

Introduction

The following is the diary of Magnus Erd.

He was born on the 5th of March in 1903 in Petersthal/ Allgäu (Allgäu is a German region in the Alps, Bavaria). He died there on the 28th of July in 1996. Magnus Erd kept a diary of his times in the military during World War II, and his time as a Russian prisoner of war. He described his experiences from the late thirties up until 1950.

The original diaries are little booklets, and are now quite worn. During his imprisonment he hid them under his insole. Another prisoner who had been released earlier (in 1949) brought them to Magnus Erd's wife, and at his request she put his notes and his accounts into a more legible form. He didn't write the diaries only for himself, but wanted everyone (especially the members of his family) to read about his experiences.

He intentionally kept an unpolitical attitude and abstained from judging the events too plainly, because the diaries always could have fallen into the hands of those who were in power: at first the German "SS" and then by the Russians and the Czechs.

This objective and rational account reveals the hare-brained machinery of his time. Little by little he had been dragged into military service, then sent all over Europe by hateful people for their own purpose, and later had been forced into hard labour for five years by people he hated. Each system forced further inhumanities on him; each system let him pay for the other.

His writing style follows the spoken German language and sometimes there are dialectal expressions of his native country (Allgäu).

From 1917, Magnus Erd has been a lower level employee of the post office in Petersthal, a village near Kempten. After he married in 1936 he wanted to become a post office official and that is why he had to join the "NSDAP". Employees of the state had already been forced into a military training before the war started.

In war he worked at the field post office, and as prisoner of war primarily in a Czech uranium mine. There he had to mine the raw material for the Russian atomic bomb. His family (wife and two children) didn't know for a long time if or how he survived the war. Those times without him they managed to get through with a little farming, two cows and a potato field. Although he always has been one of the eldest he was the last of his village to return home from captivity, and later he survived all of his former comrades.

My times in the military, the war and in captivity

On the 7.1.1937 (6 weeks after my marriage) I reported to Munich for eight weeks of military service. I was drafted into the Signals Division in the Lazarettstraße as a "Junker". The service was hard, I came home sick on March 30th.

On the 11.3.1938 I was sent for by the postal service. I was to report to the I.R.91 Signals Regiment at Kempten. My wife, mother and Phillip cried. It was mobilisation: destination Austria. On the 13th we were dispatched by train. There was much equipment and many horses with us. We travelled over Munich in the direction of Austria. On Monday the 14th, after a 27 hour long journey, we were unloaded in Vienna. The quarters were in a secondary modern school. We were to sleep on straw. In Vienna we were joyfully greeted and rejoiced over. In the mornings we were on duty (public works in the "Prater"). Afternoons were our own. I was often invited as a guest to the home of a registered-mail carrier. I saw the sights of Vienna, and passed many pleasant hours there. On the 30.3.1938 we again approached our home-country. In Petershal 24 men were called-up, I was the only one in Vienna. It had been a peaceful campaign. During my absence my wife had done service at the post office.

The 1.9.1939 was mobilisation. It began with the war with Poland. On the 8.9.1939 I had to report to Dietmansried (Gasthof Ochsen). On the 11.9.1939 we travelled by train to Oberammergau. Here we came to the mountain signal barracks. First Signal Company 15. Things were good for me in Oberammergau, and I was sometimes allowed to travel home for a Sunday holiday. As on the 2.12. I came home just at the right time to be present at the death of my mother. On the 6.1.1940 I was again discharged. My wife and Phillip picked me up in Reute. I was placed on "U.K." until further notice.

At the beginning of April 1942 my "U.K." designation was lifted. I made an application that I may do my war service in the army postal service. It was approved and I was found healthy by the army postal service's doctor. At home after a severe winter with many snow I've gone through a lot of strain doing the post office. On the 18th April I reported for duty to Munich, where until the 28.4. I lived in the Max II barracks (First Motorised Division 7). On taking up service I was, to my great consternation, informed that I would be classified under the SS division "das Reich" (Field Post Office). Shivers went down my spine. I was ordered to report to the central post office in Brest am Bug. With 10 days provisions and much equipment I departed at 5.30 in the morning (completely alone) in the direction of Berlin, where I subsequently arrived at 4 o'clock. With the underground railway I travelled to my departure station. After a several hour long halt I travelled further during the night. In Brest am Bug I reported to the central post office. Here I was informed of the end

destination of my journey. My unit was in Rheschef on the Volga 150km before Moscow. On the 1st May I travelled further with a station post van. The 2.5. I arrived in Minsk, where I already saw much war suffering. On the 3.5. I left for Smolensk. On the journey the line was blown up by partisans. Day and night we travelled through woods and savannah. We travelled further to Wyasma . On the 6.5. at 12 o'clock midday, there was a muffled bang: our train had run over a mine. Goods-wagons lay next to the tracks. Luckily no one was hurt. On the 7.5. I reached Rheschef. It is a large town. Dirt, misery, hunger and Typhoid were there. The front was 12km away. In the town were 32 field post-offices. After a long search I found the SS field post office "das Reich". It was on our side of the Volga. The bridge had been bombed. One could only reach the other side with a raft. The field post office was accommodated in a well-kept house (previously a German had lived there). At night we were always plagued by flies. From time to time it was shot at by the artillery from the town. We didn't have a single intact window. Roughly 70 bags of post would arrive, which we would have to fetch from the station 5km away, and then process. The day was long: it became light at 4 in the morning and got dark at 11. As an experienced swimmer I examined the Volga closely and was seized by the desire to swim. So, on the 1st and 2nd of June I swam across twice, there and back. The river was roughly 100m wide. In town it was uncomfortable. A direct hit on a military hospital, and 4 houses burnt down. I went to the orthodox church in Whitsun. The inhabitants were very hungry. In our office were now only 6 men. The division had already been transferred to Germany. Only one regiment now remained. We were also due to follow in the near future. On the 9th June it was time. We travelled over Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, East-Prussia, Berlin and Hannover to Fallingbostal. Here our unit intended to refresh itself. Our entire field post office consisted of 21 men, amongst them some Allgäuer, Wilhelm Fischerer, Immenstadt and so on. There was also a volunteer from Lichenstein, Franz Büchel. Together we visited the grave of Hermann Löns in the Lüneburger Heide. On the 7.7. I was allowed to go on holiday. At 18.30 I was in Zollhaus where I was joyously greeted by my wife, Phillipp and Annemarie. I helped at home for two days at the haymaking in the wheatfields. One night I dreamt that I must go back immediately. In the morning I thought, what madness. I had another 4 days holiday until the 23.7. Then a telegram actually came, that I must return immediately. On the 23.7. Departure from Fallingbostal for France. We came to the magnificent city of Le Mans. Our office was accommodated in a school. I myself had splendid private quarters. France had magnificent churches with beautiful stained glass. I often visited the many churches, although it was not approved of by the authorities. On the 7.8. I received from Kempten the document of issue as post office official. One week later we came to Laval. On the 19.8. came the alarm. The English had landed in Dieppe. Things would soon be settled. We received inoculations against dysentery. At the post office, at that time, we had much work. I was busy with stamping and sorting. We again moved to Vire. On the 30.10. I arrived at a small branch office in a village by the name of Guibon 20km away from the Channel. We were billeted in a parochial house. Our offices and living quarters were at Father Pikart's. We were only two soldiers in the whole place and had much freetime. I made myself useful by chopping firewood for the Priest. He himself was a very nice man. After 10 days we again had to take our leave. He had given us much and cried as we left. 8.12, our next destination was the city Rennes. Here we worked in a large, French post office. After that we set up our field post office in a vocational school. 16.12.1942. Then began the Christmas rush. That day 500 bags of post arrived, and we had to grind. The food at that time was not good. Christmas had already been celebrated. 31.12. On that day came the news that next we would be going to Russia. A bitter end to the year.

January 1943

On the 16.1. we loaded our entire field post establishment including our 2 buses, 2 vans, 1 station wagon and 1 private car (belonging to our boss) into the train. Our complete division rolled on towards Russia. 17.1. descent over Tours, Troar, Charmont, Vogesen, Saarburg, Schweinfurt, Kulmbach, Hof, Chemnitz, Dresden, Görlitz over the Riesengebirge, through the Silesian colliary district. Here the snow was black. On the 21.1. in extreme cold we came to Poland: Kattowitz, Lemberg, and over the Romanian border. 24.1. 1 o'clock at night in the extreme cold we were all unloaded onto the open tracks. The journey continued by car towards Charkow, where we arrived after 3 days. Our lodgings were in a large school. Here the stove broke, we were all almost asphyxiated. Frightening air raid warnings, the front was very close there. After a few days we learned that we were surrounded by Russians. 9.2. The postal service there and back is suspended. We travelled at dead of night back to Poltawa. Around there was strong resistance fighting. 18.2. Inoculations against typhus. Our troops began a large out-flanking maneuver. Three divisions were deployed: the "SS-Leibstandarte", "Totenkopf" and our division "das Reich". We were pursued through large and small towns and villages. We didn't stay anywhere for longer than three days. Mostly we travelled further during the

night. On the 23.2. our division was blocked 300km to the South. We travelled by car through wet and mud and consequently got stuck. With much effort we made it further to Kremenschuck and Dnjepopetrowsk. The latter was a large industry and mining town. Three or four men from our post office were in the vicinity of the front. The others were further back, so that the troops could bring or pick up post. On the 1.3. I went with 6 comrades into the small town of Nowomoskowsk. As punishment, because partisans had made much trouble, the town had been heavily bombed. After 2 days we left with the departing post. I was the passenger of Hans Rasch. We got stuck in the mud. The radiator of our car was broken, so that we had to be towed back to Nowomoskowsk post office by a land vehicle. 5.3. In Krasnograd we celebrated my 40th birthday. Our encircling maneuver made good progress. Kustermann, Strobl and I were again sent to advanced positions. On the journey we were again halted by messengers. In Waluiki and the surrounding area there were still Russian fighting troops. A cannon with 4 dead horses lay next to the path. The dead lay around here like stones. A terrible scene. We travelled back again, our advanced mission was now Lupotin (a suburb of Charkow). We lived in a small, nice cottage. For 15 to 20km the floors would shake when Stukas bombed Charkow. At the post office we had it hard. On the 18.3. we left Charkow and we worked again in the school where we had previously been. I shared my quarters with some old people. 20.4. I received the "Kriegsverdienstabzeichen mit Schwertern" [a military decoration] . On the 28.4. from the post office at Kempten I received a promotion to post office manager. I was now Feldwebel rank (Oberscharführer). It was spring. On the 25.5.1943 I received the news, that I may go on holiday. On the 28.5. I was allowed to leave, accompanied by field postmaster Wock (my boss). Poltawa, Kiev, Poland, Prague, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Kempten. At 18.30 I arrived at Zollhaus where my wife together with children picked me up. It rained throughout the whole holiday. I was only able to make hay on the last two days. We had fetched in the entire hillside. On the 22.6. I again took my leave from home. Phillip cried terribly when I left from Zollhaus. In 5 days (going the same way back) I was again in Charkow. After a stay of 3 fairly quiet months I set off for Udi. Here we lived in a school. The Germans were leading a large, new attack . Day and night tanks drove through the town. We drew back and lived in camps in the woods. I lived with a comrade Fischer in a small tent. One night, after terrible attacks, came bad weather with downpours of rain. The next day was a gorgeous Sunday, fewer attacks. The company commander Menzinger told me that in a village 5km away were military church services. I didn't want to believe it, but I went anyway, so that I could be away for a while. However it was in no way a church service. They only wanted to tease me because of my religion. On the way back (it was terribly hot) I got lost for six hours in the woods. In the night I got back to my troop, completely wasted from the heat. I had a bad row with Menzinger. I scolded him because it could even have cost me my life. 19.7. Return again to Charkow. The whole division was transferred 400km away to the south. Hefele and I had to stay behind for two further days, to bring the rest of the arriving post. On the 25.7. we loaded hundreds of postsacks into the postbus. It was stuffed full. After a several hour long journey came a big hindrance. Our vehicle stood up to its axles in mud. One of the armoured patrol cars pulled us back out of it. On the runway everything went well again until after a bang. We stopped and saw that the doors had been blown open. Our heavy load had fallen out the back. The sacks were spread over about 100m. Again we collected everything together. I now had to sit between the sacks, and we travelled on further. On the bumpy streets I often hit my head on the roof of the bus. At a maintenance service detachment our vehicle was again repaired. Our night-quarters were under the bus. And again we travelled on further. After 2 punctures we arrived late on the 27.7. in Chanschinkowo. In the night we couldn't find our troop and we remained near the town beside the street. At night there was a big Russian air-raid on the station. We took cover under the car and we escaped unscathed/unhurt. We did 450 km and in the morning of the 28.7. we again found our troop. After the next removal we came to Stalino (Korowasa). We set up our post office in the open air under about 100 cherry trees. Now came word we should return to the Reich and then later go to Italy. On the 8.8. we were loaded onto the train together with our vehicles. After 10km our train had to return, as the railway line was under enemy artillery fire. We were again unloaded onto the open tracks. Extreme heat, dust, the streets full of deserters, also thunderstorms and rain downpours were the order of the day. The Russians were now always in front of us, we had to retreat. With everything things got rapidly worse. There was often danger from paratroopers. Most of the time we had to stay in the woods. Without a break we retreated towards the Dnjepr bridge by Kremenschuk. The streets were blocked with thousands of vehicles. It took us 48 hours to travel 4km. The bridge was about 800-1000m long. Before the crossing I crawled into a large haystack to sleep. We were startled by a terrible bang as the munitions depot exploded. On the 23.9. we finally made it over the bridge. We entered a lovely village on a lake (Woroschiloka). It was a lovely autumn day. Here it was quiet, however according to the news the Russians would also soon be over the Dnjepr. 5.10.43 Departure for Ljubjanka 100km away. We lived and worked in a school. It was quiet and the weather

was nice. 28.10. On that day our school was struck by fire from an aeroplane known as the "sewing machine". The windows were broken and the vehicles damaged. The weather was foggy and cold. 2.11. Today immunization against Cholera. We were again moved to a different village and lived in a school. The inhabitants were very nice. Then came a sad order. All the men of the village from 16-65 years had to leave the village within 1 hour. They were loaded into cars and sent to the next town. Perhaps they were sent as workers to Germany. There were heart-wrenching scenes at this awful farewell. The women cried out. War is terrible. 9.11. 1943. Today the inhabitants had to hand over the livestock as well. On the 10.11. Departure for Osyrna. We had to deliver with one of our cars about 50 hundred weight of sausages. I had to sit with the sausages in the back of the car. As Strobl (the driver) opened the car door, I was just having a snack and was eating Allgäuer cheese. I was laughed at as if I was a real idiot. 25.11. departure for Schitomir. 30.11. to Troya. It was cold and we had much work (Christmas post). 20.12. We were processing everyday about 200 sacks of post. Our food was good and plentiful. My comrade Apostel and I let the children in the village gather together and made them a present of groceries. We celebrated Christmas, but Russia left us no peace. On the 29.12. withdrawal over bad, icy streets and through partisan controlled woods, we came to a bombed river bridge. With a big diversion we made it to Polonje. Büchel Franz and I lived with nice people, who at night slept on the stove. At midnight they cried out, you can hear the Russians shooting. However it was Germans, who were firing to celebrate the new year.

1.1.1944 that same night we travelled further through ice and snow 100km back to Tscherilovka. 7.1. Today the inhabitants, irrespective of the date, celebrated Christmas. According to their custom they made their own Schnaps. It was wretched however. 9.1. Today I went with Spiegler to Pari-Konstantino. On the runway all was blocked/jammed by the "Leibstandarte". 11.1. Again we drove 80km to Kloskuro. We had to deliver winter clothes. 13.1. Today we travelled with 7 men 70km to an advanced position at Mitschibotsch. It was a pretty little town with 2 churches and castle ruins. 22.1. Today again travelled 30km further in the direction of the front to a nice village (Baben). We had not yet unpacked when a Russian plane (Rata) appeared and shot from all cylinders. A woman and an 11-year old girl were killed. The bodies were wrapped in clothes and carried in open coffins to their graves. There was beautiful singing. My comrade Fidler and I lived with an old woman. I made her a present of a sewing needle. On the next day I could have used 50. Every woman in the town wanted one. Wet weather arrived and all the vehicles were stuck. On Sunday I visited the orthodox church, where I was repulsed by the corn meal. On the 7.2. we were picked up by a tractor. The bus had a broken axle. We got important news: our division had arrived in southern France. We now travelled 180km by car to Poland (Galizien) Sborow. It was winter weather with heavy snowstorms. We were busy with shovelling snow and waited for the railway carriage that would take our 17 men to France. On the 25.2.44 we were loaded on. On 26.2. at four o'clock was our departure. The journey went over Lemberg, Krakau. On the 29.2. we reached the German border. We stayed a few days in Deutsch Wette, because the station was blocked. On the 3.3. we arrived in Prague. Then we travelled over Pilsen, Annaberg, Nuremberg, over Heilbronn, Heidelberg (a very romantic area), towards the French border. Mannheim looked bad, heavily bombed and ravaged. On the 7.3. we arrived in France. We travelled over Orleans and arrived on Sunday the 12th in Langon near in Bordeaux. Here the trees were in blossom, it was beautiful warm spring weather. The difference in the climates did our health a lot of harm. Our post office set itself up in a hotel. We had much work. Many of my comrades revived themselves with good wine. On the 30th March 1944 I was allowed to go on holiday. On the 31.3. I arrived in the evening at Augsburg, where I slept in the soldiers home. Augsburg looked terribly ravaged. 3/4 of the town was destroyed. On the next day (Palm Sunday) I visited the church service in Kempten. With the midday train I travelled to Zollhaus. Here again was deep snow. Georg Notz picked me up with the horse sleigh. I arrived home at half past two. I should no doubt have telephoned home, but the homecoming was supposed to be a surprise. It was one as well. On holiday I chopped wood and repaired the fence. I received a telegram that I must not return to Langon but to Montauban.

On the 22.4.44 my wife and children accompanied me to Kempten. With heavy heart I said my farewells at the station. I had the misgiving that I would not be able to celebrate seeing them again for a long time. However that it would take 6 years I did not suspect. Annemarie remembered for a long time the final wave with the handkerchief. I stayed overnight in Ulm. Over Mühlhausen I travelled back in glorious weather to my unit. Montauban, 30000 inhabitants, 5 churches, lying on the Garonne. On the 14th May I swam across the river. In France the air attacks increased yet our town remained spared. On the 6.6. the English and the Americans invaded. They landed in northern France. After 7 days our division travelled to the battlefield in Normandy. The journey took 5 days. We couldn't travel by night, and by day we could not allow ourselves

to be seen because of the air attacks. Every 100m lay a burnt out car. Our field post office could only find quarters in the woods. Even the letters had to be camouflaged. Every man had to build his own air raid shelter. The woods in which we were working at that time were around Vire in Normandy. In the woods it was no longer safe. The "VII Waffe" were being shot at. It was a weapon with which the Germans had bombed England.

An enemy bomb was dropped 200m away from us. Four people were killed, six injured, and a few French peasants' cattle lay around. The whole woodland glade looked like a battlefield. Day and night we had no peace. The post collector could now only collect the post at night.

1.8.1944 we again retreated 70km to another wood near Mayenne. Now we were steadily retreating. We had now set up our quarters in the wood of a château. Towards midnight 2 French peasants, who had hidden secret weapons, were lead by the military police through our wood. I saw how close to us in a gravel pit they were shot. It was a very sad thing.

On a somewhat quiet evening I took a small walk with my comrade Phillip Schied. We climbed a small hill, to get a better view. My comrade clambered up a tree, although I warned him. And, oh horror, soon came an enemy aircraft ("Jagdbomber"). He pressed himself tightly against the tree, so as not to be seen. Otherwise he would have been lost. I hid myself between the rocks. It must be said we had luck with our adventure.

12.8. We had worked hard throughout the night. One could hear constant cannon thunder. Suddenly it became quiet. Our postwagon was supposed take out the post, but after 1/2 hour it came back. The first Americans were already 2km away. The alarm was sounded. We had to leave as quickly as possible. The French people stood there with bunches of flowers to welcome the Americans. I sat on the bonnet of the vehicle, to watch the terrible enemy aircraft. Everywhere were burning cars on the streets. It was good that there was so much undergrowth, because we often had to hide ourselves again. I lay for 1/2 hour in an air raid shelter. When it was somewhat quieter I crept out. Then what horror, I could no longer find our car. There was nothing else but for me to continue by foot. However, this was no small matter. Finally I took another military car. After 1000m I saw our post van hidden beneath the undergrowth. Late at night we arrived at our lodgings, a hayrick. Sunday 13.8. The whole day we stayed in the hay shed. Everywhere aircraft and bombs exploding. So it went on from morning to night, no sign of life. In the night we again retreated about 60km. A large motor vehicle depot was once again our quarters. On the 16.8. in the evening again a retreat of 150km. After a puncture that we had to repair in the dark, we arrived in Paris at 7 in the morning. We immediately went on further to a wood of a château. In the evening we went further 80km north-east of Paris. We again stopped over in a vehicle depot, where we also worked. 24.8. Rainy weather again today. We travelled with 7 men to a forward position and found ourselves between Rouen and Amiens. We often had tyre punctures, as the terrorists had spread nails and so on. We were always retreating. On the 31.8. we crossed the Belgian border. Our field post office now had its quarters in a beautiful castle 15km from Lüttich. On the 3.9. With 5 men again we travelled 35km towards the front. However, we soon retreated again. The enemy attacked Lüttich, so that our castle quarters shook. On the 8.9. we retreated over the western ramparts. We were now south-east of Aachen in a small village (Einruhr). The front was somewhat impeded. There at the western ramparts the Germans put up a stand. 9.9. Again retreat as far as Holzmühleim. After 2-1/2 months I again slept in a bed. I noticed that I now had lice, but I soon got rid of them. At that time at the post office we had little work. A few comrades and I were sent to help with the harvesting. I had to cut clover, fetch in the corn, sythe, even help with the cow calving. On the 15.9. I dug potatoes with my comrade Fidler. On Sunday the 19th we took up position in the high-lying village in the Eifel Nohn with quarters at Ahrweiler. For a long time now no post had arrived. It was somewhat quieter, and we could now pick ourselves up. At the beginning of October I was at the food office and worked like a navy whilst my housekeeper Frau Schend was busy with the harvest. Foot and mouth disease reigned there. I took a walk with my comrade Fischer over a small hill. The sky was overcast and it was raining lightly. The aircraft couldn't do much when it was like that. A train with two locomotive engines laden with war materials travelled through the nearby valley. The sky brightened and a few aircraft were already there. They shot at the train so that one carriage after another exploded. 29.10. Left the Eifel-village where I had enjoyed living, for the small town of Mayen. The town had been bombed two hours earlier. We were loaded into the train. The journey took us over Andernach, Koblenz, over the Rhein after Limburg and Marburg. 31.10. We travelled throughout the night and were unloaded in Brilon. It is a pretty small town. I lived at a Mrs Dimala's. Her husband was imprisoned in Russia. She had one 4 year old child.

10.11.1944 Our field post office found itself in a nunnery. Until the 19.11. we were in Brilon. On the 18th we were loaded into trains. We arrived on Sunday morning in Neuss near to Köln. Whilst getting off an iron

loading ramp fell on one of my feet. We set up our post office in a guesthouse at the station in Kapellen near Köln. My quarters were with very good people (in a dairy). Here I made a poultice for my crushed toe. There raged lively air-fire. In the house was an air-raid shelter, that we were often forced to use. Very close by a large farmstead was hit by a bomb. There were 4 dead. From home came the bad news that my son Phillip had broken a foot. He had slipped, as he was happily hurrying home with 2 letters from me (behind Notze's barn).

9.12.1944. Today made 25 years that I had worked at the German Reichspost. I received a good bottle of wine from the people at home. At this time the weather was always bad. We were pleased, because the aircraft activity was quieter. 17.12. at night, at a quarter past 12. we leave Kapellen. I sat at the front on the radiator. We had to travel in the cold and dark until 10 o'clock in the morning when we arrived in Mechernich. The Germans were leading a big offensive, however it achieved nothing. The woods were full of tanks. Bombing and low-level attacks raged terribly. Today I saw the "VI" flying on England. 19.12. Constant low level attacks on the streets. It was bad. There was an old leadworks, that was being used as an air-raid shelter. Many women and children hardly went out anymore. For fourteen days I had received no post from home.

21.12.44. Today at midday we left Mechernich. Moved our headquarters into the village [of] Antweiler (Eifel) in a guesthouse. I lived privately with a family (Krest) with 5 children. The people were very charming. Euskirchen was 6km away. On Christmas Eve we saw from our quarters 6 English bombers attacking Euskirchen. One was shot down by our "Flak" [Anti aircraft artillery] on the return flight. Cloudy weather with snow flurries. Fighting groups flew in and out. There was a constant roar. We were not for an hour certain when our village would be destroyed.

1945

January passed fairly quietly, apart from heavy aircraft activity. Every Sunday at 6 o'clock I went to holy mass. Whilst collecting the post in Euskirchen we fell into a bomb-crater. With a big effort we eventually made it out again. The town is a complete shambles. The inhabitants could only see misery and on top of that it was winter. Sunday 14.1. In Antweiler I went to confession. 20. and 21.1. The weather improved and consequently there was heavy aircraft-activity. A petrol container was hit. It blazed brightly. One hardly saw German aircraft anymore. From southern Germany came very little post. 29.1. I went along to fetch the coal from Köln-Brühl. It was interesting to see how the coals moved along on the conveyorbelt. 30.1. We had to make ourselves ready to march to the East. 1.2. Left Antweiler, which for us had become home, at 6 o'clock in the evening. My comrade Franz Büchel from Lichenstein, and I, sat at the back of the bus on a box. We travelled through Koblenz now 80% destroyed. We travelled through a bomb crater, I was flung out. I suffered bruises to my knee joint and a strained finger. Now we travelled over the Rhein. Many bridges were destroyed. We arrived at half past two at night in Melzbach near Neuwied, where we set up quarters and had to wait for our departure by train. In Bad Kreuznach the whole division was loaded in. On 7.2.45 came the departure for the East. The weather was rainy. We travelled through Limburg, Frankfurt, Augsburg, Salzburg, Wien and further on to Hungary. I suffered an injury to my hand caused by the heavy pushing in the railway carriage. On 11.2. we were unloaded in Komerun and travelled further by car to the city Győr. Our field post office was set up on the edge of town. 28.2. Things went orderly for us, and the post was collected in Wien. The inhabitants were friendly, there were no partisans. However, enemy aircraft activity was greatly increased. 5.3. Weather still cold and unfriendly. On the 10.3. we moved roughly 100km by car to Balatonvire on the Plattensee. Our headquarters were in a bank. On 14.3.-15.3. we travelled by car towards the front to the other side of the Plattensee, to collect peas and potatoes. 21.3. We departed from there and travelled about 100km sideways. The journey progressed with the customary toil. The streets were all blocked. 22.3. Today in the morning our goal was Dorf Monsontzentinkla on the Hungarian-Austrian border. It was beautiful, early spring weather. 26.3.45. Left for Winden a small village on the Neusiedler See in lower Austria. We were billeted in the school. The inhabitants of the town were asked to leave, as it was feared that the Russians would soon come. A few left, the others stayed. Everyone was not thinking straight, especially the women with children. They didn't want to leave their homes. Yesterday was an alarm, level 3. On the main street were lines of refugees and motorized units. Everything was retreating.

1 April, Easter 1945

At this time we found ourselves in Deutsch-Wagram near Wien. 5.4. We left Wien again for Sitzenberg near St. Pölten. It was Spring and the situation was serious. 7.4. Today we again left Sitzenberg for Gföhl near Krems. The remainder of the Hungarian army was disarmed. We were accommodated in a large guesthouse (Brinz). The lines of refugees did not stop coming all day. 9.4. Today in the evening 8 men, amongst them myself, left by car for a safe haven on the Donau. 11.4. We lay 250m from the beautiful blue Donau with an MG for every two men. Everyone had dug a hole and lay in the open air. The cannon thunder moved ever closer, but suddenly was silent. It seemed the Russians had taken a different route. 12.4. Now we retreated again to the "F.A." in Gföhl. We hardly had any more work for the post office. The streams of refugees had died down. The war was nearing its end.

In our guesthouse quarters we helped roll 500 large wine casks in the cellar. The landlord said we should rest for a while and then sample them ourselves. 26.4. Today we again set off traveling through Linz, then St. Thomas near Ried (Innkreis). On this journey we saw a line of about 2000 Jews being driven like cattle. It was terrible to see. I threw them a piece of bread out of the car, but they were not allowed to pick it up. We said to each other that it would soon be the same for us. Thus it came soon indeed. We heard on the radio that Memmingen and Kempten had been captured by the Americans. Now I had worries about my home, wife and children. We still wanted to collect the post from Passau, but none came, the entire connection was destroyed. An order informed us, that anyone who deserted their unit would be hanged. I had already seen some others hanged. Naturally this scared us off. 28.4. Today we set off for Iglan 100km away. I sat in the back of the "L.K." maintenance truck. It went into a deep ditch and tumbled over. I was covered by our fallen inventory. I had to be set free again. Apart from a few grazes I was alright. 29.4. We were loaded into the train and on the 1st May unloaded in Arnsdorf (Sachsen). We were billeted in a small town Langebrück 12km from Dresden. Here we learned that Hitler was dead. I couldn't write home anymore. The enemy was in the Allgäu. 6.5. Moved up to Böhmisch Kamnitz near Bodenbach. It was our last station.

6.5.45 We had ceased operations at the post office, because no post arrived and none left. 9.5. Germany had surrendered, finally we were freed from Hitler's yoke. We were commanded to throw the entire post onto a pile and set light to it. 10.5. We travelled to Karlsbad to meet the Americans. We stood in long columns on the streets. In Karlsbad the Czechs took our weapons from us. Many thousand soldiers, civilians and wounded crowded the length of the streets. Everyone was being disarmed. Pieces of uniform, boxes and crates with valuable things lay around. It was the end. We reported to the American tank division, only 2km away were the Russians. Everyone ran to the Americans. 11.5. We came to a large open-air camp. Luckily we still had our vehicles. We stood on a hill near Schlaggenwalde. We should go to Germany. I sat in the second to last car. Our car stopped and wouldn't start up again, so that we became separated from the leading cars. Six men: Menzinger, Voß, Ernst, Deutschenbauer, Strobl and I stayed behind. Our other comrades were at the top of the hill. Bender came back down the hill to collect bread from us. When he got back to the top the others had already left for the Reich. He now had to stay with us. My comrade Büchel from Liechtenstein had a civilian suit and a Swiss passport. He took his leave and wanted to travel home by foot, which he also achieved. I would have liked to go with him, but without a passport it was no longer feasible. There was no food, but we still had some in reserve. The camp held about 15000 people, including women and children. The Americans had too many, and the Russians too few, prisoners. The houses of the Sudetenland, like our car, were hung with white flags - the symbol of surrender. 13.5. Today came the news that we would be handed over to the Russians. It meant that it made no difference if one was with the Americans or the Russians as with either one we would be taken home. 14.5. We left, traveling over Karlsbad, while we took with us many impressions. Women stood in front of doors crying. The Russians learnt to ride bicycles, wrist watches were taken away. I tore my army pay-book into small pieces with my teeth, so that no-one would know my unit. We marched by foot to a Russian camp 5km before Teplitz-Schönau. The most important things we could take with us in a rucksack. The gutters were full of things that had been thrown away because of fatigue, heat, hunger and thirst. From the field post office we were now only four men: Ernst, Bender, Voß and I. Our driver stayed with the cars. Several thousand were now in the open air camp. Rations, for the time being, were sufficient: 600g bread, 1 litre soup, 25g sugar and 30g canned provisions. Our hair was cut very short. We were organized in groups of 100. We were now moved to a barracks. I lived in the corridor on a chest. I slept a lot, others played cards, read or dished out good and bad slogans.

27.5.45. I lived at the loft and looked longingly towards the west. On the streets one could watch the prisoners marching past for an hour. 9.6. Today in the evening we marched with about 3000 men towards Dresden. The weather was good. On the 70km long march we got absolutely nothing to eat. Only the

villagers would occasionally throw us something, but what was that between so many? Whoever could no longer march they wanted to shoot. For three days we had to camp in a meadow until we were allowed into the camp. Shots were often fired over our heads so that no-one rebelled. There was still nothing to eat. 13.6. We were admitted into the large camp. First everything was taken from us, money, watches, knives and everything of value, including our shoes, in case anything was hidden in them. If anything was then found it was a beating. The money was stored in a laundry basket. In the cover of my water bottle I also hid a little money away. My wedding ring was collected in a cream tin. Both watches that I had with me, by a wonder, I managed to keep hold of. The camp held about 20000 men. Now began the constant hunger. Nothing is safe, everything was being stolen. My wrist watch I rolled up in a ball of wool but unfortunately I was observed by my fellow prisoners. When I once wanted to swap it for bread, I could hardly believe it, instead of the watch there was a stone rolled up. It had been stolen. We were now getting only 500g of bread and 1 litre of thin soup daily. I met a fellow countryman from Immenstadt, Josef Hagspiel, a farmer in Rothenfels.

July 1945. We had no work other than digging holes for toilets. About 50 Allgäuer met up everyday under a tree. Some maintained that we would soon be home, others that we would never again see our home-country. Many were so besides themselves from hunger and sickness that they could no longer walk. 9.7. I had diarrhea from dysentery and reported to the medic. He said that I must wait a few days to be admitted to the military hospital because it was so overcrowded. The latest gossip was that we would all be going home within the next few days. I asked the medic what would happen to those in the hospital. He was of the opinion that the sick would stay behind. So I refused to be admitted and acted as if I was healthy. However, just the opposite was to happen. After 5 years I learned that everyone who had been in the hospital had been released. 29.7. Now came a thorough examination. Groups of 100 men had to bound naked past a Russian medical officer. Only a few were released on the ground that they were too wretched. 1000 men, amongst them also myself, were first to go to a labour camp near Stettin for 2 months and would then be released. We believed this and had hope. We left the camp. In the open air in a cornfield stood a train. There were 50 men to carriage. We were tightly crammed together. A little bread and a vat of cabbage soup for every carriage was all we had. It was just how we fed the pigs at home. Going to the lavatory was your own problem. 1.8. Arrived in Stettin and set up quarters in the barracks. Water and light were broken. I was now separated from my comrades from the field post office. We were busy tidying up. 5.8. Today we happened to march past a slain comrade. We listened to a speech: the same thing will happen to you as him if you try to escape. At that time instead of bread we got only dog biscuits. 11.8. Today I was busy the whole day (16 hours) rushing around gathering the material to build a bread oven. 12.8. I worked the whole day, until 10 o'clock in the evening, as a workman building the oven. 14.8. Today for the first time we worked through the night loading a ship in the harbour from Stettin.

16.8. Worked in a big warehouse without a break from 11 o'clock until 8 o'clock loading heavy crates onto the 3000 ton steamboat with a floating crane. 22.8. Shovelling coal onto the ship. I was constantly hungry. I received white overalls with a blue stripe so that it would be easy to distinguish the prisoners. I worked with my comrade Hagspiel, always on the ship. 1.9. The whole week from 5 o'clock in the evenings until 12 o'clock loading the ship "Waldai". Today my bread pouch containing 5 apples and 1 piece of bread, which I had swapped for my gloves, was stolen. It was a heavy loss, when one had such hunger. 8.9. I got heavy diarrhea. Much hunger, ill, working on the crane demolition in the free port. 20.9. Reported sick because of a tonsil infection which took a turn for the worse. 26.9. I was out of service, bed-ridden. It had spread to my left eye which was completely swollen shut. 28.9. Slowly my eye got better. I still had a fever of 38.5 C.

5.10.45. Still ill. My eye had gotten worse and I was in the sick bay. 8.10. Today I arrived in a large hospital camp in Kreckow. My eye was bad, it was painful and my vision was affected. The food was better here. 18.10. It got better slowly, and today I went to the convalescence company where I bumped into my comrade Bender from "F.P.". 21.10. Today was a Sunday church festival, a day full of memories. I had to dig earth for 2 hours. 23.10. Today I arrived back at the work company and took up quarters again. Here I had to clean and carry bricks. I was very home-sick at this time. 7.11. Today was a holiday the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the founding of the Soviet Union. For the first time we were allowed to write home. These cards we found later in the attic, as it was just a trick. 13.11. In the evening we marched with 150 men to the port and were loaded into a cargo ship. We stood for half the night in the cold. We were hungry as we waited to leave for Swinemünde. It was an open barge, which was attached to a steamer. We travelled through the Stettiner harbour. On the way we saw a German half-sunk air-craft carrier showing above the water. 14.11. At 10 o'clock at night we arrived in Swinemünde. We should have been quartered for the night in a house but it was already full. I slept with a damp blanket on a stone pavement. Our work at this time was heavy.

19.11. Everyday we loaded ships from 12 midday to 12 midnight. Often it was 14 hours. It is cold, there is too little to eat, and we are covered with lice.

6.12. I found myself in the military hospital, heavy diarrhea. I was taken in completely naked, with only a wool blanket to cover myself. After being discharged I was sicker than before. I had to now complete 6 days garrison duty. Mostly spent the whole night potato peeling in the cellar. 17.12. Again working on the ships. Mostly loading railway tracks. The Russians had dismantled the double-track railway lines in the east zone, loaded them up, and sent them to Russia. It was heavy work, it had broken many bones. 20.12. Today, on the edge of the town, we dismantled a tiled oven that was also to be sent to Russia. In the evening, more inoculations. My ring, rosary and pocket watch were stolen by German comrades. On Christmas Day we were loaded onto a ship. Had no Christmas, no presents, no better food. Also no news from home. It was sad. Always had a boil. 500g bad bread, 18g sugar, 1/2 litre soup and 1/2 litre sliced-turnip soup and black coffee were our rations.

1946. Work had somewhat slacked off, as fewer ships were arriving. It is very cold and there is snow. We were directly on the Baltic Sea and heard the roar of the waves. 14.1. We had to march an hour to work. I had such terrible hunger that I prayed during the walk for God's help, that my hunger would be stilled. I was detailed with 2 other men to sort potatoes in a camp. We received potatoes and soup so that we were completely full. 15.1. We chopped wood for a Russian officer and again we received a large pot of soup.

20.1. Again we spent 12 hours loading railway tracks. 3.2. Today, Sunday, shoveling coal for a Finnish steamer. I refused to steal a radio on the ship for the Russian guards. 17.2. Sunday morning 200 men had to straighten up a large Russian military hospital (it had been a German hospital) situated in a beautiful park. The whole place was covered with things lying around: needles, bicycles etc. The regulator and furniture we had to throw in a little ravine. But several things we kept to ourselves. My rosary is such a keepsake. 20.2. Again we've been searched very thoroughly. From me they took nearly everything away. I didn't even have a knife and a fork. I ground the handle of a spoon to cut my bread. 25.2. Now I only weigh 57kg. I have boils and I have to take cod-liver oil.

10.3. Today is Shrove Sunday. Worked late shift in the engine room of the ship "Pawlowsk". A Russian machinist noticed my trousers, which didn't look too bad. He proposed to give me his trousers plus bread, sugar and soup for my trousers. Because I was hungry I agreed to this exchange. 20.3. It's gradually getting warmer now. 22.3.46 Today I received the first letter from home. I was very glad. I didn't have any news from home for 2 years. The letter indirectly came to me. A friend, a Saxon telephone engineer, forwarded it. The letters had been collected at Heringsdorf. I really wished to answer the letter, but I neither had paper or a pencil nor money to pay for the postage. I was at great pains to bring over a scrap of paper. A good civilian, a woman, took my letter secretly and payed for the postage. Two months later the letter arrived at home (in May).

8.4. I was ordered off to the "Preussischer Hof" (formerly it had been a hotel visited by German Emperors and Kings). Today it's shot to pieces. There I had to clean bricks. At present I'm very feeble, limp and weak. I was detailed for garrison duty in the camp, cleaning. The German doctors realized that we needed vegetables, but where should we take it from? We went to a field picking clover. We picked the whole night through and then we made soup out of it. They even cooked white fir needles and we drank the decoction. Spring is coming now. We cooked fish-heads we often got from the fishermen at the harbour.

6.5.46 Today, in the morning, we unexpectedly left for Stettin by ship. We arrived at the barracks where I've been before. My comrade Leo Kuen from Kempten (he was working in the kitchen) gave me soup daily. Again I'm loading ships at the harbour. 13.5. Today at midnight I had a bad accident: In the dark I fell down in the gap between the ship and the quay. With only one hand I got hold of the edge of the quay and some of my comrades had to pull me up. The doctor diagnosed bad bruises. I couldn't undress myself because my upper arm was heavily swollen. I was sent to the military hospital in Krekow. 17.5. My arm is still swollen, and it hurts. Rations are better, outside the weather is fine.

20.5. Today I was sent to the convalescent-battalion, with my arm in a sling I can't work. Today I met my comrade Bender (field post). He told me that this camp is a releasing-camp. I have hopes of going home soon, especially because of my present condition.

6.6.46 My arm is not all right yet, I can't work. I have massage and radiation treatment. In addition we receive 10g butter, daily 2 1/2 cigarettes. The cigarettes I exchange for bread. In our quarters is a big bug plague now. 10.6. Whitsun, I'm very homesick. 16.6. Today I went to a Punch-and-Judy show. 21.6. Since today I have been working in a Russian sauna. I'm receiving additional rations. 23.6. Opening of an open-air

theatre. 25.6. I was ordered off to a Russian family. I had to wash the dishes, beat the carpet and do the cleaning. For that I received milk, cake, white bread and fruits. This really was a good day. 30.6. A beautiful summer Sunday, I'm in the open, sitting on a bench and reading. 7.7. Today I'm detailed for picking red currants. We were told to steal them, but we only found a few red currants and everywhere we were chased off. 13.7. Again I'm working in the Russian sauna, and my arm is not right yet. Now and then I read novels of Ludwig Ganghofer. It helps me a lot to get over a good many things. Today I had to move again. 26.7. Big fuss. In the evening a public court-martial trial was held: 3 prisoners of war, among them one from Isny, were accused of escape attempt and falsification of documents. They were sentenced to work three years in a working-camp. The riding school has been converted into a clubhouse where lectures, trials and assemblies are to be held. Above the large paintings of Stalin, Lenin, Thälmann, etc. in tall letters we could read the motto: "No god, no emperor, no tribune helps us; we have to release ourselves from misery." 5.8. German and Russian doctors examined us for release. I, and many of my comrades, have been designated for release. We were very happy about that. 22.8. Again, a check-up of the prisoners designated for release. Only a few of them failed, I was one of them. 23.8. Most of my comrades have been released and I have to stay in the camp. It's so dreadful and bitter. A Russian interpreter tried to console me and said: "Next time it's certainly your turn" Only five men had to live in one barrack now. We moved again and we waited to see what would happen.

2.9. I am certified as fit. The whole day long I was busy at putting up a barbed-wire fence. It's a strange feeling fencing in people. The weather is fine, we don't have to work too much, food better, all comrades are gone. I'm very homesick. I was detailed with 15 other men to work in the kitchen peeling potatoes (9 hours of work). We received potato soup three times a day in addition. I had fluid in my legs from eating a lot of potatoes. My legs were heavily swollen. Many prisoners had that illness, and a few even died of it. 16.10. I was sent to the military hospital for dystrophy. We ate a fatty food diet, white bread, milk soup, and were given 5g tobacco. I wasn't allowed to work, and only had to eat and sleep. 22.10. It's autumn, leaves are falling, I'm homesick. Since March there have been no letters from home. I feel so desolate. 25.10. Vaccination against typhoid. It was very painful. 1.11. I'm healthy again and certified as fit to work. 5.11. At present I'm occupied with harvesting potatoes.

14.11.46 Again, I'm under medical treatment because of dystrophy.

26.11. Today it's my tenth wedding anniversary. I recall it with sadness and thinking of it makes me very sad.

3.12. Today I left the convalescent camp of Krekow with 200 men and took up quarters in a large mill. Everyday I am working on a ship, loading sugar, salt, cement and corn. We had to carry 100kg bags. Sometimes we stole sugar, but very often it was again taken away from us. 20.12. Loading big kettles (5000kg) with a floating crane. One of us had stolen a bulb. He should confess voluntarily, but he didn't. A Russian machinist then struck out at us blindly. I was hit. It's very cold, rations are short, but there is plenty of work. There always were 5 or 6 ships in the harbor. Loading one ship took us 3 days. We often were occupied at the freight depot. Once, 3 men fled from a commando unit of ten men. As a punishment and as a warning, 3 comrades were shot although they weren't involved. Thus only 4 of the 10 men came back.

24.12. Today, Christmas Eve, on shift, loading sugar the whole night (on the ship "Otto Schmied," which formerly belonged to the Germans). At Christmas double shift, working 8 hours two times a day.

31.12. Severe cold. On ship loading kettles and unloading coal. 1.1.47 Severe cold working many double-shifts. 7.1. After working the whole night through we were searched very thoroughly again. We had to hand over everything and were given completely different clothes. There were preparations for our transportation. We didn't know where we would go. Maybe to Russia, to Poland or to Czechoslovakia. Only the sick were allowed to stay. A Russian doctor regarded me as one of them because I looked very pale. The 8 of us had to hand over our new clothes to prisoners who were to be transported, and we had to wear their filthy old clothes. 9.1. I now had to move to a camp called "Auto-Union". Our quarters are bad, many double-shifts, severe cold. 17.1. Today again, 750 men got new clothes. I was among them. Departure to the station, we were loaded into freight cars, 37 men to a wagon.

22.1.47 After a five day ride we arrived at Breitenbrunn near Johann-Georgen-Stadt in the Erzgebirge (Czechoslovakia). It was a winter landscape with woods and mountains. In a blizzard we had to march 27km through the mountainous country (1000m high). At night we arrived dead tired at our destination - Joachimsthal (the Czechs call it Jachimov). Women lining the street through Oberwiesenthal cried out with compassion. Joachimsthal once had been a beautiful spa and health resort. Here we were delivered to the Czechs. We were still prisoners of the Russians but we are now under the supervision of the Czechs. Russia

has leased the Czech uranium mines for 99 years to exploit them. The first night we were packed in like sardines. We only could sleep sitting down. Food is all right.

30.1. Today I marched off with 25 men for another camp. It is situated in the mountains (1000m high) 10km away from here. The name of the place is Seifen with 100 men working there. It's bitterly cold, a biting east wind is blowing and there is a lot of snow. Our lodging formerly has been in an inn called "St Leonhardt". 4.2.47 It's very comfortable here. There was a German doctor, 2 cooks, 1 shoemaker, 1 tailor, and 1 barber, as well as a German camp commander. Food is good. Work isn't too hard, we are only shoveling snow. Seifen consists of about 50 houses. Only 5 or 6 of them are inhabited, because the former inhabitants had to leave for Germany as "Flüchtlinge" (refugees). In the empty houses we've found many things we could use. 18.2. Today is Ash Wednesday. We were ordered by the Czech railway administration to shovel snow. In Platten (the highest railway station in Czechoslovakia) the train was snowed in. Only the chimney of the locomotive was seen. The whole February through we were occupied with shoveling snow, and for that we received extra bread and soup. Because he was ill, a man wanted to warm himself with an iron hot-water bottle. He put it with the top closed in the stove pipe. Suddenly we heard a terrifying bang. The hot-water bottle and stove were smashed. The soup in the kettle boiling on the stove splashed onto the ceiling, and so we had no lunch. The Czech guards became very unpleasant, sometimes beating us. We were only allowed to make the reports in Czech. I've been slapped in the face because I didn't halt correctly. 14.3. At present, every day detailed for building a new camp in the school building of Zwittermühle (1km away from here). As of now we get money (2 crowns a day). It is worth 2 cigarettes. With that we could buy little things.

Since the beginning of March we are allowed to write a postcard each month to our families. But only half of them arrived at home. 10.4.47 We have moved to the camp at Zwittermühle. The new camp is very homely. We like it very much. I have good comrades, we are in a better humour now. 2.5. Today, to my great delight, I received after 13 months of waiting 2 letters from home. Food is all right. 18.5. Today, Sunday, digging holes for electric pylons. Spring is coming now. 21.5. With 14 other men I was ordered off to the camp in Breitenbach. We were driven there by car. 23.5. Every day we have to go into the woods felling trees. I had to cut off the branches and was hit by a falling tree. I got bruises on the left hand and on my back, but it could have been a great deal worse. It could have killed me. One of the guards took me home and I was sent to the sick-bay. After 5 days I was able to go to work, peeling trees. 9.6. Again digging holes for pylons. Working with wood I got a splinter in my eye. It hurt badly, I had to go to a doctor. With one eye bandaged I had to do woodworking. The cook and another man made use of the moment the guards changed shifts and fled. All hell broke loose! At 4 o'clock in the morning we had to line up nearly naked. They took it out on us. The camp is next to the Czech-German border (East Germany). 20.6. The 14 of us went back to the camp, where we've lived before (Zwittermühle). 24.6. I was detailed with 4 other men for sorting ore. We tested the stones coming out of the mine for uranium. Work wasn't hard but harmful. Sometimes we used a Geiger counter. We built a stove and dried the stones. Thus the uranium is much easier to be detected. The radioactive rocks were worked and sent to Moskow. Good uranium rocks are black as coal and heavy as lead. It requires 200 tons of it to extract 1g pure radium. Men who used to work there died prematurely. Uranium destroys tissue and organs of the human body. We received 1/2 litre of milk daily as an antidote. We had to sort uranium for several months. In July, if the weather was fine, we also had to do the haymaking. The grass wasn't cut because the farmers had to leave. 23.9. Today a bad accident happened. One of my barrack roommates, comrade Gottleber (from Chemnitz), lost his life. As he came up he got caught by the elevator of the mine. It broke his back. The accident wasn't reported to his wife, she still wrote him letters at Christmas. I don't have to work down the mine yet, I'm still working as sorter and stoker. Fifty meters away from us there is a watch tower. Every little move we make has been watched by the guards. At work my comrade and I moved too close to the barbed-wire fence. Suddenly a bullet passed our heads. The guard said: "Next time, I'll shoot more precisely". In December there was a lot of snow. At St Nicholas' Day I had to play "Knecht Ruprecht" (the helper to St Nicholas). At Christmas we had two days off. Meals were good and we had a little celebration. We got no bread. Because of the blizzards it had been impossible to bring some bread.

January 1948. Mild weather. 15.1. To my delight, today I've received a parcel from home. Tobacco has been stolen by the camp commander. For each parcel we had to pay 9 crowns of our hard-earned money. 26.1. A miner was killed in an accident. In February rations again became very meager. Clothes were ragged and filthy. A third of us had no shirts. Instead of socks we had to use cloth. Our shoes were bad. On the 1.3. I've received a parcel from home again. During a night-shift a young prisoner (Ernst Schniderich who came from Rhineland) tried to escape through a drainage-pipe running under the fence, but he was unlucky. His escape had been detected too early. He soon was caught by the guards. At midnight the whole camp had to line up

and he was presented as a felon. The Czech guards beat him up and naked he was thrown into a cellar. For 21 days he was imprisoned. Thus we were treated by the Czechs. At present there is again a rumor going around that we were going to be released. But it was just a fraud. On the 24.4. the camp at Zwittermühle has been disbanded. We were distributed to 5 camps. Together with 28 men I went back to the main camp (called "Brüderlichkeit") near Joachimsthal. We lived in a barracks measuring 6 x 8 m. Forty-seven men had to live and sleep in it. Three wooden plank beds on top of each other. I laid at the bottom; I even couldn't sit. The quarters were lousy. For now I have to go down to work the mines: 6th level, 380m deep. Six men got into the elevator and it went downwards. Every man carried a davy lamp with him. We worked in three shifts. 1/3 of the men is on shift, 1/3 sleeps, 1/3 is at home. Working in the shaft has been very dangerous because of the radiation and because of the primitive safety precautions. Very often the roof caved in and there were rockfalls. After 8 hours of mining we had to do labour service for two hours. I was occupied with cleaning-up and driving the tubs. We worked together with Czechs and other foreigners. Now and then they gave us something to eat. The tubs weighed 100kg, very often they jumped the rails. Using crowbars we had to put them back onto the rails. In some places the air has been very stuffy (lack of oxygen). The lamps used oxygen too. Some corners of the shaft were so wet that we came up soaking wet. Often power was off, the pumps couldn't work, and the water rose up. Then the elevator didn't work either. At the end of work we had to climb up 70 ladders (it took us 1/2 hour). 95% of the stones we've brought up was waste and went to the slagheap. Only 5% could be used. The whole May through I was working on the 6th level. I supplied myself with food. There was a lack of vegetables, therefore I picked some stinging nettles at the back of the barrack and threw them into the hot soup. It did me very good. At Whitsun we had somewhat shortened working hours. Since June 1948 the rations were good. We now got 1000g bread and proper meals, we weren't hungry any longer. But food was somewhat unbalanced. There is a lack of vegetables and salad.

In June I was working on the 7th level, 500m deep. There it was very hot, and the air was stuffy. There were all kinds of rocks: copper, silver and bismuth. In the past silver was mined. That's why a particular silver coin has been called "Joachimstaler" [the word "Dollar" is derived from "Taler"]. Today only uranium-pitchblende is mined. In our camp there were 3 catholic priests, and they worked down in the mine as we did. Since July 1948, on Sundays, they said mass now and then. Mass was said in the (common) barrack next door. During a walk with one of the priests I made my confession. In August there was a large bug plague. On the 19.9. there was a large "de-bugging", and the bugs were gassed. I was working down the mine with comrade Ave. He was a refugee and had 8 children, and after his release he kept working down the mine. Because of the uranium and dust he got lung disease. He died in 1965. On the 25.11. a comrade was killed in an accident caused by rockfall. In December 1948, there was a big guessing game on our homecoming. All the time it was promised but they only told lies to us. At Christmas the service was well attended. Our camp commander (a German from Romania) disturbed the service by yelling and swearing. He was violent and harassed comrades. He betrayed and beat many prisoners. He also did many dirty tricks and thus his power came to an end. He then enlisted in Czechoslovakia because he didn't dare to go to Germany. Quite a few comrades would have taken revenge on him. Thus, "Nero" (as we've called him) came to an end.

Around the camp, "Brüderlichkeit" ran a double barbed-wire fence. It was 2,5m high and more than 2km in length. At night 200 bulbs were alight round the fence. About 10 watch towers rose (into the air), the guards were armed with machine guns. Inside the fence was the pit-building with a big Soviet star. At night the star has been illuminated. If the power went off at night, they shot flares to light up the camp.

February 1949. Our release has turned out to be nothing again. As a sort of comfort we received 2 shirts and 1 pair of underpants. Now in the camp, a play was put on now and then, and an orchestra was assembled. For that we had to pay the little money we've got. 5.3.49. To my great delight I met Karl Pfattischer, a comrade from Ottaker. He was working 1km away from here in the main camp. In both camps there were 8 Allgäuers. Winter returned with a lot of snow. At the end of March 25 men escaped with great difficulties under the hardest circumstances. A long time before the flight had been organized. They got out of the camp through an old shaft that wasn't used since 1880. It was rotten and crumbling, but they succeeded in escaping. Now the Czechs took it out on us. Instead of 8 hours we had to work 16 hours. But it gradually calmed down and everything was as it had been before. At the end of April, 15 men (among them Unsinn from Lechbruck) escaped the same way. Most of the fugitives were metalworkers and skilled workers. After the first flight the shaft had been locked with railway tracks welded together. Now the prisoners had to saw through the railway tracks. They succeeded with all their strength. They really wanted to take me with them, but they didn't consider me fit enough for an exhausting flight because I've been one of the eldest prisoners. At the night of their flight there was a terrible snowstorm, and two men went wrong. They were found later, frozen

to death. Thirteen of fifteen men went home. One of my room-mates (Weber from Dortmund) was among them. He wrote to my wife. She was very grateful to him because she finally learned the truth.

14.4. At Easter we had to work. At Whit Sunday I was working down the mine. At Whit Monday there was a little fun fair.

17.7. At the instigation of the German camp commander I didn't have to work down the mine any more (because I've been one of the eldest). I was sent with 3 other men to the metalworking shop. We had to repair the tubs. I felt quite well there. It was my best time in all the years at prison. The rations are very good too, and work isn't hard. 17.8. I received a parcel from the Protestant relief organisation (Evangelisches Hilfswerk) with cookies and vitamin pills. 28.8. Today "Der verkaufte Großvater" ("The sold Grandfather", a bavarian play) has been playing at the theatre. In the barrack there's enough room for us now, but there are bugs (instead).

A big recruiting campaign was started: they wanted us to sign up to work for 2 years in a Czech or Saxon mine. I was weary of the risk. A great transport left the camp, among them many East Germans. Later on we learned that most of the West Germans fled over the East German border and went home. 11.9. Now I wanted to go home the same way and signed up. 26.9. A great transport was leaving (among them a many good comrades) and two days after it would be our turn. End of October. To sign up for Saxonia only East Germans are recruited. All the enlistments of western Germans are void. It was just the same with me as always: I was sitting there once again. Some of our comrades were writing us letters from home already. All the time I was worrying about how I should take my diaries home. They were very precious to me. I gave the diaries to my comrade Kynast to take them with him. He sent them to my wife. She received them in November. 14.10. We are still here, one rumour follows hard on the other. They say: "This month you'll certainly go home." End of October: We are still here. We are very impatient now, after 6 years of imprisonment it's certainly not too early to release us. We are wondering whether only the prisoners of war had to make reparations for the misdeeds of the Germans. The East Germans who are enlisted will leave tomorrow, and again I'll lose good comrades. Winter is coming gradually and it's getting colder now.

7.11. At present we have 3 days off on the occasion of the October Revolution and because the camp is renovated. We received 250g margarine instead of only 30g. Today they again promised to release us soon. If it's true, we'll be back home at Christmas. 14.11. Today, Sunday, we are working. I have to fit a conveyer motor. 1.12. At present there's rain and snow. 3.12. Today 5000 parcels came. They were sent by the Red Cross. The camp commander searched all the parcels and destroyed the addresses of the senders. Every prisoner got 3 1/2 parcels. The parcels I received contained sausage, cookies, chocolate, evaporated milk, fish, soap, and a razor. We were very pleased. The things all were unfamiliar to us. The Russians said it was all propaganda. But that didn't make sense. They told us the West Germans were poor. 15.12. We are constantly talking about our release but nothing happens. In our common room we could listen to the radio, only East German stations and programs. A lot of us who listened to the news clearly heard: "On the 14th of December the last prisoner left Czechoslovakia. There's no prisoner in Czechoslovakia any longer. We now kicked up a row. We demanded a statement of the camp commander. They tried to put us off (telling us): There are still no wagons yet. But you certainly go back home this year.

20.12. 49. Now the camp commander made a statement: Those who sign up for Saxony will leave within 2 days. But we stuck together, nobody signed up. We said: We only want to leave by legal means, as you've promised us before. Christmas came and we still were there. The last days of the year have been very exciting. We are in a terrible state of nerves. It is dreary. Our comrades secretly made arrangements: our camp "Brüderlichkeit" and the main camp resolved to go on hunger strike.

1.1.1950. Everywhere in the camp posters have been put up, to read as follows: "As to now everybody goes on hunger strike. The Russians told lies to us and deceived us for five years. We will eat nothing until we are on the train back home. Those who break the hunger strike will be called to account at home later on. We carry on working. If somebody passes out he will be brought to the military hospital." The kitchen cooked on, we put up pickets. They took care that nobody ate. The first day of our hunger strike the Russians pretended not to realize it. On the 2.1. a Russian commission with high-ranking officers came from Berlin. They asked us to eat again. "You will go home soon." We turned our back on them and didn't answer. We treated them with contempt.

3.1.50. I weakened at work, starving became noticeable. I myself didn't like the strike, but you just had to join in. We were told that the strike in the main camp broke. We now should eat too. But we refused. We had to pack all our things and line up. Again it was argued. Then we resolved to end the hunger strike too because it

was promised that we will soon leave for home. We now ate again but it was a very tense situation. One of our comrades asked a Russian officer: "When will we finally go home?" He said: "Maybe in 3 days or in 3 years, or maybe in 30 years." Life goes on. After a few days we were invited to a concert given in the clubhouse. Only three men came, and the concert had to be canceled. We couldn't laugh and be merry any longer. Now political lectures about communism were given. The speaker came from East Germany. He also would get communist books for us. One of our comrades yelled: "We don't need any books, we want to go home!" 22.1.50. At the roll call it was announced that we will go home soon. We laughed as if somebody had made a joke. We couldn't believe it because it has been promised so many times and they always told us lies. But this time it was true.

24.1.50. We didn't have to work any longer. Preparations for our release were made. But we still were weary about it, it was too good to be true. One of the rumours said we should be sent to another mine in the mountains of eastern Czechoslovakia (Hohe Tatra).

28.1.50. We left the camp in trucks. Our names have been called in alphabetical order, but the "E" closes the Russian alphabet and thus my name was called at the end. This time, again, I was the last to go. Our journey took us towards Annaberg (Erzgebirge). On our journey to Annaberg we only just avoided an accident. We nearly bumped into another car (because of the thoughtlessness of a Czech policeman). At Annaberg we were loaded onto the train. There were approximately 1700 men (37 men to a wagon). The wagons were bolted and many of us feared that we will be brought to Russia again. After 24 hours' drive the train stopped at Frankfurt/Oder. We breathed a sigh of relief. It was extremely cold. The commander of the releasing-camp gave a speech in the name of the German Democratic Republic. We were brought to a camp. For one day we got nothing to eat but hot water. But we still had provisions with us. The camp looked very neglected. Now we received our releasing-money (2.279.55 East German Marks). It was worth 350 West German Marks. That was the wage for 5 years of working. We were told to invest or to spend our money in East Germany. Isn't it a mean thing? In big letters there was written: "Every homecomer is a friend of the Soviet Union."

2.2.50. I was hiding the money in my felt boots because I wanted to take it across the border. Now we got our discharge papers. Again I was one of the last. Some of us got blind drunk. On foot we went to Gronefelde, a village 1km away. There we were divided up to 4 releasing zones and got our ticket for home. Heartily I said goodbye to the comrades who lived in another zone. I went on the train going to Leipzig. In Leipzig we had to wait a few hours. I had a bad cold and was running a fever. I immediately wired home that I was on my homeward journey. At the station I laid down on a bench. We were surrounded by beggars. They've heard that we had a little money with us. We gave away a lot of it. They were chased off by the police (Volkspolizei). At night we travelled on towards the zone border (German-German border). 4.2. We arrived at the border station of Gutenfürst. There we were searched superficially by the Volkspolizei (East German police). They asked if we had money. They didn't find the money I was hiding in my boots. Again we went on the train. After 10 minutes there was a solemn moment: We now were on Bavarian soil. In Möschendorf near Hof we were sent to the American releasing-camp. Because it was Saturday we couldn't be released until Monday. At Sunday I went with my comrade Oberbauer to church at Hof. I wired home again. At Hof I met a comrade whose hand was bandaged. I asked him about his injury. He said: "At Frankfurt I quarreled with a Russian. I slapped him in the face and thus I got hurt. In the crowd I succeeded in escaping. I could take revenge on one Russian at least." 6.2.50. After putting papers in order at the American releasing-camp we left late in the evening for Munich. There we arrived at half past eleven at night. Only one comrade, Ludwig Kirmayer from Kimratshofen, was still with me. We stayed the night in a Protestant hostel for the homeless. The following day we took the first slow train to Kempten. Because I had a bad cold we drank some coffee in the waiting room of the station in Kempten. Then I called at the post office of Kempten. In the meantime my wife and Annemarie were waiting at the station. They thought I took the fast train. My wife was content to wait for the next train and went into town. Unexpectedly, I went on an extraordinary worker train, leaving for Zollhaus at 10:45 a.m. At Walter's (the restaurant at Zollhaus) I put down my wooden suitcase. With hurried steps I plotted on the footpath through the snow, with joyful anticipation I made my way home. I had been walking nearly 100m on the road as a horse-drawn sleigh approached at a trot. It was Georg Notz, and he wanted to pick me up. Mrs. Walter from Zollhaus told him about my arrival over the phone. As we came out of the little wood behind Gschwend I saw my beloved Petersthal. It was the picture I've so often seen in my mind's eye. At a quarter to 12 I got off the sleigh in front of our house. My son Philipp and my mother-in-law gave me a hearty and joyful welcome in front of the door. Unfortunately, my wife and Annemarie were still in Kempten and didn't know that I came home. Philipp didn't have to go to school, he had just heard the news that his father's coming home before his mother knew. He told it over the

phone to our friends (Kaisinger). Now she learned it at 12 o'clock. At one a'clock the bus left for Zollhaus, and she came home at half past one. We were very pleased to see each other again. But Annemarie wouldn't accept me. She was very shy and she used to hide in a corner. She didn't know me any longer, as the last time I saw her she was 2 1/2 years old. Now she is nearly 9. Arrived at home on the 7.2.1950.

I could settle myself down again, but I always thought a guard with a machine gun was following me. The doctor gave me a medical certificate until the 16th of April. The money I've received at my release I had to spend on the dentist because my teeth had been ruined during my imprisonment. I thanked God with all my heart that He allowed me to come home healthy, and that I joyfully found my home with wife and children.

Introduction: Thomas Nagel