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Harburg, Germany

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A letter from Germany by the parents of son and daughter-in-law Paul Buder

5 Nov 1919

Dear Son and Daughter-in-Law,

We received your letter and it made us very happy. We are glad you are healthy. Thank God, we are healthy too. We have thought of you often. At every opportunity the name Anna Bubi is mentioned.

We have experienced a very bad time here in Germany. Thank God you were not here. Rarely does Paul have luck but it was his luck not to have to be here in 1914. People envied us during this period. Soldiers had to give their lives and others returned home as invalids. And for what? Only to fill the money bag of the "big" ones.

Now I want to share with you how we survived during this war period. A man received 2.5 pounds of bread per week, 7 pounds potatoes, 150g sugar, 50g butter, 100g meat. (100 grams is about ¼ pound in American weight.) In 1917 we received 2.5 pounds of potatoes. In the morning, at noon and in the evening we ate turnips. Lena knows our large pot, in which she cooked potatoes for the pigs, which we ate during the day. You boiled them in salt and water. I want to tell you too that Oestreich lives in Harburg and makes his living with wood. If somebody buys potatoes on the black market, he has to pay 20 to 30 Marks. In the spring the farmers charged 50 to 60 Marks for a hundredweight (Zentner). We had to take the train to Soltau or beyond Lüneburg and carry the potatoes to the train station. At every station you found police because everything possible was taken from the people. Whoever receives a pound of butter on the black market will pay 20 to 30 Marks. A liter of rapeseed oil costs 30 Marks. It was stolen because you cannot find it on the market. One egg costs 1 Mark and 60 Pfennig. One pound of oats cost 1 Mark and 80 Pfennig.

You cannot dare think about buying clothing. A suit sells for 580 to 600 Marks, a pair of boots 180 Marks. Most people wear wooden shoes. I bought a pair of military boots you tie up for 40 Marks. That was cheap. People who had not stocked up before the war are doing poorly now. Many people who returned from the war do not wear a shirt anymore. They wear their uniform. Every man age 18 to 48 had to become a soldier. All were drafted, healthy, sick, lame or just one-eyed men. Those between the age of 48 and 60 had to work. They worked under the compulsory military law and they were punished if they refused. Women had to work in manufacturing of ammunition. Many died from breathing in the life-threatening gases. Many people and children died. They called it the flu but in reality they died of starvation. People you meet in the street appear pale and very thin. In 1918 we had a revolution which did not improve the standard of living. Most people do not want to work, stealing and robbing is their occupation. The farmers brought their cattle from the pasture in the evening. While still in the pasture they were pierced, the meat cut out of them and then they were left lying in the pasture. The pigs were brought out from the barn and killed. They robbed the place where Beinhof lives, pointed the revolver at his wife, then loaded it and took off. They stole the clothing of uncle Fritz in Habsburg. Friedel returned from imprisonment in England. He had nice clothing but it disappeared, also his boots which were worth 5000 Marks. There are no gas lanterns in the streets. You walk in the dark. This winter we will receive 10 hundredweight brown coal. One meter of wood costs 60 Marks. This is our coldest winter. It is snowing already.

What did the revolution bring us? We earn more money and only work 6 hours a day, but you cannot buy anything with this money other than getting by. You have to pay 400 Marks taxes each year. Now you can imagine the beautiful Germany. Men and land have changed because you cannot feel safe in the street at night. Those men who gave their lives during the war did not have to experience the pain and suffering. Many marriages happened during the war period, but now you find separations and divorces. We are living in a wild time. A Himpen leasehold by Hartädt in Sinsdorf costs 80 Marks. I go to work between 2pm and 10pm, the following week from 10pm to 6am. Everything else remains the same.

Mr. Keidel, Wikdolb, Hoffmann and Altmann died during the war. There is no building trade as you cannot buy stone and lime. A sack of cement costs 8 Marks and 80 Pfennig. Rock/stone cannot be burned because we have no coal. Fertilizer costs 80 to 100 Marks without delivery charge. You can now imagine what daily life is like in Germany. We live off of the postage stamp which we receive from the courthouse, there is nothing else. This means watch your money and save more! The news from here is that Mr Zollgewe has sold his house and now works on the Gurci. Marie Henk's husband died in the war. About all the other acquaintances we will write next time.

Please write to us and let us know what you are up to and where you work, how you are. We believe that during the war life was different in America too. Tell us how Bubi is and your two children. I want to close here. Greetings from your father and mother, also Borztorf Oestreich, Adolf Robert Bohenk and all acquaintances. Write soon. We received your letter on October 30 and hope to hear from you soon. Regards to your children. Emma asks about you. Last Sunday we visited with Hermann. Emma would love to visit with you. Hermann and siblings send their greetings. R. B. Paul Buder, the son of the parents, lives in Texas.

Translated by Margot Hendricks and Weldon Mersiovsky