

# Extracts from Letters found on Germans during the

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## SOMME BATTLE.

*Undated.* "You should have seen the recruits who were mustered this week; it was like the boys coming out of school, but they have all become soldiers; it hardly seems possible. On 24th November there is another muster in Röhrsdorf—this time for the older, untrained men, till now unfit for active service, and for those who have become unfit during the war. I don't know whether I shall have to go too, we get a special notice from the district command. I am prepared for everything—Germany's last hope."

**Extract from an undated letter written by a man of the 3rd Reserve Ersatz Regiment.**

"Since April 10th we have changed our position four times, the first three were quite good, a man could hope to return home again, but the one we now occupy is a bad witches' cauldron, one is glad if one gets out of it with sound limbs. On the first day I had lost hope; a T.M. bomb fell beside our dug-out, tore away the door and filled the place with dust; the six of us inside thought we were lost. As soon as we saw daylight again, we went into the front trench to watch whether any more of these projectiles were being fired, for one can see them coming in the daytime; it is worst of all at night for then they cannot be seen.

"The work here is terrible; it is unheard of what they expect us to do. On one occasion we ceased work, as we were done up; so that the Company Commander had to detail other men. No man can stand work day and night.

"I hope the cruel war is approaching its end, for one no longer has any heart for this sort of thing."

**The following is an extract from a Regimental Order of 5th Bavarian Reserve Regiment (4th Bavarian Division):—**

*30-8-16.* "I have occasion to draw attention to the following:—The demand for artillery barrage and the nervous firing of the rifles, because an unseen bomber throws a few hand grenades, reveals a state of great excitement. The result is nothing; on the contrary, it is only harmful. We waste an enormous quantity of ammunition, and when we want it, it is gone. Secondly, we damage ourselves in the eyes of the enemy. It has been constantly stated that troops have thrown an enormous quantity of hand grenades because they heard one enemy grenade exploded somewhere. I want this sort of thing stopped. It does us a lot of damage. The men must remain calm and keep their presence of mind. I count on the help of my officers and sergt.-majors. I have got the impression that a few Englishmen throwing grenades from their trenches can thoroughly frighten a crowd of Bavarians. Things must not go on like this. Why always silently acknowledge the superiority of the enemy without any reason?"

"The Artillery Commander has assured me that this state of things cannot continue. Both his ammunition and guns are done for.

"Only Company Commanders may order rapid fire or volleys of hand-grenades. There are plenty of watchful Company Commanders with presence of mind. If troops open rapid fire without orders it shows lack of discipline and despicable cowardice.

"If we put an unnecessary barrage on the enemy's trenches, he retaliates, and therefore we suffer for it.

"Instead of demanding unnecessary barrage, or wasting hand grenades it is much better to do something useful; strengthen our wire entanglements, deepen our trenches, and build strong shell-proof dug-outs for the garrison.

"This state of terror on the Somme front must be dispelled, and calm must take its place."

(Signed) VON HAASY, Lt.-Col.

**Extracts from letters from a man of the 119th R.I.R.**

*8-9-16.* "We have been relieved and are resting at Inchy, near Cambrai. We have had some strenuous days, especially on the 3rd September. The English attacked our 1st and 2nd Battalions and managed to reach the third line; we were sent up to repulse them. Some of the companies of the 1st and 2nd Battalions were practically annihilated. Companies of your regiment turned up too, only after the battle was over."

**153rd Regiment, Battalion Command Post. (Probably Stuff Redoubt.)**

*22-9-16.* "In case of an attack we are not in a position to defend ourselves, much less to attack—the rifles have been dragged through the mud and are useless for shooting, all we have are bayonets and hand grenades, but I think if the "Tommies" came no one would put up a fight, the men would gladly go over to them."

**180th Regiment, Machine Gun Company. (S. of Thiepval.)**

*26-9-16.* "We relieved a Machine Gun crew who had the only entrance to their dug-out knocked in by a shell after a gas bomb had fallen in it. You can't imagine what misery this is. Our Company Commander was gassed and is now in hospital.

"The bombardment has again begun at a rate to make a man dizzy. I think we shall soon have to either get out or be taken by the English."

### Thiepval. (Probably 180th Regiment.)

© 1998 Henry Williamson Society. Henry Williamson Society Journal, 34 (Sept. 1998), 245 in a tight corner. The English now have aerial torpedoes which have a frightful effect."

### From the diary of a man of the 66th Regiment (52nd Division).

"On the night of October 2nd the regiment was relieved (in the Thiepval sector); it has lost 87 officers and 1,400 men. Of the 1st Company only the ration carriers are left.

"In the afternoon we arrived in Achiet-le-Petit. Miraumont, till now untouched, is completely destroyed."

1-10-16. "We have returned to the trenches. What we most feared has happened to us. We are in the trenches near Thiepval. . . . Our company has already suffered heavy losses. We hope we shall soon be leaving this sector. There is no cover in the front line trenches; it would have been better had we never been relieved, for in Beaumont we were alright."

### From a Landsturm man to a man of the 111th R.I.R.

Baden, 8-10-16. "As regards my transfer I suppose nothing will be done. Father got a petition sent in to H.Q., but up to the present nothing has come of it. Only the farmers and the Jews can work that sort of thing, but some day the war will end; it can never go on thus, for I think all people have had enough of leading such a life. The Russians have got a proper dose this week; I think they will soon stop and make peace. If only some stop, so that we have a prospect (of peace). . . . After the war things will be better, I fancy, and there will be enough work."

### From a letter.

20-10-16. "We are again in front of Serre. It is frightful the way the 'Tommies' attack us. We are in a miserable state of mind. I hope I shall be lucky as regards my leave so that my nerves may have a chance to recover."

### To a man of the 121st I.R. from his wife.

23-10-16. "One cannot think any longer of an end to the war. On the contrary we continue to make more enemies. I infer from your letter that you and Hermann are about to desert to the English and meet there. You are right to do so, so that some are left who are not 'kaput.' But how will you be treated there? It is possible that you may receive better treatment than you are getting at present; but one cannot tell. Have you arranged it with Hermann?"

### From a man of "Fl. A. K. Zug 116" (Wurt.) to a N.C.O. of the 120th R.I.R. (Wurt.).

25-10-16. "You write that you are presumably again going into the hell on the Somme. I could have cried when I read that; why must the blood of our brave Suabians always be shed? It is abominable."

3-11-16. "Yes, we still get food, but there could be more of it. For being day and night in the open air gives you an appetite. . . . We are chased round from one bad position to another. At present we are near Thiepval, and what that means you will probably know if you follow the news in the paper. I will say only one thing, that is that we shan't recover our senses if things go on as they are."

### Carpathians.

3-11-16. "You are, I suppose, released from hell now. You know what I mean, don't you? You fellows have now a better time for a few days, but we are out of one hole into another. Here all the guns are banging away. We have changed our position and have got into a God-forsaken one. We are up to our knees in water, snow and filth; and, besides that, every morning shells come over by way of a morning greeting. I really have no taste for the business now.

"I was to have a few days leave, but you know such things hang by a thread, and if that breaks, it's all over. My brother Johann is best off. He went home for ever a few days ago. I should like to do so, too. How about you? And then the Austrians blackguard us and ask us what we have come here for, and say we only want to prolong the war. They are all fools. . . . it would be the same to them even if the Russians had occupied Cracow again. The chief thing for them is that the war should end."

### Bremen.

22-11-16. "Our 2nd Company at the front consists now only of young recruits 18-19 years old. Unfortunately, on September 3rd, in consequence of several English attacks not a man of the 1st Battalion came back.

### Extracts from a letter dated 21-11-16 and written by a man of the 25th Regiment (208th Division) at present in the North of Beaumont:—

"It is impossible to describe how awful it is here. I should not wish my worst enemy in the hell of the Somme. It is said that we must remain here till December 2nd or 3rd; I can't conceive that we could hold out as long as that. If we were only safely out of it: every second is torture—we all feel like that. The mud here is worse than in Galicia, and anyhow, war there is child's play to this."