

Correspondence from Germany
(Original Correspondence)

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Petroleum and Ration cards

Gradually we realize here in Berlin what our war means in terms of sacrifices and inconveniences that we are involved in the most serious war possible. After the silly housewives and virgins stormed the grocery stores where they had to pay 40 Pfennige for a pound of salt which after three weeks became available again for a mere 10 Pfennige and the normal supply of food had returned. The next item which came in short supply was petroleum. I don't know if this means need for lighting was put on the list of goods not allowed to be imported by the English government, or did the American producers of oil not have the needed ships for transportation. Standard Oil stopped delivering oil to German harbors. We had to run all over town to buy one liter or even half a liter per week. On the other hand we were able to purchase Austrian or Rumanian oil. Mr. Rockefeller's oil was accompanied by a strange smell when lit and we will not want to buy it again once peace times have returned.

The second inconvenience was caused by the confiscation of wheat supplies and a new order for baking goods. You could not bake French rolls or breakfast rolls anymore. You enjoyed them for breakfast. The new order was to add 20% potato flour to the bread flour. The use of wheat flour was restricted. The bread now looked dark brown but tasted better than the flour (*Mehlpampe*) which you often got to eat in peace times.

The limitation of use of flour did not guarantee that our reserves would last until the next harvest. Every family was given a certain ration and with that a ration card for each man, woman and child. This was the only way you could buy bread. Each member of a family was allowed 2000 g of bread which equaled 4 pounds. These rules were set by the English government; however, we calculate 3 pounds of bread for a German man per week, which means that even if the English tried to starve us, we would do ok. Whoever lost or forgot his ration card for bread will not be able to get bread at the bakery or in an inn. We acknowledge this shortcoming with a sense of humor when we think of our comrades in the fields fighting for our freedom in mud and marshes. This ration card measures about 13 by 11 centimeters. At the top of it you find the name of the town you live in and the date of its validity and the notation "Cannot be transferred". Furthermore it states, "Exclusively for flour and bread". There is a number on this card specifying the week it is for. Without returning this card you cannot get a card for the coming week. Around the edges of the card you find 24 fields the size of a mailing stamp. Four of these fields represent 100g, 8 fields representing 50g, 8 fields for 25g, and 4 with 250g. If I go to the bakery and buy a 3 pound bread, the sales person will take her scissors and cut off 1500g from my card. The same would happen in a restaurant. If I order my meat and then a roll to go with it the waiter would trim my card accordingly. On the reverse side of the card you find paragraphs explaining what will happen to you, if you do not comply, for example 6 months of imprisonment or a monetary punishment for up to 1500 Mark.

It is the ownership as well as the loss of it which can bring anxiety to you. Here is the story of a coachman who roamed around Berlin without having registered, as he did not want to be caught by the police. For days he had tried to steal a loaf of bread or the ration card to buy one. In the end he was so hungry that he went to the police station and confessed to his crimes and was put in jail.

The incident best illustrates that the bread cards were not his gimmick, but something that testified to a remarkable expenditure of energy and organization.

Translated by Margot Hendricks