

Letter from Germany

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Barel, 2 November 1919

My Dear Ones,

Today is Sunday and I finally have time to respond to your letter of August 31. It took 14 days to arrive here. I thank you very much as this was the first exchange after many years. We also thank you for the box of tobacco which we divided among all of us. The tobacco is very good. As I am writing I am smoking a pipe.

Please don't send any more as the tobacco went through customs and I had to pay 75 Marks and 7 Pfennig plus consider the expense you had to mail it to us. We can buy tobacco here and yes, it is very expensive. We also thank you for the photos which mother is saving. Our heartfelt thanks for everything. We have been wondering about Lina already having gotten married. Her little daughter appears so sweet in the photo as well as the young couple and your two little ones. Soon your children will be grown. You wrote that you had an appendectomy and are now feeling well again. Your wife and children are well too We can say the same of us.

Now I want to write to you about our life here. Some of it you have read about in your local newspaper. To some extent you are aware of how things are going here. If you would come to Germany today and you would enter a shop to buy something you would be surprised at the enormous prices. Here are some examples: For the heating in my greenhouse I had to spent 1000 Marks for coke. You cannot find firing for the furnace. It does not look good for the coming winter season. You literarily have to beg for it to receive one hundredweight. You can buy peat and heat with it in town where in earlier times nobody would have used peat. In August I bought two loads of peat, one load for 100 Marks. Today you pay 200 Marks, in larger towns you pay 4 to 500 Marks. A pair of man's shoes cost 175 to 200 Marks, a man's suit 750 Marks. Before the war you could buy a bicycle for 75 to 100 Marks, today you pay 5 to 600 Marks. The worst situation is that of purchasing groceries, one pound of butter 25 Marks. In general, all groceries that are procured in this way have to be paid for with book prices. The groceries which you buy with your ration card are not so expensive but you would go hungry for long periods of time. Yes, you cannot and will not envy us at this time in our lives. Your pay has changed a lot too. The laborer who earned 3 to 4 Marks per day today earns 15 to 20 Marks. It is not a good thing and I am concerned about the coming winter. I am not one to see the future as bleak, but I am very concerned. Stealing from one another is a new trend. The cattle in the pasture is stolen and often butchered right then and there and sold for an extremely high price. The human race has changed. The war made it happen. If you want to travel by train today you don't know if the train will come or not. Trains don't go on Sundays because there is a shortage of coal and locomotives.

Everywhere in Germany you find organizations for the defense of inhabitants even here in Barel. These defenses carrying guns are formed against our own people. Yes the "Deutsche Reich" lies seriously shaken and broken. Its military fought all the world but finally the internal unrest and hunger among its population brought it down. I don't know if we will see our country rise up again in our lifetime. The "Entente" does everything it can to not allow us to get back on our feet. I don't know how we have deserved that all the world hates us? The "Deutsche Reich" became too powerful for the English. The French were nourishing their hate based on the experience of 1870. We are broken and everybody else runs over us.

Now I would like to tell you about my war experiences. At the beginning of the war I was sent to Belgium specifically Flanders where we fought the English. At the beginning they were difficult days. We marched during the night and rested during the day. The weather was wet and cold but we were confident. I had already experienced several smaller battles when I was injured on October 21, 1914, a shot through the lower leg. After my leg had healed I was sent back to Flanders in May 1916 where we fought the Belgians and the English. There we experienced bad and good times. I will attach two photos and hope you can recognize me. In August 1916 I participated in the battle on the river Somme where much life was lost. Later on I was sent to the Champagne in France where I received another minor injury. I spent 4 weeks in the infirmary at Charleville and then returned to a garrison in Germany. In February 1918 I was sent to Lorraine and then to Cambrai where we experienced difficult battles. From there we retreated and we marched to Germany by foot at time of armistice. It took us 12 days to reach our garrison. We were relieved that war had ended. We did not care how at that time, but then we were taken by surprise.

Yes, I am running out of paper. Dear brother, you write that you intended to send us a care package. It has not arrived yet. All of us are doing quite well. We would be happy if winter had passed but it has not started yet. Boyken is visiting with me and telling me that passenger trains will not run between November 5 and 15. I will close here with the wish to hear from you dear people soon.

Cordially with greetings from all of us,

your Gerhard.