedom which we now experienced. Although we were often taken on walks, this tended to excite our need for fresh air more than satisfy it. And anyway we only had a tiny paved courtyard available for our “exercise”! When you think that from the freedom of May-green forests I had just been locked away in this “golden cage”, you can understand that not all the amenities of camp life could compensate me.

My whole life long I have never had to bear anything as hard as the restriction of my personal liberty, and this now took place to the utmost extent. So it is no wonder that the seven months in Issoudun are my saddest memories. In addition, I was right from the start gladdened by a “reciprocal measure” which determined that they deducted 20% (!) from the money sent to us from home. I also had to wait weeks for my luggage which had remained in Tours or Turpenay, and this caused me some awkward situations. In brief, I honestly yearned to be back in our beautiful old abbey!

The shape our interned life took can again be seen from a letter (dated 11th June 1916) to my mother: “Whitsun! And once more in captivity (section censored). But all this will not keep me from hoping that it is the second and last time (what an optimist!) that I must go

without my freedom. We celebrated the date with a festive meal and are now sitting peacefully together.

The large size of the groupe spécial means that smaller groups are naturally formed of people with the same interests. For instance, Blümke, Lieutenant von Wenkster, Lieutenant Schneider, Theurer (deacon), Cordes (teacher) and I make up a group that reads and discusses great German poetry (Faust, Wallenstein [play by Schiller http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallenstein_%28play%29], etc.). Zander, Zimmermann and Pastor Kuhlitz (from the old Hanoverian pastor's family) occasionally join this group. As we are a bunch of older people, these literary evenings are quite fruitful, because everyone makes an effort to be thorough – even me! My work and the P.E. continue as normal. The currently prevailing cool weather (similar to two years ago!) reconciles me with the impossibility of roving. And yet! But I must not think seriously about the lovely woods of Touraine which I left so very much against my wishes. There were clear becks there, where I bathed, blooming meadows to lie in and beautiful views on all sides! And all that has now once again vanished in the nebulous distance for at least a year! Oh well, even this will be borne! ... The news about the status of school reforms in Germany interests me a lot. Sounds as if the prospects are very good ... I am surprised that you have not received a letter for so long, I write one every two weeks ... Black military trousers in the next parcel please ... but no meat and no fat as long as it [is] expensive ...” We were at that time beginning to have concerns about nutrition at home and thus from June 1916 on a repeated request that they did not send provisions appeared in my letters. Sadly without success, because back home they were not aware that we in France could buy foodstuffs. And the messages that we sent home about this via exchanged prisoners (medical orderlies, severely wounded) were sadly not believed.

I became especially close to Comrade Zimmermann at that time. Whilst he oversaw my physical training and set me right with “spiritual advice” in the increasingly frequent fits of depression (which were never worse than in Issoudun!), I gave him lessons in Zoology and later in Botany.

Zimmermann had a happy, untroubled nature in all things and truly helped me at that time. Besides this there was also the old friendship with Zander and Blümke which admittedly was often expressed in hefty insults and so forth. For instance, Zander insulted my Latin and swore that he could translate any piece in the ancient language chosen by a neutral third party better and faster than I could. Then, without me knowing, this “neutral party” was drawn in to the conspiracy: Zander was thoroughly crammed for the piece in question and ... was victorious. In addition we would engineer tremendous brawls to spend our excessive energies beneficially.



Issoudun 1916 Zimmermann's exercise course
 [Nine men in picture, five named:] Zimmermann; Fritz Bergmann [illegible]; Kordes; Kelm; Hartmann



Issoudun June 1916 Standing: Kelm, von Wolfendorff, ??, Kordes Seated: Kordes, Wyneken, Theurer, Lt. Brand Then ??, Zimmermann

** I met Kordes again in 1943 (!) when [illegible] in ... Stranberg [probably Starnberg, an attractive town in Bavaria]. That is, during the 2nd World War!!!*



POW troops Issoudun 1916

A tremendously important innovation was also introduced at that time: we were allowed to have French, English and Italian newspapers. This meant that the – by then extremely refined – theft of French papers became unnecessary, and from now on we followed world events “legally” again. Since we had long since learned to read between the lines, [and] the English papers generally also published the German military reports, from then on we got political with a passion once more. And even then we were convinced of the final German victory, but my optimism about the end of the war had already suffered so much that in June 1916 I only dared hope that we had the first half of the war behind us. My dark mood at that time was not least influenced by the failed Verdun offensive and the mighty Anglo-French counterattacks.

Since Zimmermann (violin) and Zander (guitar) then began to play music together, I often joined them in their rehearsal space, to enjoy the beneficial effects of music. I also bought myself a good [book on the] flora of France and with it gradually gained a very nice knowledge of the plant world of that country. Another – material – advance was that we were allowed at our own expense to buy a petroleum stove and lamps, which both improved our cuisine and meant that we could stay out of bed longer. We also continued to use the existing stove – especially to make coffee – setting up guards on both stairways to warn of the French, because we were burning ... the gun racks and all the rest of the wood in the building (e.g. including the bed bases, which were not used) – anything that was not nailed down! What faces the French must have pulled when they returned to their utterly plundered barracks! But in the long term this cramped squatting together was so unbearable that Zimmermann made a bold suggestion to me and two others: that we should report ourselves for work in a nursery garden or suchlike. This proposal initially gave rise to a storm of indignation in the *groupe spécial*: it was not good for the national cause to work voluntarily for the French at this time. Only when we explained that we wanted to tend a vegetable garden for our comrades did the storm abate. So then, in the hottest and most unbearable months of the year, we did – soon to much envy – all kinds of light garden work: planting, weeding, watering, etc. Even now I am convinced that this alone saved me from a nervous

breakdown. The pictures that a photographer took of me at that time show how down I was then. Moreover, as a reward for our work we were “fully and in fact quite excellently supplied with rations”, as I wrote to my mother. We grew winter cabbages, leeks, carrots and greens, and I could do botany to my heart’s delight. This gardening work lasted about two months, but later we also went briefly to a farm in the country for the harvest – although we did not disclose this work to our comrades, because they would have objected. But if one considers that all of us who went had already been captive two years and were simply falling apart in the cramped camp life, even this decision can hardly be condemned.



Dr Wyneken, Issoudun 1916

I described our gardening work in a letter dated 3rd September 1916: “Anyone who knows me will understand how I revive when I can spend a large part of my life in the open. Of course I don’t overwork. As a volunteer we are granted the most freedom of movement conceivable. We essentially seek out our own occupation. I am very much in favour of watering our five thousand cabbages and two thousand leeks. In addition I enjoy burning the many weeds. And planting is not an ignoble profession. Naturally there is a jovial mood – everyone puts down everyone else and praises the value of their own work. In between there are battles with clods of soil and tremendous assaults on the most slandered (of which sadly I am sometimes one). In other words we are bucolic, nefarious and harmless. Over all however a lovely blue late summer sky spreads and all around us there is glorious autumnal blossom ... In the evenings I always occupy myself intellectually for a couple of hours, even if not very intensively, because one is always pleasantly tired afterwards. Now and then there is also a heated discussion about aesthetics or philosophy; but here I am usually in a illustrious – though honourable – minority.

My doubt in the reality of this existence, which I find is growing, is particularly held against me. I often wonder how little otherwise very intelligent people are troubled by such reflections ...”

From October on, this outdoor life ceased, and domestic work became increasingly important. At this time another especially joyful event occurred to me: from the Relief Organisation of Swiss Universities for POW Students I received the long-awaited microscope!!! And it came with all accessories including the reagents required for work with a microscope. So, with this microscope in hand I passed from camp to camp for the next three years. Only when I faced my final return home did I return it (it was only a loan!), i.e. had it packed with things to be returned to Switzerland. Anyway, the relief organisation obviously had a deep human understanding of our position, because they included vast quantities of alcohol (500g 70% proof, 800g 95% proof, 300g absolute – although admittedly the latter had been made unusable by the addition of copper sulphate). The French then smelt a rat and only delivered the alcohol to me in small portions. But I went along more often and soon had possession of the entire [batch of] alcohol. I kept a small flask for my work, and we converted the rest into liqueur under the expert guidance of our chemist and colleague in the garden, Dr. Heitmüller-Hannover.

From now on I worked assiduously at my microscope and also some other natural scientists and lovers of nature subsequently enjoyed the microscope. Gradually too our orchestra grew stronger, and we were now able to hear all kinds of music – not always good because they lacked sheet music, but it was normal for every birthday boy to be serenaded. In addition there were also proper concerts. And I began at that time to get more of a taste for card games, and joined in the twice-weekly “Doppelkopp” [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppelkopf>]. Since we played without animosity and not for large amounts of money, and good humour prevailed too, I have fond memories of these evenings.

By and by the third Christmas in captivity rolled around, and the mood in which I welcomed it can best be seen from my Christmas letter to my mother: “So yet again Christmas has to be celebrated without “Peace on Earth”! The normal idyll of Christmas comfort has vanished slowly but surely over these three wartime celebrations. But not without leaving some good behind: as happily as I have always celebrated this festival in particular, the older I got the more I had missed a certain something. There was, I believe, an increasing inner turmoil, and lack of understanding of the lives of others. This was certainly down to the fact that there were no shared great ideas which surely bind more even than the bonds of blood. Now, the shared great idea has surely brought us this war, and with it a shared experience of suffering and endeavour, which has certainly brought us all closer together. Therefore this time when we gather (whether in fact or in our thoughts) around the Christmas tree, there will be a far closer community between us than was possible in peacetime. So this time too I will be far more intensely with you than ever before with all my thoughts and good wishes. Yes, and how may Christmas be this time? Two years ago it was quite primitive, but it was very atmospheric and peaceful. Last year it was almost too opulent for captivity, but with far less atmosphere and comfort. We also missed the Christmas letters that time, and at the same time the uncertainty of the situation was oppressive. This time we veterans of 1914 have above all found ourselves facing the idea that we may even have to celebrate Christmas in France in 1917 too, and therefore we will accept the inevitable in 1916 with more humility. But the longing for a Christmas with family and friends will despite all resignation still be the predominating note this Christmas. Still, we will keep our heads up, come what may!” What good luck that we had no idea that we would celebrate another four Christmases in France!

So we made general preparations to spend the third Christmas in Issoudun. Even on 10th December in my letter to my mother I expected nothing else. Then without warning on 16th December the order came for the entire groupe spécial to decamp! In other words, so close to Christmas that by necessity none of the letters and parcels that we were expecting from home could reach us for the festival. We found this – and we were hardly unjust, because we experienced the same procedure twice more (1917 and 1919) – as a deliberate and considered piece of chicanery by the French, who wanted revenge on us for our continuing complaints. After all our groupe spécial from Poitiers-Issoudun was generally known and correspondingly unloved by all the French authorities for our tenacity with complaints. Well, for our part we did do everything we could to justify our – supposedly poor – reputation. Where we were poorly treated, we were as stubborn as mules and inventive in devising tricks to counter it. And where we could destroy French property we did it enthusiastically and without a second thought.

6. ETAMPES

Our anger over receiving the order to decamp at precisely this time (because in itself most of us did not care for hanging around in one place for a long time and preferred roving) will be understood. At breakneck speed we packed the essentials, but of course a lot had to be left behind, especially books and suchlike. In general I had my trusty rucksack on my back, my “Coupé” suitcase in one hand and my microscope in the other. A terrible load to lug around, which often brought me near to collapse during moves – not least when we had to walk for kilometres with such loads.

Our journey was not far this time: via Orléans, the second time for me since 1914, we travelled to Etampes (Seine et Oise), south of Paris. There, thanks to our stubbornness and in particular the energetic efforts of our exemplary camp leader from Issoudun, the little Lieutenant Brandt from Saxony, we managed to see to it that our luggage was driven to the camp. Camp??? We stood astonished in front of a derelict old water mill, with a courtyard barely a quarter as big as our already small yard in Issoudun. We Germans were housed in the upper rooms of the mill and the neighbouring granary, while the French office and the guard occupied the lower ones.

This “camp” was nevertheless a very important one, as it was the main camp for a large number of German work teams right up to the Front! Such a chaos and disorder we had never seen before, although we’d seen a fair bit. With cheers and derisive laughter we greeted our accommodation: two granary lofts, with such large holes in the floors that we could see and chat through the palm-sized gaps. Then there was immediate forceful protest about housing us in this pigsty! The French who until then had never had to deal with serious resistance from German prisoners of war (work teams only passed through this camp for a few days!) were helpless and at a loss! Our spokesman Brandt revealed to them that some authority had in his wisdom sent us, without informing Etampes of our “genteel” nature. But after a little while they recalled that they were actually the masters. In particular a German from Alsace, Adjutant Fuchs (called “Füsch” in French!) strenuously opposed our aspirations. He was laughed at and derided offhand. He locked up one of us, the capable deputy officer Sadowski, and wanted to give him punitive drill with a knapsack on the small yard. The whole camp stood around jeering. And Sadowski showed the French what happens when one tries to give an “old war horse” punitive drill. They had certainly never seen such slow lying down and or “double-quick”. And on top of it all the inextinguishable laughter of the “Boches”, who while we were driven from the yard, appeared at all the doors and windows. Sadowski was threatened with court-martial and all sorts of other hellish punishments. He stayed imperturbable, and with a grin on his face allowed himself to be taken back into the prison and ... after a little while was released to join us again because he was incorrigible.

So now began a jolly miniature war between us and the disgruntled French. Roll call: the yard was dark in the mornings and we should be counted. But never did all of us leave our camp for the roll call. And the counting sergeant went cursing through all the rooms attempting to get his list to add up, but it never did! Things became quite hilarious however

at the times when the electric light failed (which often happened). Then absolutely no one went out for roll call, on the grounds that we didn't want to break our necks in this derelict pile of lumber. And the French could trumpet the roll call as much as they wanted: the yard remained deserted until they provided light.

Since the French simply could not cope with us, they started to show us a gentler side: they admitted that the current accommodation was not worthy of us, but they consoled us with the thought that we would soon go to a better camp. At the same time however they sent one or other of us on a work team. We had by then started to report home on our situation with secret writing, and I have a bunch of letters from the whole of 1917 written in this way. It's just a pity that my mother never managed to decode them. Zimmermann was the first to manage to communicate secretly with his wife. I had asked him to instruct my mother about everything via his wife, and to warm up letters that began "Dear Mother" instead of the usual "Dear Mama!" over a flame. I risked my neck at that time, because I also passed on military information. For instance, in January we saw many trains laden with tanks (still something new in those days) travelling to the Front. Accordingly I wrote, "I expect major English attack with many 'tanks'. Anyway the coming spring!" And from the Île de Ré I reported the many barges that we saw sailing into and out of our straits every couple of nights, accompanied by a cruiser or a destroyer. If the French had caught me, I would surely have faced a court-martial with torture. Well, neither the French nor my mother noticed anything. (Later (1939!) I myself treated these letters appropriately and (even after such a long time!) could still decode quite a lot of the secret writing!) But since a lot of us sent the same messages home, they must have reached the right address.

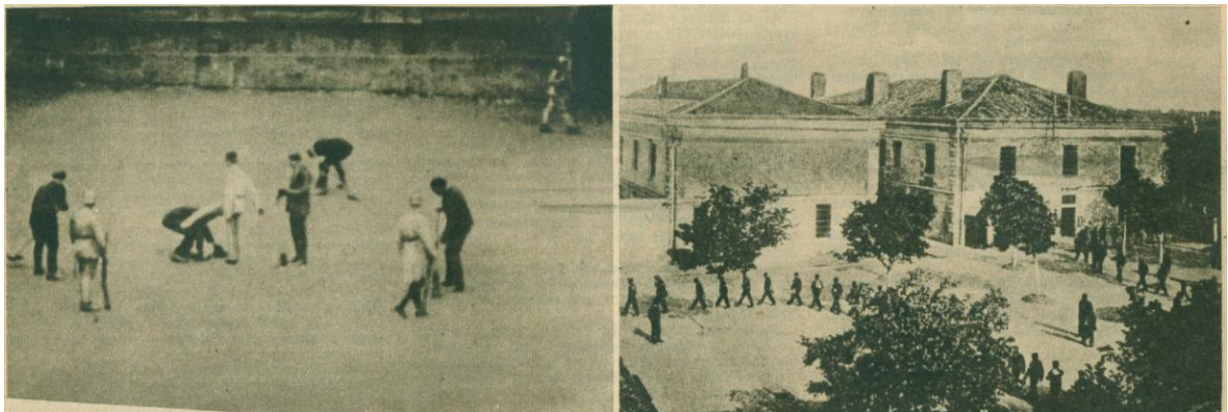
Otherwise, we had for too long already been PGs (that is, our uniforms were labelled with "PG" or 'Prisonnier de Guerre') to be really upset by the unfortunate situation. So we then passed Christmas as well as we could. I describe it in a letter dated 1st January 1917 thus: "So Christmas 1916 and the New Year are now behind us, and both festivals passed far better than I had expected. On the morning of Christmas Eve, the seven of us, including Zimmermann and Zander, received permission to go to a nearby wood and collect Christmas trees and greenery for our room. A landowner kindly gave us permission to cut as much greenery in his forest as we needed for our celebrations. It was a very lovely morning and we came back with several beautiful pine trees (spruce is relatively rare here). In the evening, before roll call, we close companions in suffering gathered in our room, and forming a choir sang some Christmas songs. Blümke read the Christmas Gospel and I spoke a few words of welcome. Then Zimmermann, Blümke, Zander, I and three other comrades had a pleasant time together with tea punch and many sweets. Three small trees sent from home were lit up before us and we spent a very peaceful and festive time together. The next day the troops had their celebration: a large tree, a series of choral songs, plus violin and lute music by Zimmermann, Zander and three other comrades. The French commander of the camp was also present ..."

As a consequence of our rapid departure, Christmas letters and parcels did not arrive in time, of course. Although people in Issoudun had promised that they would send all post on immediately, and actually did so, the disorder that prevailed in Etampes and the laziness of

the translators meant it was inconceivable that our things would be delivered to us promptly. In fact, we learned from the Germans who were permanently in the camp that the work teams often had to wait a quarter of a year for post and parcels. So we helped ourselves – at least as far as the parcels were concerned – the post room was behind our “room”. If parcels for us were carried through the room, the relevant Germans among us simply noted our property. Later we quickly broke in and took our parcels without any checks. Admittedly we didn’t get them all, for example on Good Friday 1917 at Ré I received another two Christmas parcels! Anyway, the unending time that our post took around and about – even in normal cases – was a sad chapter in itself: very soon there was a “reciprocal measure” that our letters would have to sit and wait for ten days. Then they had to pass through both the French and the German censors, making the “normal” duration for sending a letter one full month. But there were also times when a letter needed six weeks (and more) around and about. In other words, if you wrote on 1st February, for example, you had a reply on 1st April! Occasionally there were faster shipments but they were the exception. Besides this, we were once allowed to send home parcels of clothing from Issoudun, and likewise with books and other possessions from Etampes (this was never allowed again) and at that time I sent part of my possessions to safety in three parcels.

We stayed in the miserable camp of Etampes for almost two whole months. The only event that affected me closely was that I was allowed to attend Mass in a local church with Catholic comrades. Here there was cake for all in attendance on Christmas Day – and therefore for us too. Otherwise the French made efforts to break up our solidarity by sending a number of us compulsorily (including Blümke) and voluntarily others who were sick of the heartache there on work teams. The latter included Zander and Zimmermann. For myself I had grown cautious, and decided to wait. In a card dated 25th January 1917 I wrote the following in secret writing: “Still here. Zander, Blümke, and Zimmermann have already gone. Zander and Zimmermann to the Vosges as leaders of a mining team. We are now all being separated into larger and smaller troops. Well, they have an easier ride with us (!) when they want to send us to a work team ...” (Which we were of course not obliged to do, and this especially irritated the French.)

7. ST MARTIN DU RE



Newspaper photographs of the prison at St. Martin de Ré

Well, on 5th February it was finally time! What remained of the groupe special (it had to be about forty men) was shipped off again. Where to, nobody told us, but the rumour was that we were going to the Île de Ré near La Rochelle. When we told our guard this, they pulled odd and foreboding faces, because this island was the location of the most notorious gaol in France, where everyone ended up who was going to be sent to Devil's Island. So we prepared ourselves for the worst when we travelled via Poitiers – where we had a long rest – towards La Rochelle. [Large parts of text deleted – may still be legible with careful study.] Then we were taken from the station to accommodation in a former church. I [was] in a fairly [illegible] state. After a sound sleep I was up again and managed to embark with my comrades on a small steamer from the port at La Pallice to the Fort St. Martin on the Île de Ré (Charente-Maritime). After such a grievous debut I expected nothing good. We were taken to a spacious barrack yard ringed by ramparts, and there I experienced my first pleasant surprise: my old barrack-room mate from Poitiers and camp leader himself, “Käpt’n” Janssen was the first to welcome me. Straight away he invited me and “Father” Kelm for coffee, and we learned that we had got lucky with the notorious St. Martin: decent accommodation, an exemplary commandant and good treatment. And that is how it was. We received proper barrack rooms, had a large area for walking and there were many similarly-educated comrades there. First of all, five of us made up a “household”. Here I was generally with our “Father” Kelm, Dr. Heitmüller and the postal assistant Strouss. I stayed with the latter until the end of our captivity and we often shared accommodation. He had experienced many woes already, because he had had hard times in Africa (Tunisia or Algiers) with malaria and so forth. But he was quite indestructible, despite how small and delicate he looked.

The first letter that I wrote in secret writing on 15th February started like this, “Well, really, I am very happy to have come here! Not that there are no dark sides here though. Above all the cramped quarters and the lack of orderlies (you can see that we were spoiled in this regard until 1917, but that soon changed!) is unpleasant ...” Since I had now learned to get used to a new place quickly, I was already quite settled in the new camp on 15th February. I continued, “My microscope is also here, and the local commandant has already

been amiable enough to permit me – in the company of a sergeant – to go to the beach and gather algae and other smaller and larger forms of life to my heart's delight. Now my washbasin teems with mussels, snails, algae, protozoa, etc.! Such a pity that Zimmermann did not come [here] too! We could have continued our biology practicals beautifully. The view of the sea is also splendid, and often enlivened with fishing boats with their colourful southern sails. I find the sea here – in comparison to the North Sea – has an altogether distinct southern character ...” In fact this view of the sea was unbelievably beautiful, especially on fine mornings when whole flotillas of fishing boats left our bay. The Île de Ré lies on the northern edge of the Bay of Biscay, in other words in a really southern latitude. On 16th March I was already in the middle of assiduous scientific activity and report on it to my mother, “Together with Dr. Andreesen and other colleagues and seekers after knowledge the ocean fauna and flora are still being researched, examined by microscope and anatomised. A primitive snail (Fissurella), and the oysters, cockles and blue mussels which are available in sufficient quantities have just made a fine addition to our zoological course at Issoudun. And algae aplenty! From tomorrow on I will be taking part twice weekly in a newly-established course on chemistry for beginners. Besides that I am actively involved in the well-represented (elementary school) teachers' union. Its chair, a young teacher called Meyer from Munich knows Gustav [Wyneken – see previous reference to his educational practices] and loves him a lot. There is a lot of progressive education, especially Kerschensteiner [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Kerschensteiner], of course. Now I am making efforts to gather together all the philologists, who are also well-represented here. And I have private exchanges of ideas with intelligent people from all professions here. So the intellect is well provided for here, and we mainly look after the physical side by the calisthenics which we have resumed ...”



St. Martin, 1917 Île de Ré Our dinner group Strauss, Kelm, Heitmüller, Wyneken, [illegible], ??



Île de Ré, Spring 1917

On 3rd April I then recommenced – after a year’s interruption – keeping a diary, and I kept it for a further full year. On this date there is a neutral commission visiting us, to hear our complaints – which however this time were exclusively about Étampes. I complained above all about the post which they had not sent on. In fact, two days later, on Maundy Thursday, I received a Christmas parcel sent on 3rd December 1916, and state here the contents: “eel in jelly, tea, sugar, chocolate, rotten apples. The rest was stolen by those French bastards!” Nevertheless I received the laconic reply from the Swiss legation that my complaints “ne repose sur aucun fondement [has no basis]”. However, this was the answer of the French “Ministère des Affaires Etrangères”. The Swiss were cautious of challenging this answer. But whilst they usually locked you up for up to four weeks for an unfounded complaint, nothing at all happened to me. So you see!

Alongside intensive intellectual occupation, we took part passionately in the military and political events of the day at Ré. Since we were in an expressly intellectual camp, every conceivable newspaper in French, English and Italian was read and discussed there. In addition there was lively smuggling of German newspapers. Soon a kind of political HQ was formed, which was led by one Comrade Schübler, an editor by profession. He lectured us “on the situation” daily in a large – initially unoccupied – room. And since he had not only gone through all available newspapers in foreign languages, but was also naturally brought any smuggled German papers, he was really usually very well informed. Since he moreover felt it was necessary in the national interest to keep his reports extremely optimistic (and he was without doubt right!) he had a beneficial enough effect and stopped a lot of hanging of heads. Half of my daily reports from that time contained news on the military and political situation, another sign of how passionately I followed world events. Because the U-boat

Campaign was at its height then, I always noted the number and size of boats sunk with care. We, who experienced the effect of the U-boat Campaign from close up on our island (because the German boats were animatedly cruising around our island too) approved of this type of warfare wholeheartedly. It should be noted here that we had a proper victory celebration on the sinking of the Lusitania. Only much later did I begin to doubt in the usefulness of this U-boat Campaign. Anyway, we saw the effects of this campaign almost daily directly from our barrack windows, as continuous convoys of 12-20 large ships gathered in the straits which lay – about 20km wide – between our island and the mainland. They then sailed at night, accompanied by a small cruiser or one of the new cruiser-like destroyers. Our marine comrades explained about the different types of merchant ships and warships, and I learned some new things. Naturally I (and other comrades) reported these proceedings back home. They were however mainly reported back by our medical orderlies who were exchanged. My lovely secret letters were unfortunately not read by my mother this time either!

Our life in Ré was so pleasant not least because in the person of the commandant we had an especially gentlemanly person. He had us appear for roll call only once [a day] – at 10:30 – and he always took it himself. In doing so he above all placed great value on each of us appearing in spotless uniform and spotlessly clean. His principle in this was absolutely correct, that physical neglect too easily results in mental collapse. Consequently he ruthlessly punished anyone who appeared at roll call in anything but best possible form. On the other hand he was also so gentlemanly that when going through the ranks he would salute every German decoration! (Some of our people had the dubious fun of stitching all kinds of cigar papers in their button holes so that they too would receive the salute from the commandant, and he then promptly fell for this not very nice joke.) Otherwise he kept a great distance to us, but he treated us as properly as the rules permitted him to. And it is clear that this kind of treatment also rubbed off on his subordinates, the translators, guards, etc. Throughout my entire captivity I never experienced such proper and humane treatment as I did in Ré.

Maybe the picture of the notorious prison with which we shared adjoining walls and the occupants of which often enough passed through our yard contributed to this gentlemanly treatment [by the commandant – Wyneken appears to lose the thread of this sentence halfway, so I have given the best rendition I can from my understanding.] Because, as well as we were treated, these convicts (who surely included a large part of the scum of humanity, but probably many unfortunates who had not deserved such a lot) were treated with as much cruelty. The loathsome director Blond [illegible] passed through our yard full of hate, and would have liked to have been greeted by us but of course this never happened. (Lieutenant d.V. Schierstädt, who following his capture had spent some time in the prison at Ré, had already painted a sad picture of him.) Such shameful treatment as the prisoners experienced there can hardly be surpassed. Once, one went mad and climbed screaming up a tree. Time and again we heard the cries of people being tortured in the cellars of the prison, and daily we saw the sad ranks march in the prison yard. We often shook our heads that these conditions were possible in a supposedly “civilised” nation. In addition the hearse passed from the prison gate through our barrack yard almost every week. (These conditions were also

reported by the political prisoner G. v. Oetinger in his book "In Ketten vom Ruhrgebiet nach St. Martin de Ré", who was imprisoned and taken to Ré during the occupation of the Ruhr.)

Amongst my comrades who gradually arrived at the camp was also the Berlin botany professor Mildbraed, who was especially delighted to find I had a microscope. Having crossed Africa as a civilian on a research trip to Cameroon he was taken captive, but then they stuck him in a sergeant's uniform. Initially he was interned in Morocco and employed there as a supervisor on road building, then finally he was brought to Ré (whence he was later exchanged and returned to Germany). He now took on guidance of our botany education, gave lectures and was a reliable authority in any cases of doubt. Our pedagogic meetings were no less lively, whether for elementary or upper school teachers. I was a regular guest at both and sometimes gave lectures. I still have the manuscript of "On the emancipation of youth" (given on 17th April), and "Classical education?" (given on 14th May and 13th June). In all these lectures I attempted to draw a picture of the pedagogic task that faced us after the war. If you recall that at that time I was in general looking back on what would soon be three years captivity, such efforts are nevertheless a good sign of how relatively unharmed I had withstood this time. Even now I was trying to formulate my theories as sharply as possible, and was not afraid of playing devil's advocate. So, I more than succeeded in this. I am sure that not only I but my opponents too benefitted from these fierce battles of words.

The agreeable commandant could not of course protect us from the "reciprocal measures", which, as in the other camps, bore down on us here too. Occasionally food sent from home was not handed out, or else our orderlies were withdrawn; we were also occupied with "light camp work", e.g. moving newly-received bed bases, or collecting water, peeling potatoes, etc. But since our treatment was never abusive during this, we subjected ourselves to these "trials" without even cursing the commandant. You can imagine that we were not exactly happy about these really quite superfluous ordeals, however. But we gradually got used to being the whipping boy of the warring nations, and of course we remained so for long after the war. Meanwhile we steadily improved the organisation of our camp under the quite excellent leadership of our Lieutenant Meyer, who did his job in an exemplary fashion and was greatly respected by all. He soon formed a huge orchestra with plenty of almost all the necessary instruments. Over the summer we also received a perfectly-equipped teaching barracks from the American YMCA, and were able to read and work as well as put on plays. Naturally we had long since established a library, but in addition there was a "bibliophiles' association" for those still hungry for more culture, and I was for a while the "president". We also received bathing (shower) facilities, which I used almost every day. But a major step forward was the permission to bathe in the sea which we obtained on 7th June. Before the gates of our (generally utterly outworn) citadel, surrounded by low walls there was an area where some old cannons still stood. This area with its five to eight metre high walls dropped down directly to the sea. At the ebb, the entire foreground, which had a subsoil that was rather more sandy than muddy, was clear of water, whilst at high tide the water was several metres high there. You could climb down stone steps into the sea, or – as we eventually did exclusively – leap from the walls. The sea itself was considerably more choppy than the North Sea, but also warmer. I have never again – with the possible exception of the

Mediterranean at the French Riviera – bathed and swum in a sea with such pleasure as then in the Atlantic by Ré!

We were taken outside the gate to swim, a few guards secured the area that projected like a peninsula into the sea, and then we undressed at top speed and threw ourselves into the usually very vigorously surging sea. Since the current was towards the land and there was an area there for non-swimmers that cut into the land, there was never an accident during swimming. Occasionally a beginner who had carelessly dared to go too far out would cry for help and then be “rescued” with great general cheering and jubilation, but in general nothing happened. I bathed in the sea almost sixty times that summer, which surely greatly contributed to me withstanding so well the bad years that were yet to come. The sea often surged so high that the individual swimmer couldn’t see his companions any more! At the same time, the water was so salty that you could just let yourself be rocked by the waves, without having to move a limb.



Newspaper photograph from Feuilleton du Matin, 22nd November 1938 showing the prison at Saint-Martin-de-Re where fights broke out between the prisoners before their departure for Guyana “where I lived in Summer 1917”.

Another very pleasant improvement in our lives was that on a few days of the week – usually when there was no swimming – the commandant allowed us to go outside the gate of the citadel. Then we were allowed to stroll on the path to the second gate and on the area where we usually undressed for swimming. Occasionally too there were concerts at the foot of the walls of the fort, as the picture here shows. All these pictures were taken by Zander in August, who had the incredible audacity to have a camera sent to him baked into a loaf! He risked his neck with this, because we were on an official fortress where photography of the fortifications, etc., was naturally strictly forbidden.



Concert outside the gates



Zimmermann hunting for fleas



The fortifications beneath which we bathed



Zander, Zimmermann, Wyneken, Blümke*) drinking coffee next to Barracks II. Even I was smoking a cigarette! / * Zander died in 1937 in Berlin. Zimmermann whom I met up with in Göttingen in 1946 died in 1950 in England. I'm still friends with Blümke today (6th September 1962). **He died on 17th August 1964!



Undressing to swim. Citadel in the background. Near the seashore blankets were hung so that no one was irritated by the more or less "naked savages".

At the height of summer I took a “holiday” and did nothing but observing ants with my comrade from Poitiers, Seiler, and going out on other biological “journeys of discovery”. So I lay around in the glorious sunshine for hours and tanned. I describe it in a letter dated 1st July like this, “Relatively little has happened in the past two weeks. We have been allowed to bathe in the sea again and in addition to perambulate before the gates of our citadel, and have passed days in the sun. I personally have hardly worked at all, because I have to allow for a break again ... Anyway, our pedagogic meetings continue – outside in fair weather – but I am not giving any lectures. I have already talked enough. One of my favourite occupations is to observe ants. I have made four nests, which I now examine for everything possible. It seems to me that previously I overrated the animals. I find they display almost no “emotional activity”. Nevertheless they are quite skilful and above all have enormous strength, but cannot for example see hardly anything and rely almost entirely on their senses of touch and smell for orientation. Their behaviour towards a species of red ant is amusing: these are far smaller and sidle up to the black ones to steal. It doesn’t go well for them though: before they realise, they’ve been caught and are carried off. A little way away they are then forced to “exude” what they have eaten again, are boxed around the ears and can then march away. (N.B. Subsequently I have some doubts whether I observed this correctly!) This afternoon we were allowed out again. I used it mainly to make a botanical and zoological excursion with Seiler, who is very interested in this direction. Otherwise I have read an unending quantity of modern books in the past week, because the deliveries for us “bibliophiles” have arrived. At present I am on Meyrink’s “The Green Face” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Meyrink] which is somewhat more offensive than “The Golem”. It’s remarkable that now during the War we have received a whole series of such metaphysical novels. As if humanity as a whole was going mad with the reality of existence! I read a very good Buddhist novel by Gjellerup [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Adolph_Gjellerup] recently. Theosophy, Buddhism and similar trends appear to be gaining ground massively. Things will feel quite strange on my return ...”

In July a number of captive comrades who held the same rank as us began to join us from other camps. For instance, on 5th July Pastor Kuhlitz (Issoudun) and the former comrades from Poitiers Dr. Ransch and Zetsche arrived, amongst others, as well as five other old Poitiers comrades. But my joy was especially great when I found my old comrade Blümke amongst 200 new arrivals on 12th July. I immediately invited him for coffee, and learned that things had been very bad for him in his labour camp at Rouen. His delight was so much the greater therefore when he heard how good he would have it here. From then on we were together a lot and this friendship lasted until the end of our captivity and long after. (On 27-28th April 1958 (!) we were together in Göttingen again.)

The French had had barracks constructed on the walls of our citadel for the many newcomers. This was the notorious “Baraque Adrian” which we now for the first time came to know and execrate. This barracks consisted of a layer of fairly thin boards, with roofing felt nailed over it. At its base it was hollowed out to offer more space for the bed pallets. It didn’t even have a floor but stood on bare earth. The hinged windows didn’t have glass

(which the French themselves didn't have enough of!) but oiled paper, which after a few storms soon became greyish-black, so that you had to open the window to let light in. There was no stove at all. In deep winter for the roughly 40-50 metre long barracks they got two tiny trench stoves and 10 kg coal for everyone! I regarded this accommodation, as I said, with secret horror, without suspecting that I would occupy it very soon and have to live the rest of my captivity, i.e. a good two and a half years, in it. Blümke landed there immediately, and I thoroughly pitied him. But after a large number of superior deputy officers had arrived, fierce camp battles began, with them claiming that they were entitled to the better barrack accommodation. We sergeants defended ourselves fiercely at first, and one comrade, Mellenthin, and I were instructed to handle negotiations and defensive actions. We did everything humanly possible, and the struggle lasted almost one month, but then the deputy officers won, as they had lined up behind the French, and on 6th August I moved out of my lovely barrack room into Barracks II. Now, Blümke as a deputy officer could have moved into the barracks, but as he had deplored the entire struggle, he declared that he wanted to stay in his Barracks II. He moved in with me and we once again established a community, which also included my comrade Strouss, who like me was thrown out.

Anyway, from our old barrack room a remarkable club had then formed: first and foremost a series of well-off lieutenants (e.g. Cavalier lieutenant Kaiser – his father was the owner of “Kaisers Kaffeegeschäfte”, etc.), ensigns and other Portepees ranks made up a right games company with roulette. There was in particular a passionate gamer, and I can still hear his voice with his translation of “Messieurs, faites votre jeu ...” into “Wenn das Spiel gemacht ist, gilt nichts mehr!” [When the play starts, that's it!] As far as I recall, I never, or at most once, joined in this game at which substantial amounts were won and lost.

Football and fistball clubs had also long since formed, and held great contests in which the entire camp took enthusiastic part. Theatre was also stoutly performed, and I learned something that became even more apparent in my later camp at Carpentras: since the female roles had of course to be played by men, naturally the youngest and least-bearded comrades were chosen, above all a few extremely young and pretty ensigns. And they became so engrossed in their female roles that they were worshipped almost like female theatre stars! No wonder with the lack of all femininity for years!

On the day after my move into the wooden hut I was comforted by a delightful new event: arriving from Étampes along with a number of old comrades (including in particular the flying NCO Graf, a smooth customer but an incredibly young sportsman who had shared my den for a long time in Poitiers and been my special educational subject) appeared ... Zimmermann and Zander! Blümke and I were both delighted and from then on we were practically inseparable. The picture of us sitting in front of our barracks represents the situation well: as we used to in Issoudun we bored each other stiff, swam, practised gymnastics and walked together, and regularly held our shared coffee breaks. The next two months then – if you ignore the external conditions of life – passed really enjoyably for us. Of course there were also gloomy moments, for instance when the news from the Front was bad or, as happened to me, when post and money failed to come for several weeks (6) in a

row. But we were used to sorrows. And there were many comforts that we would have had to do without in other camps.

Incidentally, our new entertainment hut was used not just for reading, studying and stage plays but also for the religious services of both confessions. The sermons of the Protestant pastor *called Callas* from La Rochelle made an especially deep impression on me here. He was a dignified, white-haired old man, who automatically brought to mind that Huguenot pastor from the time of Ludwig XIV when La Rochelle's last bulwark fell [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_La_Rochelle, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Fontainebleau

(sadly these do not explain Wyneken's reference)]. He regularly began his sermons, "Soldats, mes frères!" – "Soldiers, my brothers!" And his preaching was so perfectly accomplished that it was always an aesthetic pleasure for me to listen to him. Unfortunately later – although rightly for the many comrades who didn't understand French – these sermons were immediately interpreted into German and thus lost a large part of their beauty. This pastor even more than the one in Poitiers gave me the impression that inwardly he was perhaps closer to us Germans, who were largely Protestant, than to his French compatriots. You must remember that in France Protestants only make up 1% of the population and consequently hold a similar position to the Jews in Germany: they were at that time often outright suspected of sympathising with the Germans!

At that time great hope dawned for us older prisoners of war: all the newspapers were reporting that POWs who had been in captivity for more than 18 months were to be sent home! Well, I had been captive for thirty-four months already so rated my hopes highly. Nevertheless on 15th July I wrote to my mother, "I am avoiding [discussion of] the end of the war, exchange of prisoners and similar excitements because I believe disappointments in this direction would have quite detrimental effects." But of course silently and quite intensely I did hope that our time of suffering was near its end. In August however the negotiations failed once and for all, and the blow for me took the form of a severe depression. In my diary the days from 16th to 25th August therefore all bore the heading "dies ater" [black day] and on 22nd August I note for example, "No post for a week, for a month no money or parcels! At the same time barracks and War! Oh! Oh! Oh!" In fact living in a wooden hut occupied by at least sixty men was a further trial for a prisoner of war who had gradually become nervous. But I can state with satisfaction that I never disclosed my sorrows back home, because I knew that things were not the best there either and I didn't want to increase their troubles. On 15th August I reported on my life in the new "home" and with my old comrades, "So I am now living together with Blümke. We have set ourselves up as well as possible in our hut. Right next to us (a fraction of a minute away!) Zander and Zimmermann occupy the neighbouring hut. We do a lot together: sunbathing, debates, walking and above all the glorious swimming! I've now been in the sea more than thirty times and cannot express how much good it does me. Normally Blümke, Zimmermann, Pastor Kuhlitz and myself swim out together and undertake all kinds of childish and harmless frolics: spraying, ducking, chasing each other and so on. Now all I want to do – if my captivity lasts another quarter of a year – is bathe in the Mediterranean. Let's see if I end up there in the next year!

There is no question at the moment of intellectual activity; a barracks is only suited to that if everyone works, which at present (many “young” prisoners!) is not yet the case. Well, that will come! Meanwhile I am gathering my strength for the winter, as this is also necessary. I still don’t want any parcels, even though they are all delivered. It seems more practical to me to send money, because we can buy the necessities and most important things in the canteen.” In fact in Ré we could buy one major foodstuff almost without limits and for not very much money: butter! As we paid more for it than the French, we were offered unlimited quantities for sale. Admittedly we were living in a dairy-farming part of the country, consequently we could also buy as much glorious cheese (mainly Camembert) as we wanted. In addition to this, another local product was tinned fish. If you had money at that time you could live pretty well, whereas these products were in extremely short supply then in Germany. So – when I had money – I consumed up to 2.5 pounds of butter a week! Obviously this was necessary to balance out the sea air and frequent swimming in the sea, and certainly very beneficial. Meanwhile, a lot of post was lost at that time, and on 16th September I wrote, “(my sister) Ada’s last letter has sadly (like a lot of others in the past few months) not arrived ... You will now also know that the exchange negotiations have come to nothing. Since I had no false hopes from the start, I am relatively unhurt. Fortunately life now consists of one sensation after another. That stops some of us really understanding their own – far from enjoyable – situation ... For a student of cultural psychology this war has really produced a lot that is of interest: mass suggestion, obsessions and many other phenomena are now in full bloom. I can only wonder when reason will find its way back to this too-clever Europe. Probably only once the Japanese-American doctor has taken the age-wearied Mrs Europe thoroughly into his “loving” care. But first of all there must be cupping glasses and cold water baths to restore reason ...” My obvious bad mood was also partly down to the fact that at that time a lot of our post was not being delivered, and that which we sent was not passed on. Thus for example my first letter of September is missing, i.e. more than half of the correspondence with home that we were allowed. I wrote about the presumed reason in a harmless postcard dated 23rd September 1917, “The reason for the lack of post is explained firstly by the convenience of the translators, who simply destroy all kinds of post as they choose. Recently a lot! On the other hand there are rumours arising from indiscretions by the same translators that our post is specially checked again at the border. France and Germany accuse one another of being in the wrong regarding the missed exchange [of prisoners].” Anyway I understand that the French did wrong. For instance I am missing one September letter, but on 23rd September I wrote two postcards (which counted as one letter), apparently to be more sure of getting my secret message through. Of course my mother did not decode this either!!!

Then in September a very serious event occurred, the full significance of which fortunately did not immediately become clear to us: following the death of a deputy officer of an “unknown” disease on 14th September, another comrade died on the 19th, this time without doubt of typhoid! At that time a large number of us made our wills, because now our life on the island and in such close conditions was no longer safe. Although we had been vaccinated against typhoid back in Issoudun, it was of course not certain whether this was still effective. At the same time, thanks to our long captivity we had become such fatalists

that I for instance was not in the slightest concerned about the impending danger but simply continued enjoying swimming.



Funeral of a comrade who died of typhoid St. Martin de Ré, Autumn 1917

Naturally I say nothing of the typhoid epidemic in my letters, and instead write on 7th October for my mother's birthday, "Anyway, as far as I am concerned you should not worry. I have been relatively very lucky so far and there are really no reasons why this should change. Just the fact that in this third year of captivity I could be by the sea is an advantage that cannot be rated too highly ... My days pass routinely: a little work and a lot of entertainment with people and books. Until Tuesday (2nd October!) we were still swimming in the lovely warm sea, but now swimming is prohibited – hopefully only temporarily. (Of course because of the typhoid!) ... Today a French dentist examined my jaw injury. Whether anything comes of it I don't know. Maybe the order might come for me to be sent to Switzerland for this reason?"

Well, something did come of it, although anything but me being exchanged and sent to Switzerland: on 10th October I received the order to prepare for a trip to Rochefort, where a few comrades and myself were to be treated for dental injuries with false teeth. And so on 11th October I travelled with the steamer *La Rochelle* – *La Pallice* [maritime port of La Rochelle]. We had a very pleasant journey and en route saw a large, half-sunk ship, which had obviously been torpedoed. In La Rochelle we stopped only for a short time at the Gendarmerie and set off around six in the evening for nearby Rochefort, where we were

driven in a car to “Hôpital La Touche-Treville” and there accommodated in Room 35 with a number of German comrades who were already there.

When we had to arise shortly after six in the morning for “soupe” I made the grievous discovery that during the night I had been terribly bitten by bugs. I examined my bedstead and lo! There they were in their hundreds in every crack! And in the thin soup that was presented to us swam rotten bread! So we had landed up in a lovely pigsty! Well, first of all to the bug hunt! After that we were taken to the naval hospital. Examination by the dentist there found that I could receive my dentures immediately – in Bordeaux in fact – but my comrades had to have a lot of teeth taken out first. Consequently I would have to wait with them in the hospital at Rochefort until we were all prepared for dentures. As that would take some time I straight away got stuck in with what we old POWs always did on arrival at a new place: I sent a sharply-worded complaint to the senior doctor about the miserable provisions, the bugs, etc. Our lunch consisted of a thin vegetable soup, two potatoes boiled in their skin, and two sardines in oil. Utterly inadequate, as we were of course not sick. I delivered my complaint to the senior doctor on his visit the next day, and appeared to have a partial success: the lunch was more substantial! I also went as an interpreter to the naval hospital with my comrades who didn’t speak French, and saw with horror how they had tooth after tooth drawn. In the afternoon I explored the area of the hospital, i.e. the small courtyard that we were allowed for exercise, and had my money paid out to me so that – if the food did not get better – I could at least buy some additional food from the canteen.

At the same time I made the distressing discovery that our wounded comrades had to starve here in the hospital just as we had done back in Angers of unhappy memory. And – obviously in revenge for our complaint – that evening we once again had a scanty dinner. So the next day I once again complained to the “boss”, explaining to him our entitlements as officers and at the same time demanding better food for all my comrades. The argument immediately became quite heated, and it would not have taken much for the boss to lock me up in the “boîte” (“Allez! En boîte!” [roughly = Go! To the can!] was the concise phrase when you were locked up). The boss did not climb down so that afternoon I wrote a letter of complaint to the Swiss society [presumably the Red Cross]. When I handed it in the next day there was another clash with the boss, “Pas d’histoires!” [roughly = Stop making things up!] he snapped, but I was resolute. And lo and behold! Three days later we were granted the “regulatory” food. I had won!

The fourteen days that I was in Rochefort passed quite monotonously: first of all every morning after drinking coffee I took a hot shower. Then I did a little gymnastics, after which I studied or took a walk. After lunch I rested, went for another walk, talked with comrades and read the newspaper. Supper came early, at 4 p.m., and then I once again occupied myself with work and walking. One episode sticks in my mind from this truly monotonous time: when a French sergeant of the watch saw how some of our starving men searched through the bin into which the guards threw the remains of their food, he collected leftover bread from his men and shared it out to ours. I saw him do this many times. And this sergeant was a full-blooded ... negro! From Martinique mind you, therefore a proper French citizen.

On 26th October the gaps in my comrades' teeth were sufficiently healed for us to be marched off to Bordeaux. In a letter dated 4th November, the day of my return to Ré, I describe this part of my trip like this, "I remained in Rochefort until 26th October and then travelled to Bordeaux. The journey took me through beautiful autumn landscapes with forests, vineyards and watercourses. It was very pleasant simply as a change from our life on the island. Then in Bordeaux we were taken to Hôpital complémentaire 58, where we Germans were in the minority and therefore also received French catering. That too was a very pleasant change, not least because everything we were given was very good and substantial. Naturally we were housed in special rooms, and for a few hours each day were allowed into the lovely courtyard, where we could exercise on the available gymnastic equipment, and were treated well. We were driven to the Stomatology Clinic by car, which gave us the chance to see a good part of the really lovely and large city. This too did us good after life on the island, not least because we could look at everything in peace. Treatment in the clinic was once again good and professional. Within one week we all had our dentures, so that on Saturday 3rd November we were able to travel back ... As a consequence of the vastly different food, which of course is good in the hospitals, I had also recovered really well, and when I weighed myself at the station in La Rochelle I had put on at least six pounds! ... I read a few of my writings recorded in the hospitals to my close friends here yesterday afternoon over coffee and had a lively debate for several hours. I had above all dealt with epistemological and social biology issues while there ...

This three-week break in my island life was really very beneficial for me. The stay in Bordeaux in particular is one of my warmest memories. We were treated as humans there by everyone, something we were no longer used to. I recall for instance with pleasure how our car occasionally broke down in the middle of the city, and we were then surrounded by a large number of curious people. But whilst we were used in these circumstances only to hearing insults and abuse, this time we saw only friendly faces. And straight away a few strong people had at the request of our driver taken hold of the spokes and pushed us into a side street, where we were picked up by another car. Our food was also brilliant, for instance one Sunday there was nourishing soup with bread, beef stew, potatoes and vegetables, wine (!) and chocolate, and in the evening nourishing soup with bread, fricassee, macaroni, tomato sauce. I also got to eat the meat and above all fins of a type of skate my one and only time ... The dentures that were very quickly made, after having taken a plaster cast of my oral cavity did not sit at all firmly, but the French reassured me that they would settle naturally. And in fact I still wear them today, after seventeen years. (*And I wore them until mid-February 1960, i.e. almost 49 years!*) The return journey had its dark side: for some bureaucratic reason or other we could not travel by the express train that we had gone with. So we ambled through the countryside on the next slow train and as a result only arrived in La Rochelle at 11 p.m. We had a very "mixed" escort: the brigadier in charge came from the Antilles and the Foreign Legion, one soldier came from the Midi and the other was a Kabyle, that is, from Africa. But they were nice to us. As all the barracks, etc., had already closed their gates we had to overnight at the station, so I "slept" on the boards of the luggage counter.

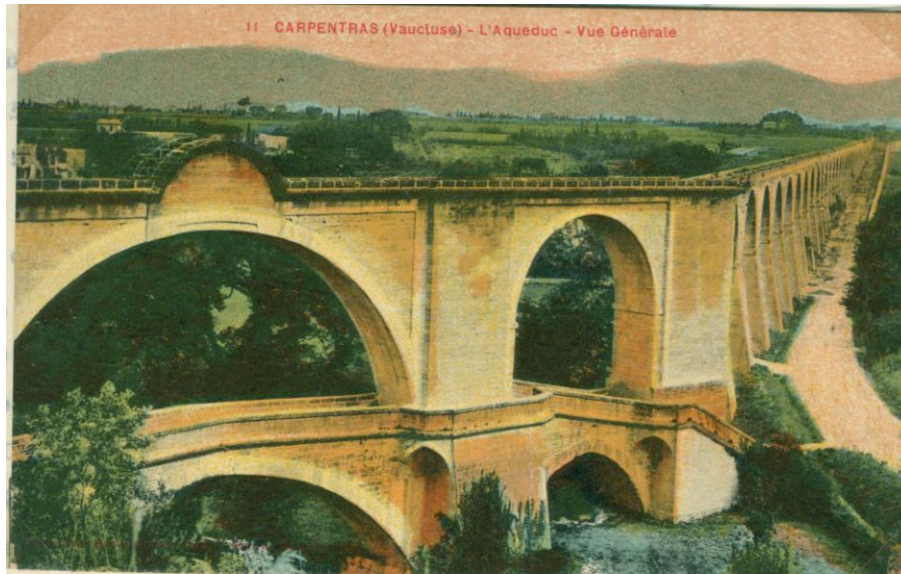
The first news I heard on my return to Ré put me in considerable distress: Zimmermann was seriously ill! Typhoid! On account of an insurmountable aversion to the procedure back in Issoudun he had avoided being vaccinated (by bribing the French hospital assistants with cigarettes!) and now it had got him! Nevertheless he got off lightly and lives today bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. *(Was until 1937 senior civil servant and Head of the University Institution for Physical Exercise at Göttingen [now Institute of Sport Science] where we met up again in 1934, then – because of Jewish wife – demoted. Later sports teacher in England, I met him in Göttingen in summer 1951. Died 1955.)*

The interruption to my life on the island also benefited me in that I once again found strength and enthusiasm to study. I immediately engaged in the existing scientific activities, by holding a botany lecture for farmers three times weekly. In addition with those of similarly advanced scientific education I undertook scientific exercises and in other ways resumed an extremely structured life.

The typhoid epidemic was waning, but we still had to bury two of our comrades. At such times the entire camp formed a guard of honour from the infirmary to the gate, as the coffin was carried out. Now at last the French took a few measures to protect our health. First and foremost the well in the centre of the camp was cleaned, and it is absolutely incredible what dirt was brought out of it! Then we were also all vaccinated again, and thoroughly! We were all sick for days after the procedure this time. Otherwise life in the camp continued in its routine path. There were entertainment and concert evenings, which were gradually improving. Little by little we heard a lot of classical music, and plays were performed valiantly, e.g. scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the indestructible "Rape of the Sabine Women", and so on. One time when they didn't supply us with coffee, we went on strike by refusing to go to roll call. The coffee was then delivered, but 25 comrades were also locked up following a punitive roll call.

On 8th December the first rumours went around that part of the camp would be leaving. The next day they intensified to such an extent that we learned that some of us would go to Carpentras near Avignon (Vaucluse), and on the third day we learned the names of those who were leaving. These included me. On the other hand Blümke, Zander and the (not yet recovered) Zimmermann were spared. I then parted from the latter two for the remainder of my captivity. I accepted my "call-up" without significant grief. Only my separation from my old comrades hurt, for the rest I was quite excited to see the Mediterranean region and its flora. In addition my old partner in suffering Strouss went with me, so I did have a special friend on this journey. Mainly the sergeants were leaving. By what aspects they chose us, I don't know, but we assumed that the degree of suspicion they had about us played a part. And the reception we received later in Carpentras did nothing to diminish this suspicion. Well, in any case off we went again, and we even welcomed it from the point of view that such a change of camp made the time in captivity pass faster. Admittedly it was characteristic that yet again we were sent immediately before Christmas. It was absolutely a deliberate but entirely superfluous cruelty by the French.

8. CARPENTRAS



The journey we then began was the longest that I ever took in France: on 11th December we set off and on 15th we finally arrived in Carpentras. Five whole days!!! The start of this journey was ominous: I was half-sick and in this condition had to carry my heavy luggage through the whole town of La Rochelle. Soon I was alone with one guard, because my comrades had already been marched to the accommodation. The two of us were surrounded by a cursing mob, who called on the guard to urge me on with the butt of his gun. But he behaved decently and even occasionally helped me to carry my luggage. Definitely an excruciating march! Fortunately we were well housed in a chapel that had been converted into a cinema. There I recovered rapidly and after a heavy sleep was once again fully fit to travel the next morning.

We were put in second class (!) waggons for the long journey (admittedly not again on the next stage!) and set off at 8 a.m. from La Rochelle via Saintes and Bordeaux. After Bordeaux I saw an orange tree full of fruit for the first time. Now we travelled on without stopping. Via Agen, Montauban, Toulouse, Narbonne to Cette. Unfortunately we arrived there around midnight, so we could not see anything of the Mediterranean. It had already taken us three days to Cette, because we arrived there on the night of 13th to 14th December - our train kept stopping somewhere every few moments. So we rushed to the machine [possibly a samovar?] to get hot water for our drinks. It was on one such night-time stop at a marshalling yard, I think, where those of us who had poor footwear provided for themselves from a waggon that was standing there full of brand-new French boots, and did so with the assistance of the guards who did likewise!

From Cette we went on to Nimes, where we waited for six hours at the station. On this leg we saw far off the snow-capped peaks of the Cevennes. Of Nimes itself I noted, "Oleaster plantations, many evergreen trees, lovely welcoming city, friendly people." The journey then continued across a plain where I was struck by its red clay soil and forests of olive trees. Later past limestone crags to Beaucaire with its castle. And there is the Rhone

with many islets and Tarascon on the other side of the Rhone. At 8.15 p.m. we arrived on a very cold evening at Avignon station, where we had to leave our train and were placed in a shabby hovel without flooring and with just a few benches. Actually some of these benches were smashed up for firewood before the last of us entered the waiting room. We spent a miserable night in this hall, lying on the bare hard ground – I used my rucksack and suitcase as padding.



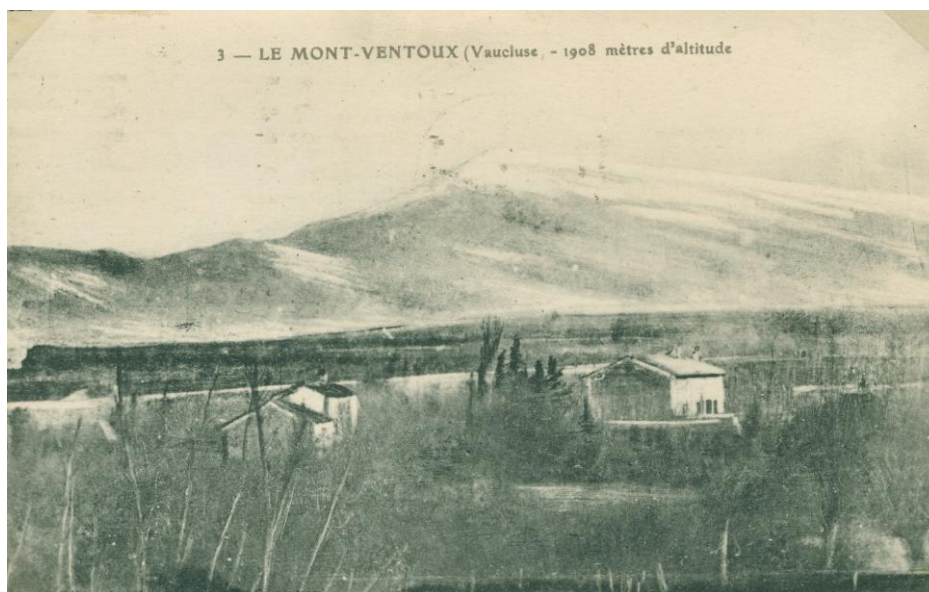
29 - Le Mont Ventoux (Vaucluse – altitude 1908 metres) Route from Carpentras to the Observatory; left: St.-Pierre-de-Vassels



53 – Carpentras (Vaucluse) Point of view – Quartier des Tanneries (2nd view)

On 15th December, the fifth day of our journey, a small railway took us to Carpentras, an ancient Roman settlement (Carpentorate), of which there are still towers and the remains of a great aqueduct. Now we had to march another four kilometres, which after the hardships of

the journey and with our heavy luggage was no mean feat, and finally stood in our new camp, Serres-Carpentras.



3 – Le Mont Ventoux (Vaucluse – altitude 1908 metres)

The camp lay on a kind of plateau not far from the foot of the almost 2000 metre high Mont Ventoux. At its entrance there were the barracks of the (very well-manned) watch, the office, the commanding officer and the storerooms. It was encircled by two lines of barbed wire fencing. The guards patrolled between these two fences. At the centre of the camp stood a farm, which housed the prison, a few storage spaces and our bathing facilities. Opposite this farm was a long row of barracks that was occupied by Germans and partly also Austrians. Behind this lay the Bulgarian camp.

When we arrived, the drunken commanding officer had us line up in a quad, inspected us – naturally after this journey we looked pretty rough – with displeasure, then had some of us

whose hair appeared too long to him come to the front and summoned the German camp barber to immediately cut their hair there and then. When one of them, an irrepressible chap from Cologne whom we called ‘Tünnes’ because of his sense of humour [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%BCnnes_and_Sch%C3%A4l] kicked up a fuss, he had him hauled off on the spot. To start with he got fifteen days in the clink, then the local commanding officer made it thirty, his superior added another thirty, and when ‘Tünnes’ – who didn’t want to back down – saw the damage he was facing around 100 days in prison!

We were now taken to some empty barracks and ‘fouilliert’, that is, an extremely embarrassing search of our luggage took place. We old lags were well up on the swindle and always kept some German cigars or cigarettes up our sleeve as the French were especially keen on them. We would discreetly press them into the hands of those conducting the search, and things would rapidly be wrapped up.

Once we were finally able to move about freely, I experienced the great pleasure [of finding] my longstanding comrade from the groupe spéciale in Poitiers, Kleudgen. He had been in the camp a long time already. After our frugal lunch and provisionally sorting out my things, I drank some coffee with him and heard that we had landed in a proper pigsty.

The coming night would thoroughly confirm his prognosis: it started raining and we suddenly realised that the barracks let water in all along the front! In the dark of the night we had to move our beds out of the way of the waterfall, which splashed and dripped down upon us. It was far from easy to find a dry spot! Furthermore, soon there were mirror-like morasses all over the barracks, so that we were obliged to put on our strongest and highest boots. I will add right away that this misery continued for both the years I was in Carpentras. And even if now and then the French made more or less of an effort to fix this dreadful state of affairs, it never made a significant difference. When I was camp leader in 1919, I once had the leaks in the roofs of our barracks counted: it turned out that there were not much fewer than two hundred in each barracks! In the end we helped ourselves by hanging tin cans beneath each of these leaks to catch the drips, and sealing the really large holes in the roof with great artifice and stolen roofing felt.

Anyway, things were not much better for the French in their barracks, and when I from time to time made an urgent complaint to the French commanding officer, he simply pointed dumbly to his desk on to which drops were briskly falling!

It was fortunate that Provence where we now were has a relatively low rainfall, so at least this dreadful state of affairs didn’t occur in the summer months! My diary from 17th December looks like this: “6 a.m. reveille, 6:30 ‘soup’, roll call in front of barracks, 7-11 struggle with the rain and other rigours. 11-12 lunch: turnip soup, bread and butter. 12:30 roll call in front of barracks. 1-5 struggle with the rain, 5-6 supper: vegetable soup, 5:30 roll call.” Or the following 18th: “Weather: still steady rain. At night: rain, in the morning: rain, in the evening: rain. Roll calls in the barracks. Complaint to captain. Afternoon water duties. Afternoon and evening: turnip soup ... Negotiations with the captain yield good results.”

These records show that instead of the previous one-off roll call we now had three. Moreover the French often passed through the barracks at night, often making a lot of noise, to check whether we were all still there. Also, the food was beneath contempt it was so bad. And finally, we were extensively enlisted for kitchen and other camp duties. The water duties consisted of us ourselves having to turn a horse-gin, which was otherwise operated by a mule, to pump up the water. The food we were given to eat beggars description. For instance, on 19th December I note: pea soup with 1000 beetles and on the next day it was 10,000 beetles and that was how it remained for the coming days. I do not exaggerate when I say that a thick layer of black beetles floated on top of the soup. The turnip soup was made from late turnips – often woody – and in the whole two years we received almost exclusively mule meat.

Yet our sufferings were far from at an end: we soon learned another downside of the ‘sunny South’ – the Mistral. This is an icy wind that descends the Rhone valley from the crests of the Cevennes and even the Alps, and in the winter brings a very unpleasant chill, but in the summer an unending dust. Without exaggeration I may say that I hardly ever in my entire life froze so much as then with the Mistral, and I wrote home rather perplexed that the ‘sunny South’ obviously only differed from our ‘chilly North’ by the greater rawness of its climate. And this Mistral prevailed a lot! And finally the French had one more surprise for us: in exercising a ‘reciprocal rule’, we sergeants (not the deputy officers!) were intensively enlisted for work inside and outside the camp. So a special work group was set up for us in Soupiras, a small village with pretty yet dilapidated ruins of a castle and a chapel, where we had to grub up trees and grapevines and split wood. These were ‘camp duties’ because some of the wood landed up in our kitchens. In the miserable weather that prevailed to begin with, this was especially odious!



Carpentras 19/8/19 In front of the “ferme”



[In the avenue](#)

Well, we'd really landed in it with our move! Even the fact that on 21st December some new comrades in suffering arrived from Ré, this time deputy officers including Seiler and Lieutenant Kolb, did little to console us. Nevertheless our powers of resistance to the French was strengthened by this new batch of older and more experienced POWs, and they needed to be, as just like back in Poitiers, the German camp leadership here was far too feeble with regard to the French. [Anyway] we sorted that out thoroughly and very soon implemented another German camp leadership. For the time being however we wanted despite all the miseries to celebrate Christmas (the fourth time already for me!)! The commanding officer allowed us to collect some greenery to decorate our barracks, and even though we had to do without post of course, we had brought some money from Ré, so we were able to buy a few things from the canteen. In addition, as a special 'faveur' on this day instead of the unsavoury beetles or the scanty turnip soup there was fat pearl barley with milk, though not without financial demands being made on the better-funded among us. I would never have believed that fat pearl barley could really make a feast! After the evening meal, the camp Christmas celebrations took place with an orchestra, two choral songs, a sermon and communal singing. You will sympathise with the fact that I wasn't in much of a mood for it. In the evening then we four who had formed an emergency alliance, Strouss, one Dr. Schröder (a colleague from Pomerania), Spiess (a young salesman) and myself, sat on our pallets shoved together and 'celebrated' with a shocking consumption of dates, figs and nuts.

On the 27th December at a roll call there came a major clash with the (almost always drunk) captain. (I think we demonstratively remained standing after the roll call and muttered between ourselves.) Consequently the next day we had to do a four-hour punishment march within the camp, although this was more of a demonstration on our part. The local commander, a colonel, himself appeared and at the evening roll call the captain gave a thunderous disciplinary speech – which did nothing to impress us. There were by now

already so many of our comrades locked up that the prisons were all full. The next few weeks continued to be extremely unpleasant, with alternating rain and the Mistral blowing, but our resistance was unbroken. Little by little our post arrived too, including Christmas parcels and money, so that the greatest material need was gradually relieved.

Then around 10th January along with a new batch of POWs from Ré appeared ... Blümke! So for the third time we had been separated and reunited! When nicer weather finally came as well in January, I began to believe in the 'sunny South' a little more. Thus on 19th January we could lie in the grass at Soupiras, wash our feet in the beck and positively sunbathe. These excursions to Soupiras soon had another benefit, however: we were able to bring back dry wood from there, to heat our primitive cooking stoves. These stoves consisted partly of large tin cans, cut out at the bottom so that the air could get in. Besides that there was a primitive grate fitted for the fuel and on top we placed our pans. Later we built makeshift ovens of stone and clay – initially within, later outside the barracks. When half a dozen of these small tin ovens were smouldering in the barracks that winter it was positively impossible to see anything any farther than their midst.

The shortage of space in a barracks like that was also really bad: everyone had just as much space for himself as his pallet took, plus half the very narrow space to the neighbouring pallets on either side. That is, the living space available to each and every one of us in the barracks was about 80 centimetres wide and roughly 1.80 metres long. So not even 1.5 square metres! There were bitter fights over this space with neighbours, and time and again one saw them measuring off their space with the measuring stick. To begin with I had shared accommodation with Strouss, Spiess and Dr. Schröder. In the daytime from our pallets we built seats and a 'table' which we lived around together. Since the lighting of the barracks to begin with consisted of two feeble paraffin lamps hanging from the roof, and these gave out just so much light that you had to feel your way around the barracks at night, we shared lighting with candles. (Later came – also utterly deficient – electrical lighting.) In the early days I kept the 'lighting fund', and I can see from my records that each candle cost 0.80 francs! That canteen! You could – if you paid the price – buy almost everything there, including forbidden items, but at what prices! An egg cost 50 centimes! A pound of American lard 4 francs! A kilo of potatoes 70 centimes! A pack of coffee substitute 2.50 francs! A Camembert cheese however 'only' one franc! etc., etc. Since too much of a crush would have built up in our large camp if everyone had gone shopping individually, a guild of barrack shoppers soon formed, who then enjoyed a little personal preferential treatment from the canteen owner, while at the same time assiduously – and with the general approval of the camp – endeavouring to deceive her. Since the camp as a whole – including the Austrians and the Bulgarians – was occupied by 1200-1500 men, the canteen naturally was a goldmine for its owner, a war widow (who was however a thoroughly 'merry widow'!).

Of course I did not report home or even hint at all these egregious circumstances in order not to upset my relatives unnecessarily. I praised the lovely region and the size of the camp yard and conclude my [letter] on Christmas Eve, the fourth in captivity, with the words, "Hopefully you are still rejoicing in hope. I am too." Our hope was the great spring offensive of 1918, which we knew about from our comrades who had recently been taken

captive. This hope tided us over all the troubles of that time, and over and over again I wrote at that time that I was “healthy and in good cheer”. Anyway, around then some medical orderlies returned to Germany from our camp, and they made the necessary reports about our camp back home, but it still took more than a quarter of a year until we were treated somewhat more humanely! How unbroken we really were can be seen from a note in my diary dated 27th January (the Kaiser’s birthday), “12:30 to 4:30 p.m. preparation for celebration of the Kaiser’s birthday, walk. From 6 p.m. celebration of the Kaiser’s birthday with good beer (I drank two litres!!!), speeches (I gave the official one!) together with comrades from various Federal States and the Austrian and Bulgarian camp leaders. Illuminations, coloured lamps.” Anyway, I also note directly the consequences of this enterprise as well, “Account blocked.” Well, we expected it, and anyway this block didn’t last very long, because the canteen owner nagged the ears off the commander, and she was on an especially ‘friendly’ footing with him.

Already by the end of January I regularly noted that I was sunbathing. In fact, if the Mistral wasn’t prevailing, then it was so warm there (roughly level with Nice!) that in the midday sun we tended to settle down along the wall of the farm or behind the avenue of cypresses and Aleppo pines that protected the farm on the north side against the Mistral (all detached houses in that region have a windbreak like this). I also began keenly doing botany, because the camp was so large that all kinds of things grew there, and moreover with our work in Soupiras I had plenty of opportunity to get to know the Mediterranean flora which most certainly is quite different to our German flora. In Soupiras we also thoroughly learned about France’s colossal surfeit of valuable land: hundreds of hectares of good soil lay fallow there, because there was no one to cultivate the land.

To give an illustration: when I visited our old camp at Serres-Carpentras during a trip to the Riviera in July 1932, it was still exactly as uncultivated as it was when we left! Only the barracks had disappeared and the farm had become a ruin. A labourer was mowing the scanty grass and weeds that were mostly scorched by the heat of high summer on the site for his donkey, and he said that the ‘proprietaire’ had so much land that he happily left it fallow here. Yet the land could have borne almost all the fruits of rich Provence!

Since by and by there were a lot of us sergeants and NCOs we took turns on the visits to Soupiras (to begin with Deputy Officers didn’t have to work with us at first, but after a few months this rule was suspended and the NCOs were sent off to work). We had to dig there, and to do it from 6:30 in the morning to 5 in the evening, so we returned to the camp very tired. At the end of January or early March a French colonel finally came and questioned us about the outrageous treatment by the captain and his subordinates, above all one adjutant who because of his uniform we called the ‘Red’. Admittedly, nothing changed immediately, but on 21st March the big offensive began, and its initial enormous success gave us the greatest of hopes and put us in the best of moods. My last diary entries that I rescued come from 31st March (Easter Sunday) 1918, “7-9 Clear up, etc. 9-11 Preparation and cooking. 11-12:30 (!) lunch: salmon (cooked), boiled potatoes, butter sauce, rice-chocolate-milk-egg pudding (!), butter, cheese, fruit, coffee. 12:30 until 3 Conversation, reading, rest. 3-5:30 Walk with Kleudgen and Blümke (both as deputy officers housed in another – but equally

poor – barracks). 6-7 Supper: 2 boiled eggs, cheese. 7-9 Conversation, contemplation. And then: heavy rainstorms at night, leaky roof, relocation.”

At the start of April it appeared more and more as if everything would get better. The German offensive appeared to bring a happy turn in the war. The forced labour outside the camp also ceased at that time. And when the Berne Treaty came into effect in May our lives appeared to become liveable again. On 26th May I wrote about this, “No more work, [instead] walks (like 1916 in Issoudun), possibility of sport, games and intellectual work, less severe punishments, better food and much more. We all breathe again. And the prospects of exchange too! You will understand that today in this fine weather I sit and write my Sunday letters beneath the pine trees opposite our barracks with a very light heart ... Among the improvements that have been introduced in this camp not least is the new entertainment barracks – once again funded by the YMCA. It is equipped just like the one in Ré. Admittedly whether I will end up working too much there depends entirely on an exchange. For the time being I prefer to remain in the open, because now we have such weather that one truly must enjoy. And after all I have also worked so much in captivity that I am ready to resume teaching in my subjects at any time. So I have mainly thrown myself into physical activity, amongst which besides gymnastics, sunbathing and walking I also count cooking. We have been allowed to build ovens which during the allocated times are constantly surrounded by hordes of keen cooks ...” I once more write about the appearance of these ovens, which played an important part in our existence then, “It was the one interesting opportunity to allow the more inventive types to compete. Here you see an oven which is similar to a blast furnace, another looks like a steamer (admittedly these were the older models), yet others have a normal and bourgeois appearance ...”

Before this hopeful time however there lay a very serious and sad occurrence: two comrades succeeded in escaping from the camp. They hid in a grotto not very far away, and were discovered there by the pursuing Kabyles and shot on the spot. When the utterly outraged camp then held a massive protest demonstration and did not appear for roll call, the camp was surrounded by a battalion of Kabyles and we were forced to leave the barracks. The French then imprisoned some of us (which surely involved acts of betrayal because there were spies among us who were sympathetic to the French) and took them to a fortress in the Mediterranean near Marseilles. At least one of the comrades died there of epidemic typhus!

For me an unpleasant episode began at the end of June, when my relatives with incomprehensible optimism anticipated my return home soon and stopped all shipments, including those of money, which we needed urgently given the dreadful camp food. Only my vehement cry for help succeeded in restoring the flow of these things. Thus I then wrote on 23rd June, “I hope your disappointment about my delayed return home is not too great. Just think: a man who has borne 45 months of captivity can bear another two or three more without too much difficulty. In the next few days the first exchanges (tens of thousands were exchanged before me!) will arrive in Germany and France. The fortunate ones!” What would I have said if I had had the slightest idea then that it would not take two or three months but around twenty until my ‘exchange’! In order to pass the time until my presumed upcoming exchange, I began to work more intensively intellectually. Above all botany. At

that time a botany specialist, H. Beger, who already knew the flora of the Mediterranean at first hand from before the war, came to the camp, so I became very close to him and learned a lot from him. In addition I once again formed a working group, with him, Dr. Andreesen and another eager botanist, and very soon gave a lecture on Mediterranean flora to several hundred comrades. I also had plenty of opportunity to do botany on the easy marches that were now introduced, and I began to press many plants for my herbarium at home. Finally I even began to play 'Doppelkopp' again.

In order that the time didn't feel too long for me, I finally allowed myself to be assigned the office of barrack leader for our Barrack 9. The barrack leaders formed what you might call the senate of the camp. They were called to see the camp leader at every possible time, and he passed on to them the French orders as well as his own. They were in addition responsible for order in the barracks, but could also consult the council of leaders. And since I now took on the last office that I had not yet been vested with, in July I had to get used to being 'Father Philipp' [a slang term normally for the gaol itself, but obviously used slightly differently here]. Of course it was a voluntary affair, because an official such as I not only had to function as an interpreter for the many who were locked up, but also to smuggle in to the cells a parcel of food and smokes for each of them. And naturally it was risky. When I went in to the prison my bags bulged with all the gift packages that were given to me by friends and the barracks of those concerned. So at the moment when the prisoner in question left his cell to fetch out his pail and clean his cell (they were just hellholes where the pallets could just fit, as I was able to check in 1932, but there was hardly any room left to stand!), then the 'Father Philipp' involved would like a flash throw his package to the farthest corner of the space. If you were caught, then you were sure to get 15-30 days in prison. Well, they didn't catch me. In fact I sometimes (definitely not always!) had a very nice prison corporal, a resident of Nice, who had previously shipped many flowers to Germany and was therefore sympathetic to Germans and cursed this war. He prompted me to fetch more food and tobacco when he thought the prisoners were not given enough. And of course I didn't refuse!

The rest of the time we circulated endlessly within our barbed wire fence like trapped wild animals – especially on the hot evenings when it was impossible to linger in the barracks. It was fortunate that the quad was so large! Since Blümke was exchanged to Switzerland at that time on account of his lung disease, I felt increasingly lonely, and usually patrolled the boundary alone. On 14th July, after I had complained bitterly about the lack of money being sent (however 85 francs arrived on 21st and another 85 on 25th July, so that I was then free of want!) I wrote, "Here we are simply wearing away our days now in the southern heat. I think about the future and the past as little as possible, and try to kill the time quickly and painlessly. Yet I still do botany ..." I closed the letter, "And now till we meet again, hopefully soon in September!" But already by 10th August I wrote, "It will definitely now be in October or November, unless something unexpected happens, and I will be hugely delighted if only I can be home for Christmas. I don't let this feverish anticipation get me down. If one has waited 47 months, one can do it bit by bit!" And then I report that I wanted to take my written work to the translators' office soon, to have it stamped as suitable to take home. I also state that I had so far been spared the then frighteningly rampant 'flu.

Well, that too was still to come! In the final days of August I started to feel unwell, but I didn't remark on it. But then when I was standing by our barrack oven and cooking a milk pudding, I became so weak in the legs that I had to sit down. When I reported sick to the infirmary, which was chiefly managed by two Austrians, the nurse found I had a fever of almost 40 degrees, and immediately placed me in a free bed. And so I had it, the 'flu. However I also had such a powerful will to live that I forced myself with iron resolve first of all to a starvation diet and then a dietary regime (days with only a little watered-down milk!). Next to me with the same abdominal 'flu lay a king-size, active sergeant, who laughed at me and my 'cure' and had his friends bring him everything possible. After a few days his condition worsened to such a degree that he had to be taken to the hospital in the town of Carpentras, where he died after a few days. Together with me falling ill, the 'flu which had previously spared us began to make mighty inroads in the camp. The infirmary was soon far too small. Two barracks were cleared and occupied solely with the sick. In addition cars full of the seriously ill drove down to Carpentras daily. This 'flu claimed many victims especially amongst those who had been captive many years. One especially sad case was that of a comrade from my barracks, an elderly primary school teacher who had also been captured in 1914 and was soon to be exchanged. His body was so weakened by this suffering that he died of the 'flu in a very short time. I had noticed him previously because of his melancholy manner. Did he sense what lay ahead of him?

Well, as I said, I didn't want to die! And I observed with deep satisfaction how my fever chart fell daily a few points. And after ten or twelve days I was able to leave the infirmary and return to my barracks. But for months to come I still felt the effects of this disease.



[Graves of comrades who presumably died of the Spanish influenza]

Meanwhile however, our hopes increasingly called on Heaven. The German offensive had been replaced by the Allies' offensive, and the Front began to crack at every seam. For example, on 8th September I wrote, "I don't want anything for Christmas. Although I would like sufficient money (I had received my pay for one year!). Because, the longer this captivity lasts, it is increasingly important. ... For myself [i.e. his transfer home] I expect spring at the earliest. In view of the delays – which I anticipated – I have once again started to study, although admittedly I first of all had to get over fourteen days of gastroenteritis (that was in fact the 'flu!'), which is however, thank God, now gone without a trace. I am also now rid of my office, and therefore once again have plenty of time available, without restrictions. I have already considered whether I want to take part in the courses they hold here for people who want to take their Abitur. But my subjects are not particularly well suited to this, and there is no shortage of qualified teachers here – quite the contrary! I think the government is very wise to give these courses a semi-official character (in fact it was official, since the exams taken in the camp were recognised by the German government!). Nobody is losing out more from this war than the school pupils who went to the Front as volunteers or even because of their age.

On Sundays I usually enjoy a good concert or a play (also really well performed). The [...] entertainments barracks is utterly irreplaceable here (as it was in Ré). ... Today they put on a two-act play by Schlicht [unable to identify playwright]. I will be going tomorrow because the crush is too great today. And now warmest greetings. Don't miss me too much! And maybe I'll suddenly be there one day."





And the exchange was indeed coming ever nearer! On 6th October I report that one of my oldest comrades, Seiler, had departed for his exchange. And one day, it was right at the start of November I think, I too stood in front of our office with my luggage prepared for the exchange. Then came 11th November! And with it Germany collapsed and our hopes of exchange were destroyed! I may say that the German collapse shook me so badly that I had no thought of my own fate. Around us there was just delirium from the French, with cannon fire and wild jubilation. And we Germans were utterly devastated. For a long time we had ceased to expect a victory, but we did hope for an honourable peace! The depression that prevailed in the camp cannot be described. But our pride recovered in the face of the wild jubilation which was expressed to us in an unchivalrous way with jeers and insults. Thus on 17th November I already write to my mother, "I think like Horace, 'If the world collapses in pieces, its fall will find him unafraid!' I know you think likewise ..." And to my later wife, "In the past week our hopes of exchange have been finally destroyed, but in fact we have lived through such difficulties that this couple of individual tragedies are of barely any significance. So now we must be braver than ever. And the coming Christmas celebrations must be above all a celebration of courage and self-discipline for us. I know you think as I do. Hopefully many compatriots still do too!"

Black days were now upon us! Cut off from our Fatherland, because at first the postal service failed on account of the revolution, in the midst of the high-spirited, triumphant enemy, we saw ourselves literally facing nothingness. It will be an eternal shame to France that from the moment of its victory it suspended all the privileges laid down by the Berne Convention. Our walks stopped, the food became worse again, and our treatment left everything to be desired. But we recovered rapidly from our stupefaction. I immediately resumed my briefly-suspended studies and then did something that had long been dear to my heart: I repaid a debt of gratitude to Friedrich Nietzsche by holding a series of lectures – to a large turn-out by the three nations present – on his ‘Zarathustra’. These lectures were at the same time designed to be an encouragement for all. I often walked alone around the camp for hours then, thinking over the next lecture. As in every difficult situation during my captivity, this [Nietzsche’s] work in particular yet again proved itself and gave me strength and fresh courage. And so I hoped that I could likewise awaken a little spirit of resistance in my comrades against “the whips and scorns of time”.

My Christmas letter dated 22nd December gives a good picture of my mood at that time, “The day after tomorrow, then, is my fifth Christmas Eve in French captivity. It will without doubt be the saddest of all. Not that my mood is influenced by the lack of money and packages, but the mistreatment of our Fatherland and the unkind treatment of prisoners of war are well suited to darkening our mood. Since the Armistice, our walks have ceased, our food has by no means improved, and many other details show that in place of the forgiveness and love necessary for a lasting peace they are determined here to sow a far more lasting hatred. After all those lovely phrases about magnanimity, chivalry, freedom and fraternity we used to hear! All of that has been unceremoniously eradicated! So, the opposite of what was proclaimed has been achieved! I am at least glad that you are facing every event with an unfaltering defiance and courage, as I can see from the two cards dated 11th November and 24th November, as well as your letter dated 1st December. That is the only possible stance at the moment.”

I dismissed the revolution and say of it, “a decent democracy – such as in England – would suit me too. But a King rules there. And for the time being I do not agree that a republic is necessarily more desirable. My experience says no. Well, I may be wrong. In any case, for the time being I will not see the German Republic for months yet. Despite all the proclaimed humanity!” It is quite remarkable that the translators allowed this letter through! Obviously they had become too lazy to read it and simply stamped the envelope.

In those difficult days, I was initially elected onto our aid committee, an organisation with the task of providing support for our poorer comrades. To this end we had induced the better-off to pay into this fund and we also received regular donations from the Red Cross and from home. But all that ceased totally in those days and with the extremely poor food the plight was soon great. I made every effort to assist in alleviating the severest hardship, but there wasn’t much that could be done. So then the thought took root that we – just as in Germany – had to have a change in the German camp leadership. This took place every couple of months anyway, as the post of a German camp leader was not a rosy one: you were permanently stuck between the – rightly – unhappy Germans and the eternally dissatisfied

French. So the old camp leader went and a new election took place. And I was elected! Apparently my quite considerable public work as barrack leader, prison sergeant, member of the aid committee (because this was highly regarded in the camp!) and last but not least my work giving lectures had given rise to the opinion that I could achieve more with the French. And I fought tooth and nail! But nothing worked: on 10th January I was proclaimed camp leader, although I was only a sergeant, while numerous comrades outranked me as deputy officers and even lieutenants! When I stood before our lengthy German lines for the first time, some of my comrades feared that I would not handle the commands properly. But an old active sergeant said with satisfaction to me afterwards that he had never known that I had such an excellent commanding voice.

In a letter dated 12th January 1919 I describe my new position thus, "So I now live in our office and enjoy a range of material advantages (food, pay, warm room, etc.). Naturally there is a distinctly different side to the coin, and this mainly consists of me not getting a moment's peace all day long and being passed from pillar to post between the Germans and the French. But that means the day passes in the blink of an eye, I am learning a lot of French, and above all I can be useful to many comrades and the community. Since my comrades have shown their trust in me, naturally I have to justify it. For the time being, then, I am quite satisfied with the novelty. I celebrated Christmas and New Year quietly with a few comrades. Since my money arrived in time, I was able to arrange a pleasant celebration even without parcels ... There's little point in writing about the events in Germany, since we here have far too one-sided information. You can imagine that I am not exactly happy, but I'm not losing my head either – as sadly many other Germans are doing at the moment. Let us hope that everything is soon in order again!

Currently there seems to be no prospect of return. I am trying to suppress these thoughts ... If I only knew how I could help my many destitute comrades! The extent of hardship there is here is seen most by a camp leader. Please let it be over soon!" And on 9th February, "I think far too much is taken far too seriously. The longer I hold the thorny office of camp leader, the more I experience this taking trifles far too seriously. My God! What am I to say to this? If I were to take everything that I have constantly experienced over these 55 months too seriously I would have been done for long ago! Fortunately I have got used to seeing everything in perspective, and where possible in as detached a way as possible, and that makes it possible to "enjoy" life without too much bitterness. In addition to arbitrate, interpret, punish, console, etc. Per day I estimate about sixty different issues that need to be settled. Naturally, besides some disadvantages such as annoyance, disappointment and running about I also have numerous advantages: a pleasant room to relax in in the evening, also certain comforts in the food line (additional bread). But the best of all is that I get through the day unimaginably quickly ... So don't you lose your courage now either! Things will soon be different and better!"

My attitude to the events in Germany are finally also reflected in my letter dated 23rd February, "I cannot share your optimism about our return home. I see the conditions from here far more clearly than you can at home.



The German work room :?Kremdau, Wyneken, Orderly, Selig, Goldhahn

Spring 1919 Serres-Carpentras (Wyneken Camp Leader)



The united camp leaders: Popoff (Bulgarian), ?, Summa (Austrian), Wyneken (German)

Serres-Carpentras Summer 1919

To criticise these circumstances is pointless. Everything will take place with the greatest natural necessity. Of course I often regret being unable to be at home, because I believe I have a clearer judgement of the present time than is possible for the majority of Germans under the one-sided overwhelming influence of adversity. In its centre-right parties Germany lacks above all an intellectual personality who is capable of quelling the socialist fanaticism that is increasingly running rampant. Sadly no one dares step into the breach to bring an end to this mad revolutionary tumult. And yet level-headed elements make up an overwhelming majority (to judge by the election results). Admittedly though, the great multitude and particularly the bourgeoisie were always cowardly, and any small terrorist minority have an easy target. I am gradually becoming ashamed of being a member of the democratic party. Admittedly, I am shielded from socialism by my abhorrence of any demagoguery. Fortunately I am too much of a philosopher to take this entire hoopla too seriously.

These first three months of my camp leadership were really especially full of work: every couple of minutes our chef de cuisine would turn up full of wrath and reporting that the French fourier or supplier wanted to rob us yet again of some of our food – which was short in any case. We were entitled to two thousand calories per person, and this was carefully checked by us. I have one such calculation:

Les Allemandes ont touché:		Effectively 631	
[The Germans received:]		[number of men in camp]	
		Calories	
Bread	189.3 kg	2137	-404,534.1 calories
Meat	41 kg	1332	-54,612.0 calories
Fat	10 kg	7873	-78,730.0 calories
Soup	3750 kg	5320	-19,950.0 calories
Lentils	204 kg		
	242 kg	2667	-645,414.0 calories
Beans	38 kg		
Green vegetables	30 kg	272	-8,160.0 calories
		Total	-1,211,400 calories
2000 calories per man, makes			1,262,000 calories
We had			1,211,400
			-50,600

In lentils that equals 18.9 kg. (*which we were also swindled over!*)



The united camp leaders: Popoff (Bulgarian), Wyneken (German), Summa (Austrian)

Summer 1919 Serres-Carpentras

When the kitchen sergeant appeared with a statement like this, I would put my cap on and go – I had authorisation to pass freely – past the guards direct to the commanding officer. At the start we had a very nice elderly man as a temporary commanding officer, a colonial soldier who had risen up through the ranks, (First) Lieutenant Gay. A painfully correct man, who asked only to be treated with respect. Naturally this was how I treated him – not least in the interests of a trouble-free cooperation. I always greeted him (at roll call, etc.) with a correct bow, instead of how my predecessor often did, with a stiff and surly salute. Accordingly I also didn't click my heels reverently but gave my greeting in a more comradely fashion. The French were obsessed with such trifles, as with their remarkable inferiority complexes they constantly scented provocative arrogance from us. Well, given my many years' experience of the French mentality, my treatment was correct, because clearly no camp leader before or after me was able to present as many complaints as I did, without being thrown out straight away – as was generally the case ... So I went with my chef de cuisine to Lieutenant Gay and complained: they were trying to swindle us. The lieutenant sprang up as if stung by a tarantula and went that instant with us to the French supplier, where our men were still standing with the inadequate food supplies. Brusquely the lieutenant ordered the supplier, "Pesez!" [Weigh it!] So, he weighed his things out and what do you know? It was too little in every case. So we were immediately given what was missing and the lieutenant had the old swindler, who sold his surpluses in the town, give his commitment. You can imagine that we were not exactly loved by this man, and he attempted to harm us at every possible opportunity. But it didn't help: I had to guard jealously against us never receiving half a pound too little. The hardship was too great then, and you must remember that the permitted 2000 calories per man signified the absolute lowest limit on

which a healthy man can exist in the long term. So we had for ourselves also worked out draconian measures against those who did not respect this plight: we had to peel our potatoes ourselves, and in association with barrack leaders and the aid committee I decided that those who were reported by the kitchen sergeant for peeling too thickly, and thus not respecting the hardship of our comrades, would that day either receive only thin, skimmed soup, or, if they didn't want that they would be reported to the French.

One day the kitchen sergeant appeared and indignantly presented to me the really quite unheard-of thick potato peelings of two sergeants. I had them brought to me and asked them which of the two punishments they preferred. One, a sensible chap, chose the thin soup, but the other, a right young brat from my old barracks, who thought we wouldn't report to the French, scornfully said I could happily report him. I wrote a report on him then and there and the fine fellow was immediately locked up for fourteen days – with the general approval of the German camp.

Another time, during peeling a whole sack of potatoes disappeared from the barracks where our seriously injured men lay. I offered the barracks the options of either returning the potatoes or only receiving thin soup in the evening. Then a young – uninjured – rascal stirred the men up and they marched past my barracks – a truly woeful procession – aiming to make me withdraw my order by this demonstration. Their spokesman was this stripling. He straight away became quite cheeky. So I immediately had him put in the can for fourteen days by the French. It is telling that this rigorous treatment – which was however necessary owing to our dire situation – tended rather to win me sympathy than lose it from the vast majority of the camp.

In those days of deepest depression, a few resilient types resolved to cheer our men up a bit and put on some masked and fancy dress balls in the barracks. It was early March, so the German collapse was already four months previous. People involved asked me whether I had any objections to this project, because voices had of course been raised in the camp saying that such a frivolous enterprise was wrong at such a serious time. I considered for a while, and then declared that I approved of their enterprise. In doing so I was working on the consideration – which still appears correct to me – that it was my duty to prevent our men from totally drowning in sorrows. And it seemed better to me even at the risk of being misunderstood to do anything at all to pick our comrades up than to passively allow this misery to spread. Thus I received an 'Invitation to the "Spring in the Grunewald" masked ball in Barracks 10 on 11th March 1919. Doors: 6 p.m.' from the first barracks to put on such an event. I went ostentatiously and stayed at this – entirely proper and certainly not excessively merry – event for a few hours.

From the start of March the world finally began to pay us some more attention. First of all the director of the Danish Red Cross, 'Otto Zahle, docteurs des lettres, proviseur de lycée, directeur de la section livres de la Croix Rouge Danoise en France', as his visiting card put it, appeared. He was quite shaken when I told him of our plight, and promised to arrange help as soon as possible. And in fact after just a few days we received 1500 francs and later even more money, so that we could start to plug a huge gap.

The Swiss delegate also came, and we were chiefly able to present our complaints about the deficiencies of the camp to him, especially our degrading barracks. He too promised to make efforts to provide assistance, but not very much happened. However, the French were more to blame for this as they were not especially concerned about our dreadful situation.

As soon as I had the time, I resumed my lectures on Zarathustra.

The shared office of the Austrians and the Bulgarians was also in the same barracks as our office, and I was on a friendly footing with both camp leaders. The Austrian, 'Ensign' Summa, was an especially pleasant and amusing young chap. By profession a merchant from Smyrna, he had a Croatian father and an English mother. As a resident of Smyrna he spoke Greek and – because he had attended a French school – French. He had only learned German to some extent in captivity! And now he is an Italian citizen! I conversed with him often and a lot, because he had a lively mind and a strong sense of humour. The language we conversed in was fundamentally – as with the Bulgarian camp leader Popoff – German, although both spoke French more fluently and I too could have easily made myself understood in this tongue. We frequently invited one another over, and often went for walks together. Above all the relationship of the three allied nations was at all times very friendly. The only friction arose once with the Bulgarians, who included some not entirely perfect elements. Of course one must remember that these unfortunate captives were even more cut off from home than we were. They never received packages and money from home, and the Bulgarian state didn't show the slightest concern about its captive sons. Particularly sad were the many severely war-injured, who were literally left to die helplessly in their own dirt. Unfortunately we had enough to do with our own hardship so that we could hardly worry about these unfortunates, who wandered through our camp collecting cigarette butts.

My work as camp leader took up so much of my spare time that I barely noticed the summer gradually coming on. However it too had its dangers: when a land work team belonging to our depot arrived late at night once again without having been notified to me by the French and so for whom I had not been able to make preparations, I said angrily to the arrivals, "That bunch of pigs haven't given notice of you yet again!" But this was heard by a French guard who had learned enough as a PoW in Germany that he understood this popular army term. So he furiously reported that I had called French men a 'bande de cochons'! Next day there was an extremely embarrassing interview and I only escaped the "pen" by (sad but true!) lying! I said I had called it a 'Schweinerei' [roughly = outrageous] that I hadn't been informed. Well, fortunately the guard had already disappeared and the French didn't want to do anything to me, as I had otherwise always been polite to them, so I escaped the four weeks in prison that I would in other circumstances certainly have had for insulting the 'grande nation'!

At the start of the summer the camp also gradually began to empty out. First of all the French sent all trainee officers, who were only NCOs, out to work, mostly to the clear-up teams at the Front, which were not without danger. My special colleague Beger also left at this time. I tried to get him a post as an interpreter, but he told me after the war that he didn't get it, but instead landed in the kitchen, which was also deemed to be a 'cushy job'. Later

around 200 deputy officers, cadets and sergeants volunteered for work teams, to escape the barbed wire and spend the last few months of captivity in reasonable comfort. At that time some of my closest friends, including Kleudgen (Poitiers 1914) and Strouss (Ré 1917) also left for a work team, at the farm of La Nesquière near Pernes (also Vaucluse). My comrade, the Austrian camp leader Summa, too, left, because he had cannily opted for Italy and was therefore sent home. (He soon wrote to me from Athens!) So I became increasingly lonely, and had already told my comrades who left for La Nesquière that I very much wanted to follow them. After all, working with the remaining dissatisfied remainder of the PoWs was becoming increasingly disagreeable. Then, at the end of June the usual troublemaking began: I had received a Red Cross Committee and told them our problems, only involving the chair of the aid committee, Westermann, and not the entire aid committee. But that was a deadly sin against our democratic constitution. Without my knowledge the aid committee met and prepared a letter of complaint about my 'autocratic' regime. This trivial issue led to a real 'storm in a tea cup'. There was a follow-up to the story, in fact after my energetic performance I even received a formal apology from the aid committee: "Neither in the oral proceedings of the aid committee nor in the report of our minutes to which you adduce was your camp leadership attacked nor should it be attacked in any regard – except for the matter of responding to the request from the German Foreign Office (which I had 'autocratically' dealt with!). Your letter dated 25th July will be appended to the minutes along with this apology. The aid committee of the German Prisoner of War Camp at Serres-Carpentras. Signed, Dr Paul Bramstädt, Chair."

This apology was given to me on 5th August 1919, that is, almost one month after I had resigned my office! In any case this stupid troublemaking annoyed me now. One of my acquaintances said – and not unjustly from his point of view, "You've been out of the barracks for too long now already!" In other words, if one lived for a prolonged period in the normal surroundings of accommodation that was fit for a human being, one ceased to have sufficient fellow-feeling for one's comrades in the barracks. This is why so far every camp leader before me had received a vote of no-confidence and had to resign after five months at most. Well, I had already been camp leader for six months and still held my post! But it was clear to me that one day I too would receive a vote of no-confidence. And I wasn't prepared to have that in any circumstances!

So, when – around 12th July – Barracks 8 (which had created the most trouble for me) once again disputed my camp leadership in some way, I wrote a circular, which was read out in every barracks and in some cases gave rise to considerable indignation, "As Barracks 8 believes that it can run the camp better, I hereby resign my office as camp leader and hand over leadership to Barracks 8!"

Well, of course now no one wanted to be it! And it became evident barely half a year later that nobody really thought my camp leadership was bad, when the same dissatisfied comrades first of all voted me leader of our huge barracks (one hundred men!) in our next camp, and then wanted to elect me camp leader. The deeply unloved and unpleasantly harsh adjutant to whom I reported my resignation, and who was astonished that my comrades (it really was only a few!) were dissatisfied with me, burst out with, "Jamais on n'a tant réclamé

que vous!” [No one’s ever made complaints like you!] And, without wishing to praise myself, there really never was a German camp leader in Carpentras who presented as many and above all as successful complaints to the French as I.

9. LIBERATION

Well, I withdrew in some disgust back into my old barracks, and resumed my work, this time mainly on ancient languages, so as to soon be at my peak – because we were now expecting to return home almost any day – when I went back to my job. Fairly soon however I realised that there were no grounds for optimism in relation to our return home.

The French – and above all the hate-filled Clémenceau – wanted to squeeze even more out of Germany and wear down the people still further. (What short-sightedness! What a revenge this would bring down one day on those French people who were not even guilty of this inhumanity!) So I very soon grasped that I would have to celebrate yet another Christmas, my sixth, in captivity. Yet I dreaded the eternal barbed wire, so when – at the start of August – I heard that more workers were to be sent to La Nesquière, I appealed to Lieutenant Gay, who was sympathetic to me, and was granted permission to go with them. Admittedly, Lieutenant Gay shook his head at an ‘homme de lettres’ [educated man] wanting to become a farmhand, but he did not dismiss my reasons. In any case, on 10th August I arrived at La Nesquière, cheerfully greeted by my old comrades and regarded with mistrust by the French ‘patron’, who had asked for sturdy labourers and could tell with a sure eye that I was no such thing.

La Nesquière was in the farther reaches of a huge estate, which belonged to a very genteel gentleman, the Marquis de Genestiou. We only saw him the once though. In fact, he was so genteel that he didn’t see us Boches at all. Even greater then was the pleasure with which we espied his delightful daughters, who for their part were also rather more curious than Darling Papa.

La Nesquière was a manor with a small stables, but with a large wine cellar, and in normal times hundreds of thousands of litres of wine were ‘made’ there. The farm lay by a delightful little river, the Sorgue. It was surrounded by fields of potatoes and carrots, as well as vineyards, since it lay on a plain and the mountains began about 5 km to the east.

Our task, together with a dozen liberated Russians who were also working voluntarily, was to keep the farm – which covered a good 1000 acres of land – in order. There were thirty of us, so that the ‘patron’ (= employer, that is the manager), *Mr Arnald*, had over forty sturdy men to hand. And in fact we wanted to work! But not for nothing! So our complaints began yet again. And, because I spoke French best I had to conduct the negotiations and was also set against the ‘patron’ at every other opportunity, this naturally did not improve my ‘popularity’ with him much! Well, anyway we managed to succeed in receiving one franc daily from the lord of the manor, on top of the 20 centimes we were paid by the French state. In addition we were fed, although in truth lamentably badly, therefore we nicked what we could get. To begin with we were satisfied with this arrangement and worked relatively well. Above all because apart from our working hours – which were however to start with all of ten hours a day – we were absolutely free on Sundays. As a formality we had been given two guards, but one was newly-wed and consequently spent almost all his time with his young wife in nearby Avignon, and the other was a passionate angler who would leave us in order to

take up his rod as soon as we had started work. After all, running away would have been pointless, since the war had already been over for a year and we were expecting to be exchanged any day.



Postcards (from Edition Rey Camille, Tobacconist) Althen-des-Paluds (Vaucluse) –
General view



Althen-des-Paluds (Vaucluse) – The Playground and Promenade

I now worked like the others, even if my efforts were by far the least on account of my lesser strength: first there was all kind of work on the farm, then we tore up old vines, then we broke up clods of earth thrown up by the motorised plough which other comrades had done the preparatory work with. In between times, the water meadows also had to be harvested! (In this fortunate country they produced up to five crops, with the fifth at the start of December!) And so on. But best of all were the Sundays: in the mornings we would make ourselves as elegant as possible. Then we ate well and went out 'to the villages'! Literally! A good hour's walk away there was a very pretty and friendly village, Althen-des-Paluds. You could walk there through the fields, past scattered farmsteads and over a few waterways. The village gave an especially friendly impression with its well-maintained roads and bright houses. Right at the entrance to the village there was a bakery and patisserie, where we started by buying up the entire stock of cakes. Then we went to a very friendly inn and café where we first of all consumed coffee and cake according to our old native custom. After that each of us went our own way, depending on our tastes: some would play billiards either together or with French inhabitants of the village (who were especially nice), others watched a game of boules (a ball game which resembles our children's game of marbles, except the balls are far larger and the distances thrown are greater), which was played enthusiastically in that district. Later they also joined in. Still others browsed the newspapers and magazines in the bar or chatted with the French. At first, we would return home for supper in the evening. But even then a few of us – dressed in Russian uniforms willingly provided by our work comrades – went out in the evening too.

Very soon we became more adventurous: on 15th August I wrote my first postcard direct to home, stamped with the French mark – that is, avoiding the censor. It arrived. From now on we corresponded almost exclusively this way. Only so as not to arouse suspicion in the camp we sent the post that we were entitled to from there as well. In this way we received an answer within no more than ten days, whilst in the camp we often had to wait for two months (and more)! A fabulous improvement! In other ways too we soon took every liberty we needed: we now – because without exception the population remained friendly - also went out for evenings in the district. Above all to a village even farther off where there was a cinema and dancing. Admittedly so as not to irritate the locals we did not dance with the daughters of the area. But comrades who were really keen to dance, danced together, as we also very often saw the young French people doing. Nevertheless, in the long term more tender relationships did form, and one of my comrades, a young bank official, actually had a relationship with a widow, the wife of a grammar school teacher who had fallen in the war! We also attended the village celebrations there and I still recall with pleasure a 'fête patronale' (similar to a parish fair) in Althen-des-Paluds. There were stalls of every kind there and the fairground was very brightly lit with many little coloured electric bulbs. And then dancing in the open! For us, who had not seen anything like it for five years, it was terrific fun! I won all of five francs at a tiny roulette, and blew it straight away.



Postcard (from Edition Rey Camille, Tobacconist) Althen-des-Paluds (Vaucluse) – The Town Hall and the Post Office



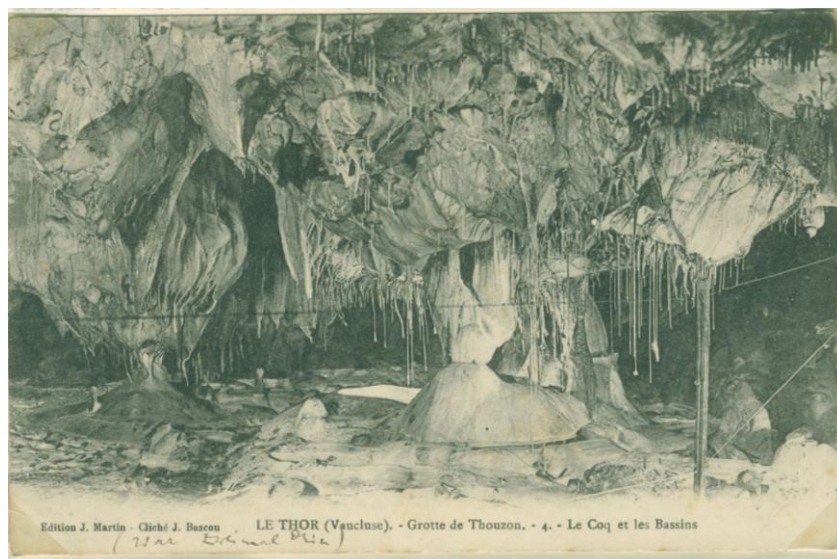
Postcard (from Edition J. Martin) Le Thor (Vaucluse) – 2. Ruins of the Chapelle de St-Pierre, stunning [natural] sculptures

Loveliest of all was the close towards midnight: then, every French dancer, male and female, took hold of one another and wildly danced a round dance like the cancan to the tune of the Marseillaise around an imaginary liberty pole. With fabulous élan!

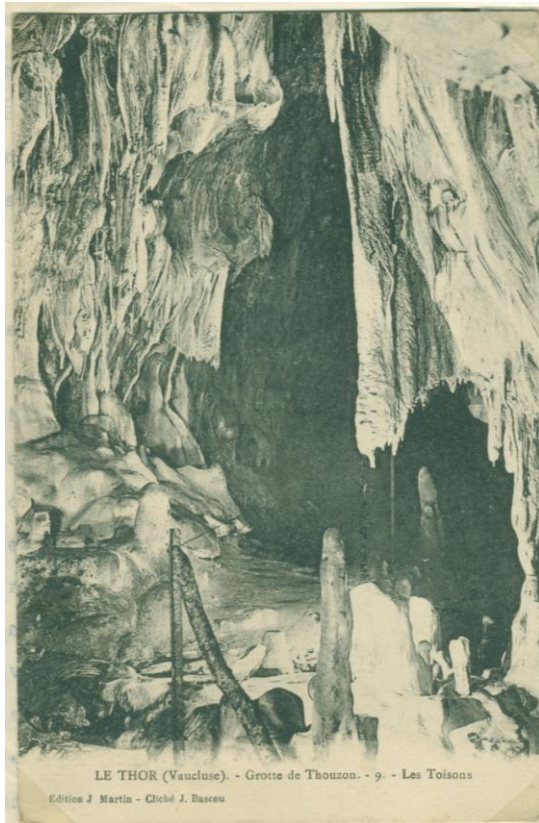
How little impression our presence made in this foreign setting could be seen when we had the opportunity to attend an election speech by a candidate for the French parliament. The delegate spoke warmly to us and promised us that we would go home soon. And when two gendarmes (who were hellishly attentive in France too) suddenly appeared, we thought, “Now we’re for the can”. But they didn’t even acknowledge us with a glance and instead just calmly noted down some of the French people who didn’t have a number on their bicycle.

(We often returned from our excursions after midnight! Then we would pass through the quiet district singing loudly. It was amazing that no one ever complained about our noise!)

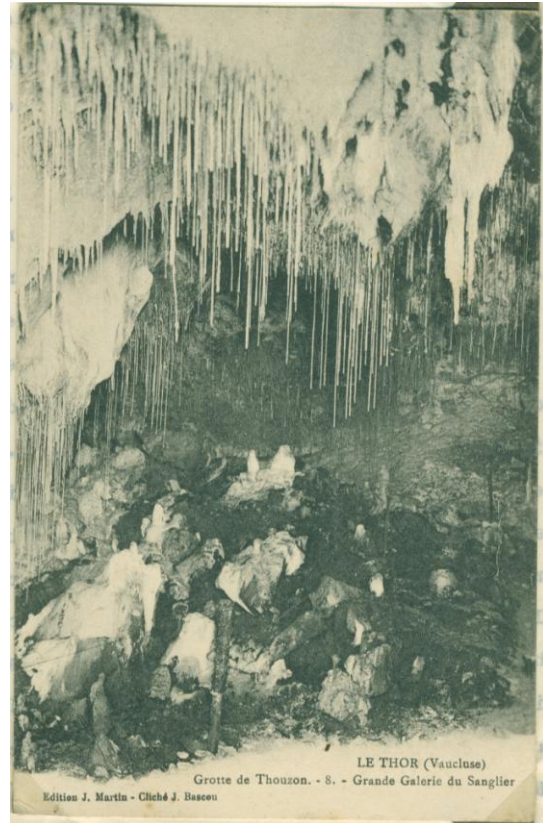
So now we became increasingly adventurous: Sunday afternoons were no longer enough for our excursions. We set off in the morning and would now go for proper hikes in the district. We had two destinations when we did this: Le Thor and Vaucluse. Near Le Thor there lay the ruins and stalactite caves of Thouzon, which I visited twice. Truly lovely stalactite caves beneath a small chalk hill, on which there lay the ruins of an ancient castle with an early Roman chapel that was still standing. The hill was covered with almond trees and of course we plundered them. From here there was an extremely beautiful view of the countryside. Towering above all like a crag on the horizon was the Pope’s palace at Avignon. It was not until thirteen years later that I was able to see it close up and on the interior! Anyway, we had a joyous feeling of freedom when they took us through the stalactite caves just like any other sightseers. On this hill there also grew a lot of Mediterranean flora of the dry hill region, which delighted me.



Postcards (Edition J. Martin, Photographer J. Bascou) Le Thor (Vaucluse) – Les Grottes de Thouzon – 4. The Cockerel and the Basins (*was there three times*)



Le Thor (Vaucluse) – Les Grottes de
Thouzon – 9. The Fleeces



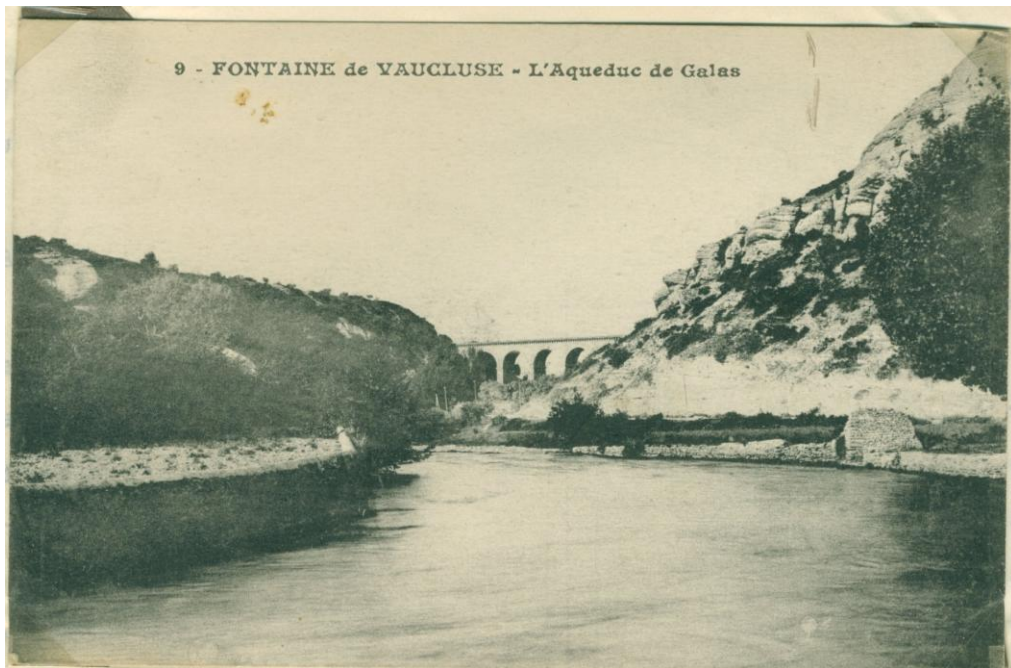
Le Thor (Vaucluse) – Les Grottes de
Thouzon – 8. Grand Gallery of the Wild
Boar

But even more interesting were our excursions in the direction of the capital of the département, Vaucluse. (Capital only in name, however, the real capital is Avignon.) To begin with we simply ‘felt’ our way there. First of all we hiked *at the crack of dawn* to the lower mountains – *often still covered in fog* – which coming from Ventoux bordered the plain to the East. These mountains were themselves very interesting to me, as they were covered in ‘the maquis’, that is, a thick scrub of evergreen trees and shrubs. There for the first time I saw large quantities of lavender, thyme, etc., growing wild. There was a lovely fragrance of all kinds of aromatic herbs on this hill. Half-way up the hill there was a canal coming from Vaucluse, and you only needed to go along it to reach [the city]. These canals ensure the incredible fertility of Provence, for the dry terrain on the plain is irrigated by them (often it rains hardly at all there for four to five months!). Then the newspapers announce that this place or that will be irrigated on such and such a date. And on these days the sluices up in the mountains are opened up and the water is allowed to flow into the plain. With fabulous success!

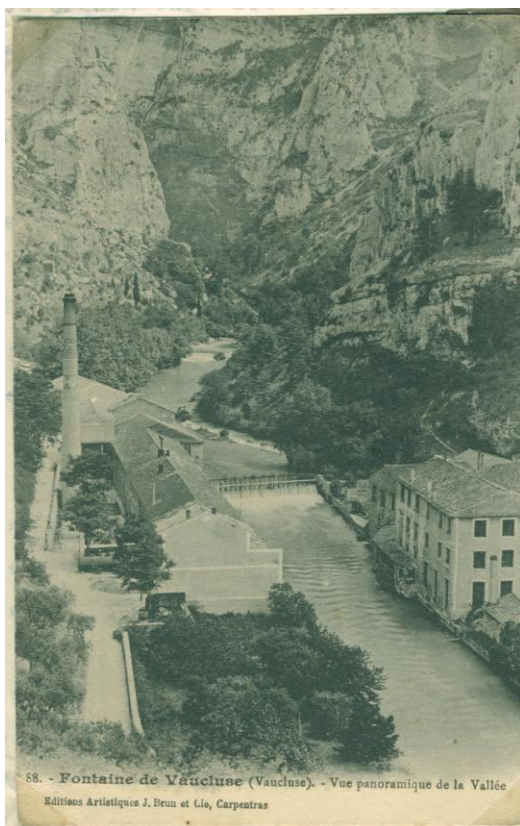
So on 1st October* we fumbled our way along this canal so far that after a 20 kilometre march we suddenly landed in Vaucluse. Vaucluse, or vallis clausa, is, as its name says, a stone basin at the back of which rises one of the most plentiful springs in Europe, the Sorgue. When we reached this deeply-carved valley surrounded by massive rock walls, it was a beautiful, warm, early autumn day. The plane trees were starting to colour at the bottom,

[and] below the aqueduct, which closed off the valley there, flowed the glass-clear torrent of the Sorgue, a powerful mountain stream, while above it radiated the deep blue Mediterranean sky. An overwhelming vision for us old PoWs! We now descended into the valley, passing without challenge through the small town that fills up the stone basin, and then went into a wayside inn, which is built on a small peninsula in the Sorgue. There we drank our café au rhum like other tourists, wrote picture postcards, and enquired about the local sights. Only someone who has been held captive long enough can imagine our elation, as we – at a distance of some 20 kilometres from ‘home’ – enjoyed the lovely surroundings in absolute freedom. We climbed up to the famous ‘gouffre’ or ‘chasm’, which is a huge grotto half way up the stone basin and represents the upper source of the Sorgue. In that warm period there was admittedly only an underground lake, whilst the flowing source of the Sorgue lay deeper. But they told us that around Easter, when the snow melts in the mountains, the whole entrance – which is as large as a living room – to the chasm is filled up with one single gigantic jet of water. Well, we didn’t get to enjoy this spectacle, sadly, but even so the place with all its lively mountain streams was totally delightful. Afterwards we climbed up to the ruins of Petrarch’s Castle (actually Petrarch never lived there but in a house in the town below, but he was the first to ascend the Ventoux from there and wrote many poems to Laura there), and marvelled at the region from up there. On subsequent visits in fact I also climbed up quite high among the crags while investigating the botany and geology. We were (that is, there were only the two of us comrades, the others were too lazy – or was I in fact initially there entirely alone? I believe so!) completely enthused by this excursion and even repeated it twice. However the final time was not without difficulties. It was All Saints’ Day and therefore we had no work duties. First of all a loathsome French sergeant who oversaw there a penal work team of German comrades from Avignon (of dolorous memory) caught us. He snarled at us terribly, even wanted to lock us up, and then sent us home with a curse. Fortunately we were already on our way back and had thoroughly enjoyed Vaucluse. But then however we (there was only comrade Strouss with me by then) were surprised by such a snowstorm as I had never experienced in the mountains. We barely made it through by summoning all our strength! Only when we had descended to the plain did the weather once again become warm and pleasant. So the ‘sunny South’ very much has its pitfalls!

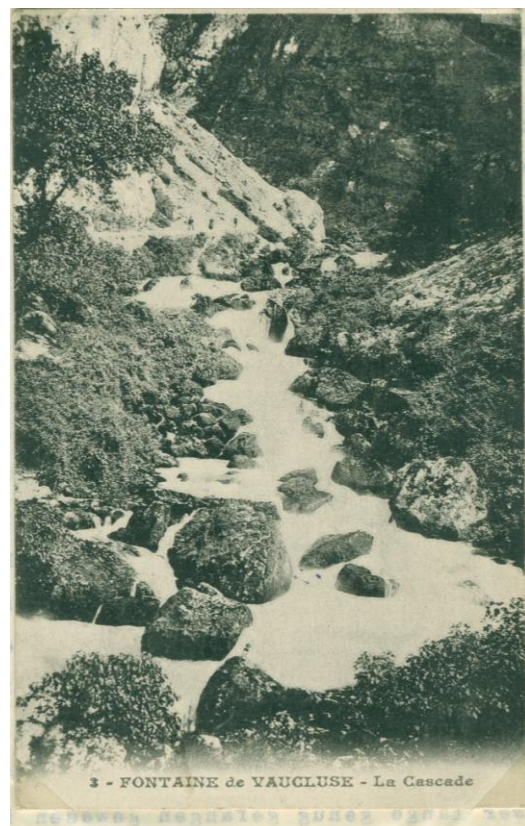
** Hunting was allowed again on this day for the first time since the war. In the very small town of Ternes two thousand residents – it appeared – had taken out hunting licences. Consequently there was a ‘hunter’ standing behind every bush along the way as we passed, and they shot at sparrows and other huntable game. We saw the only rabbit in the area [illegible] disappearing in a cornfield. It was just like in Tartarin of Tarascon [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartarin_of_Tarascon] which was set in this region.*



Postcard 9 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – Galas Aquaduct



Postcard (Editions Artistiques J. Brun et Cie, Carpentras) 88 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse (Vaucluse) – Panoramic view of the valley



Postcard 3 - Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – The waterfall

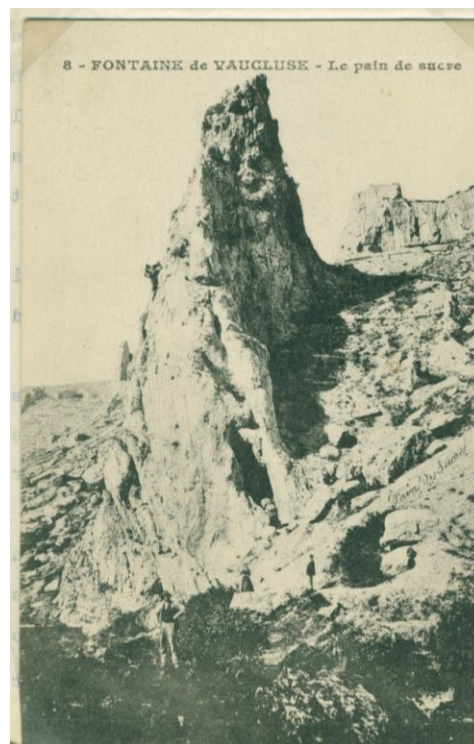
Anyway, besides these pleasant hours there were also far less pleasant ones, as we were sent there to work of course. But we certainly didn't overdo it! Because the 'patron' was too mean and coolly rejected our continuing demands for food and pay, we resolved for our part to act fatheaded. We had finished the grape harvest quite pleasurably and in doing so eaten so many grapes that in the end we couldn't look at them! It was an incredibly large but not very aromatic berry that grew on our lowlands. We generally only sought out the very best of the grapes. In other regards this grape harvest was no celebration like the harvest on the Rhine, but a real grind with schlepping the heavy baskets and vats. It was a little like the potato harvest that followed. After that we had to furnish a roughly 1.5 hectare plot of land with drainage. And because we believed that we had already worked hard enough for the poor pay, we resolved to fulfil the task with the greatest 'ingenuity': each of us would complete just one metre of trench a day! We passed the plentiful spare time with singing and mutual insults, and one stalwart type presented himself as a dance artist. We also attacked the plentiful walnut trees. For a while the whole thing went well. But then the patron appeared breathing fire and brimstone. He attempted to urge us on but reaped only laughter and scornful words, which he unfortunately did not understand. Finally he attempted to vent his wrath on me, as he took me for the ringleader (entirely wrongly - I was only interpreting!). He accused me of stirring up my comrades, and being myself a 'faitnéant' – in this he was correct. At that I berated him, called him an 'expropriateur' (exploiter) and allowed my entire hatred (although it really wasn't all that bad) to well up and burst over him. The guard who was helplessly standing there attempted to conciliate but in vain. We parted as enemies ... and everything else went on the same.

It had now become cold, and having completed the drainage (although I doubt water has ever flowed through our 'work of art', unless it has by now learned to flow uphill!) we had the dubious pleasure of having to prune the vines, so we started to muse on a change in our occupation. In addition there was the fact that since mid-September we had been increasingly shackled to our shoddy housing because of occasional rainstorms. Until then we had been mostly outdoors. We had a pleasant bathing spot right next to the house, and because of the bugs in the house we had carried our straw paliasses on to the huge woodpiles that were built up along the Sorgue, and there we slept for some months under the open skies. Naturally we were even more reluctant to go back to the barbed wire of the camp.

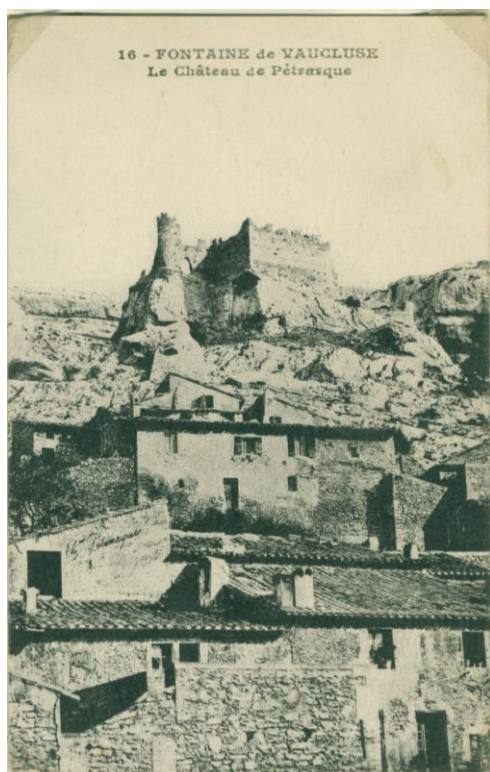
Then at the end of November we heard that there was once again hope of exchange for long-serving and sick PoWs in the camp. Since we were unable to learn the truth of this, we decided to send a patrol to the camp to determine the situation.



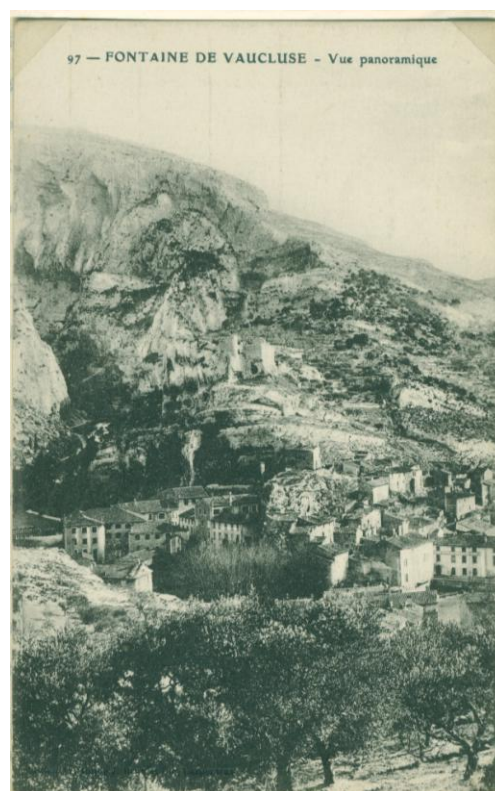
Postcards 5 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – The chasm



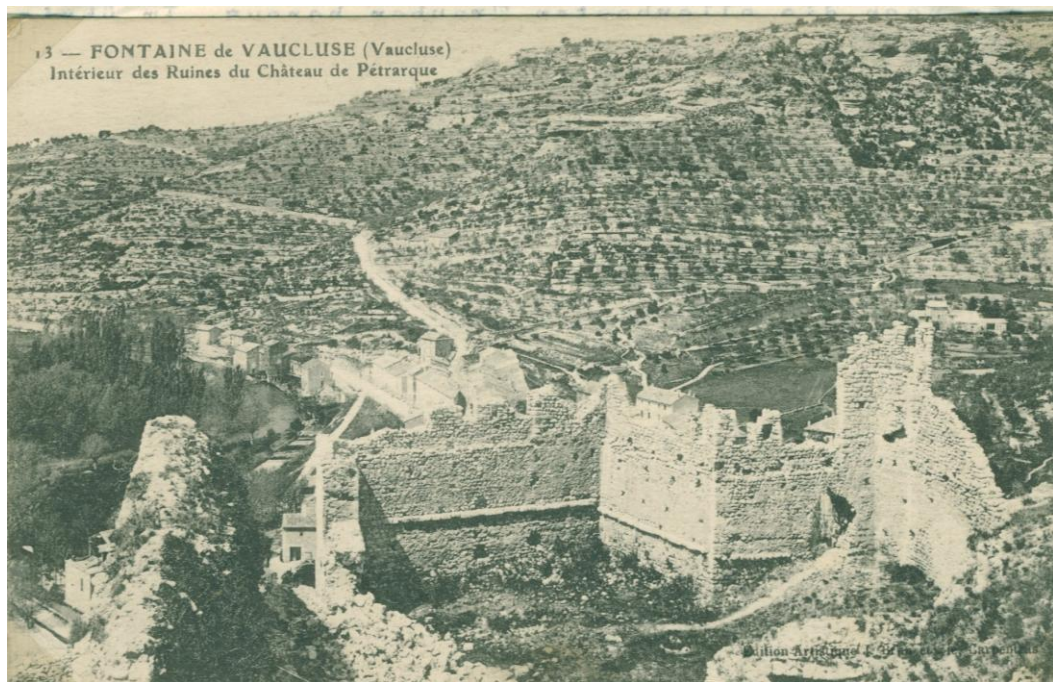
8 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – The sugar loaf



16 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – Petrarch's Castle



97 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse – Panoramic view



Postcard13 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse (Vaucluse) – Interior of the ruins of Petrarch's Castle



Postcards (Editions Artistiques J. Brun et Cie, Carpentras) 92 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse (Vaucluse) – Petrarch (C14th)



93 – Fontaine-de-Vaucluse (Vaucluse) – Laura (C14th)

The choice fell on two old Zeppelin deck officers (Lloyd's officers in civilian life) and myself as former camp leader (as well as with good connections in the French office). To get to the camp you had to report sick. Well, nothing was really wrong with us, but the Austrian assistant doctor would have written us off sick but the 'patron' finally took his revenge on us for all the nuisance he had suffered from us and from me in particular. He gave a note to the guard who had to transport us to the camp, and in this note he blamed us (admittedly not without justification) for all kinds of idleness and me personally for inciting my comrades. Unfortunately for me Lieutenant Gay was only second commander whilst a captain was actually in charge. He read the letter, gauged us with a dark look and just said coolly, "Off to the glasshouse!" We looked a bit down in the mouth, because in December the prison was even more uncomfortable than normal. But then the noble Lieutenant Gay came to our rescue [and said that] he had told me straight away that I was too weak for the labour ... well ... and I was a good type who needed to be looked after. The captain, who was no ruthless tyrant, was soon mollified. We were allowed to stand down and my two gnarled old marine comrades were very satisfied that their lives and mine had been saved. So we went to the infirmary and after a few explanatory words were promptly written off sick for a week. But we were not allowed back to our farm – the 'patron' had gratefully rejected us. All the same, when that hero brought our baggage along for us about a week later he was disappointed to see us walking around 'freely' behind the barbed wire, instead of languishing within prison walls. However it was appropriate that we had returned to the camp because in two weeks the rest came too. And gradually all the work squads from the camp returned, because the final act of our captivity had begun: the preparations for our return home had been made!

We had hoped to spend Christmas still in the old camp. But yet again our hopes came to nothing! Obviously in order to make it easier for us to part with the beauties of France, the order to decamp came very shortly before the celebrations! I had once again passed the intervening time with studies, and did not believe at all that we would be leaving for home very soon. I was still expecting to be in captivity until March. But who could know whether the French would keep us any longer? So I wasn't overly pleased when one day before Christmas Eve we set off from Carpentras – northwards up the lovely Rhone valley.

As Christmas Eve darkened we sat in a gloomy local train carriage, third class, lit a candle and sang Christmas songs with wild gallows humour! And that was our sixth Christmas celebration in France.

How blasé we had all become can be seen from a small incident that took place when we had to change trains: we were standing there next to a goods train. Soon a dense group of PoWs formed around us, a barrel was offloaded and everyone standing around supplied himself with wine. A kick and the empty barrel rolled down the railway embankment. Anyone who had been caught in this act of thievery would without doubt have had to be prepared for several more years of forced detention in France. But we had bit by bit become indifferent to everything.

On Christmas Day we arrived at Chateau Landon station not far from Fontainebleau. First there was yet again a lengthy, harrowing march with all our luggage, and then we stood

outside a camp which looked very similar to that at Carpentras on our arrival in December 1917: desolate, full of morasses and occupied by cowed PoWs. Right away there were one hundred men in one barracks! We had never lain so cramped together. And just like in Carpentras we were 'fouillert' if we did not have cigarettes for the corporals who searched us. (I had some!) Promptly we did what we always did in such circumstances: we complained. But just as promptly we found ourselves in the invariable situation.

At New Year we were allowed to buy (sour!!!) wine. I straight away bought a small bucketful. And everyone who had money tanked up on alcohol because our situation appeared utterly hopeless. When I had finished my stable bucket, I went to the neighbouring barracks where the Hungarians were housed (I had once again been elected barrack leader) to wish them a Happy New Year. They had found better wine as they had been in the camp longer. Together with a few other Germans I was urged to stay, and, nothing daunted, continued drinking. We knew no Hungarian and the Hungarians only had broken German, so we drank with the established toast, "Up with Hungary!" and they replied with, "Eljen Deutschland!"

The stupefaction with which this new camp briefly affected us passed quickly: after just two weeks I gave a lecture on 'Future pedagogics' before a large gathering. On 10th January, the day of the final peace accord, I gave another, at which I had a remarkable experience: I spoke quite freely, as I had only written down a few theories. But I must have been contemplating the capitalistic age while I spoke, because all at once it was as if a wall of previous conceptions collapsed and I suddenly saw how much capitalism was culpable for the war. And I realised all at once how precisely the 'higher' orders of every nation (*and we philologists in particular!*) had served capitalism. And with this the ideal of the Kaiser, that I had right up till now attempted to defend, collapsed, and at a stroke I became a staunch republican. It may be assumed that even before then this ideal that I had held of the Kaiser had been shaken by the disclosures in the German newspapers that we had been able to read over the past few months, and it had only needed the final straw to topple him completely from his pedestal. Nevertheless I had at that time the sense that there had been a major change within me, and since this experience I have been far less sceptical about other sudden conversions (Paul on the Road to Damascus).

Both my lectures gave rise to great controversy, and that January I once again occupied myself intensively with pedagogical questions. I no longer believed that we would return home before the start of spring. I didn't dare hope that I would celebrate Easter in Germany. Even when we had to complete a card that was pre-printed with the following message, "I will be returning home shortly and ask that no more letters, money or parcels are sent", and this was immediately sent home, I remained sceptical. On the same day I wrote a letter home in which I stated that we would probably be moving to the transit camp at Is sur Tille near Dijon, and from then travelling home via Konstanz, but then I continued, "If you believe that the prospect of returning home means that I am released from an enormous pressure, you are wrong. I am so used to my hopes of returning home being dashed that inside I am practically expecting such disappointment this time too. Only once I have the French border posts

behind me will such inner release be possible ...” Admittedly I then close the letter with, “So hopefully this is the last letter from captivity. Goodbye!”



Photographic postcard 6. Arrival [illegible] 'Heuberg'.

Yet it really was the last letter from captivity! A few days later we were once again given the order to march and then we travelled – full of hope – towards Dijon to a giant American troop camp at Is sur Tille. On our arrival the train passed by the entire camp, and we heard that it was about 10 km long. In any case we had never seen anything as huge and it immediately gave us a clear impression of how much America's intervention in the war meant to France. Once the Americans threw umpteen million soldiers and vast amounts of munitions at Europe we no longer had a chance of winning the war!

We only stayed four days in this camp. We were accommodated in a section where German prisoners of war had already been housed. They however had 'belonged' to the Americans (the prisoner of war is still de facto, absolutely without rights, the slave of the nation which has captured him. They had clearly had it better than we, as we could see from all the facilities of this camp. All these gigantic camps, stuffed with incredible resources, were 'bought' by France from the Americans for a trifling sum (which has still not been paid!). So now in these few days we yet again had the opportunity to be flabbergasted by the inability of the French to properly organise an operation. The amount of valuables that went missing or was stolen in the Is sur Tille camp defies description. Every night we heard cars drive up to the camp and carry off whole loads of valuable items. For a little money we were able to buy huge quantities of American tobacco from our guards, because they themselves

had stolen it or bought it from thieves. In these four days we were made ready for exchange, as our luggage was superficially examined and our personal details checked. Even on the last day, while this was going on, I witnessed a scene that utterly enraged me: on the other side of our barbed wire fence there was a division of German NCOs being 'fouilliert', or searched. Apparently this was not going fast enough for one deputy officer, or he had objected. Anyway he was suddenly kicked by the sergeant carrying out the search, and it knocked him right over! And this on the day of being sent home! The German did the only thing possible in his position: he shut up. Any other action would have put paid to him being sent home. But what revenge must be paid one day by a generation that was entirely innocent of these incidents!

(The revenge came sooner than I ever thought: 1940!!! And it also affected the guilty generation!)

On the morning of 5th February 1920 we finally stood in eager anticipation on the station of Is sur Tille. I personally was sceptical right up to the last moment. And circumstances appeared to bear me out: we were supposed to depart at 8 a.m. Nine came, ten, and soon eleven o'clock. Then finally our train set off. And for a long day we travelled all over the place. When it was already dark we passed Belfort, so now we had to be near the Swiss border! En route a comrade smuggled himself in with us at some station or other, and was glad to leave with us. Swiss officers awaited us in the border town of Delle. They warned us to refrain from any anti-French demonstration on the journey to the border, as this would have dreadful consequences for us. And then our train rolled over the border with thunderous cheers for Germany and Switzerland. It was deep night as we passed through Jura, but I don't believe any of us slept a wink. With curious feelings I saw the Orient Express pass far below me at a railway junction. Towards 11 p.m. we arrived in Basle where the entire station was festively lit with music playing, and a division of Swiss soldiers paid us military honours. Besides this there was more than 100 Red Cross nurses ready to receive us. We were guided by them into the festively lit reception area of the station, where one German and one Swiss officer gave very kind speeches of welcome. After two hours we were able to travel on (I was meanwhile able to notify my mother and the woman who became my wife of this joyful event).

At Säckingen we crossed the German border, and only here did my inner tension ease. The entire population of the small town had congregated at Säckingen station, and they had been waiting for us for four hours already. When we did not appear the rumour went around that our exchange had yet again been postponed. This made our reception all the warmer. Although it was now two in the morning, the citizens had chosen to greet us with music, provisions and a fabulous cordiality. Never in my entire life have I been embraced as joyfully as at that time. It must be the only time in my life when I cried tears of joy! From Säckingen we then passed to the military training ground of Heuberg via the wonderful Danube valley, through which I had wandered many times as a student. And then suddenly, finally, home. Five years and five months of captivity behind me. By far the hardest years of my life.



Photographic postcards 6/2/1920 Returnees from French captivity – Reception in Thiergarten