

*Courier Adolf Hitler:  
1914 1918*



*By His War Comrade B. Brandmayer*

## Table of Contents

<b>Forward</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Late Fall 1914</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Into the Field</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Again with the Regiment</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>First Encounter with Adolf Hitler</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Flanders, Flanders...!</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>From Fromelles to the Battle on the Somme</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>1917</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>From Montdidier to Chemin des Dames to the Aisne</b>	<b>32</b>

## Forward

**T**here is still general ignorance about Adolf Hitler's service at the front. Much isn't believed. I have decided to portray Hitler like he was in reality. I also found it necessary to write down the events before meeting Hitler, because Hitler also participated in them. In this book I have called things as they were and as they often are even today. In recent times more than enough articles have been written where Hitler, depending on the author's persuasion, is either honoured or defamed. I have always been, and still am, free of such ties. So it is easier for me to present a purely objective view, simple and truthful. Enough witnesses are still alive who could confront me. For this reason alone I must strictly hold to the facts.

May this book be valued above all by the reader since it will in the distant future have great value as a document, because there were hardly ten men who actually stood right at Hitler's side in the field.

Thirteen years have passed since the genocidal struggle, but today I pull out my war diary. It has become necessary, so that the German folk can judge for itself whether or not it wishes to follow this man. And so I offer this book to the German public with the hope that it will be well received all around!

*B. Brandmayer Götting-Bruckmühl  
on the 1932 anniversary of the outbreak of the war*

## Late Autumn 1914

*Traveller, if you go to Germany, tell them that we bled, that we died like loyal heroes, as its law commanded!*

Since the August days of 1914 my little village did not settle down. Most of the capable men and reservists left Götting. Young marital bliss was abruptly interrupted. And the woman looked after the departing husband with tears in her eyes. Perhaps she saw him for the last time in her life. Children cried for their fathers. Heart-rendering scenes again come to my mind. Father and mother gave their departing son the last accompaniment to the Bruckmühl train station. The train took him to the garrison town. Horses, too, were mustered and had to leave their old stalls forever. Women and girls competed in the production of wool clothing for us field-grey men. Countless packets of love travelled from the homeland to the field. All made the effort to unselfishly place themselves in the fatherland's service. For by Christmas, if our soldiers on the western front continued to advance so rapidly, we would be in Paris and the war would soon be over. But it turned out differently!

The harvest was brought in. Autumn had been bountiful. Now the wind swept over the tired fields. Foggy November, so rich in melancholy, had come to the German lands. Nature prepared to let winter come. The last berries fell from the bushes.

One day I myself still worked at a construction site the mailman took more time than usual to deliver the mail. It was noon. I rushed, driven by hunger as usual, home. Entering the room, I found my mother and sisters in tears. A dark suspicion seized my soul. They were unable to answer my urgent question about the reason for their sobbing; the pain of the imminent separation and the uncertainty of my future fate killed the words at their lips. The sight of their fearful, tearful faces made everything clear to me. Mutely, my mother's aged hand handed me the draft notice. "It must be, the fatherland calls!", I thought to myself as I took it. I must admit that inside I was glad; for I wanted to experience the war myself, before peace was made by Christmas 1914.

The bare essentials were hurriedly packed in a wooden suitcase, and a small bouquet of rosemary was stuck in my hat, as is custom here. Saying goodbye was hard enough for me the hardest thing was when I looked into the tearful eyes of my good mother. The next day I reported to the district command in Rosenheim. Now I was inwardly happy that I had gotten this far. The medical examination declared me fit for duty. I was assigned to the replacement battalion of the 1st infantry regiment in Munich and provided with travelling money. On November 7, 1914 I arrived in order in the Marsfeld barracks. Here began the training each soldier knows. Day after we day we marched to the exercise grounds of Oberwiesenfeld.

Amid the daily noise of the barracks, the shouting sergeants and the furious non-commissioned officers, I gradually got used to being away from my beloved mountain homeland. The deep homesickness that pained me at first and cost me the night's sleep became milder. The time flew by. My thoughts concentrated more and more on the day when I would hear the first thunder of guns. The last two weeks were devoted exclusively to field service exercises and marksmanship. On February 6, 1915 the whole battalion stood, well-equipped, on the barracks square for the march into the field.

## Into the Field

**W**e stood in rank and file and the command resounded, "By squads, turn right, march!" The band that had formed at the point of the battalion started playing at the same time. At rapid cadence we left behind us forever the red brick buildings of the Marsfeld barracks. My heart rejoiced to have finally escaped the endless drill. The bitter hours of barracks life should be forgotten forever. My gaze was fixed westward, where victory after victory was reported to the homeland.

Meanwhile, a huge crowd of people had pushed in from both sides of the street. Thousands accompanied the departing troops. The flood didn't want to end, and the crowd grew from minute to minute as we passed along the Nymphenburgerstrasse to the Dachauerstrasse toward the train station. The music started again. Doors and windows flew open along the rows of houses, everybody wanted to give us one more greeting. There was such shouting, waving and well-wishing! I have never again experienced such excitement. From the dainty hands of women and girls we received flowers and packets. Meanwhile, an immense wall of humanity had formed at the train station square and upon our arrival it spontaneously burst into the German National Anthem. It was deeply moving for me; I could have never imagined that people could be capable of such unprecedented enthusiasm. The waiting train was boarded while endless hurrahs echoed through the spacious train station. At 12:00 our military train departed the station on schedule.

At that moment I thought intensely about my loved ones at home. Would I ever see them again alive? A never before known yearning for them overcame me; had I not had the joy of at departure shaking hands with one of my family members like so many of my comrades. Life was harsh enough to seize me with a rough hand.

The train reached a high speed. Wintery landscapes appeared before us and disappeared just as swiftly from our amazed gaze. Augsburg was crossed slowly. The chimneys over glass-roofed factories puffed thick smoke clouds, which covered the busy textile-city oppressively. It was probably three hours before we reached Ulm. The train stopped. Mess was whistled. The compartment doors flew open and everybody rushed toward the rear, where a field kitchen had prepared a generous, warm noon meal. The same scene here as in Munich. The populace besieged the train station and we were again given packets, so that by God I didn't know where to put everything. After a one hour stay the transport train set into motion. Outside dusk wove dark curtains. Dark night set in. Each of us prepared his bed. Blankets and coats were unsnapped from rucksack and had to serve as substitute for bed. Heaving smoke, the train pushed through the cold winter night. Towns and villages laid in deep darkness. Only the stations rushed past us with low-lit lights. As the day broke, we stopped in Cologne. From here the path led through Lüttich, Brussels and then Lille, which we were happy to reach on the third day of our trip. In Comines our tired troops de-trained.

To reach Comines itself a three-hour march was necessary. Here we took up quarters. We were given two rest-days, which gave us time to get our things in order. Letters were written home. The men of our replacement battalion were assigned to various regiments. Fate sent me to the List-Regiment, 12<sup>th</sup> company. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was just marching from the front lines to the rear.

I experienced a happy event the very next day in Comines: Ehrhard Anton, who had been a baker's journeyman years ago in my home village. Here I unexpectedly saw him again. We recalled memories of youth and told each other what was new. He had become a fieldkitchen general in the field and as such he later often secretly gave me some barras with sausage.

The distant roll of cannon thunder was clearly discernible even near Lille. My heart pounded; I could hardly become master over the involuntary fear. The hours crept by with a fearful feeling. With much fantasy I imagined the terrible experience; later the monstrous image was far surpassed by the reality. Like a ghost, death danced in front of me. The thought: "Will I pass the first hours?" would not leave me alone. The question was later answered; heaven allowed me to return home. I got accustomed to life at the front and such thoughts no longer had any place in my head.

On February 17, 1915 I marched for the first time to the front line. The company marched in goosestep toward the trenches. Individual shells hit near us. It seemed to me that every shell would have to reach its goal. Mortally afraid, we newcomers threw ourselves to the ground, which always caused the old timers to burst into laughter. The trench was lined with wood and the dugouts were poorly built. The company commander Schmitt gave an orientation about the situation, the conditions and locations; then trench life began. I had the less than good luck to be the first one to take over an advanced listening post with an experienced front comrade. Unknown terrain lay in front of me. I listened intensively; individual bursts of English machine-guns terrified me. I thought I saw death and the devil until the man next to me brought me back to reason with scolding and cursing. Patrols and sentry duty alternated. Evenings enemy artillery became more active.

When we marched from the front line back to the rest area, we heard of the capture of 100,000 Russians on the eastern front. Jubilation and enthusiasm prevailed; it boosted our courage.

For a few days a conspicuous nervousness befell our unit. Enemy artillery fire became heavier by the hour. Flemish farmsteads were levelled by far reaching English naval guns. They seemed to have especially set their sights on Messines. Peace was over, over there they acted crazy. The hail of shells ripped through the air with a howl. Laboriously constructed dugouts were buried and churned over again. Half the company had been wiped out, but then relief came. The night was pitch black. The 5<sup>th</sup> regiment took our place. I was happy to have escaped the shower of steel. The battalion marched toward Courcoing. After an eight-hour march it was reached. Our limbs became heavy as iron, each kept touch with the other and slept while walking. The

weaving factory gallant took us in. It seemed like a palace to us. Then we forgot the world and the war; exhaustive fatigue and sleep demanded the next hours.

Dawn broke over a trembling, devastated land. Non-commissioned officers shouted to assembly. Exercises were necessary. Squabbling and cursing. Cursing, the group moved into the open air. "Damn, exercises even in the field!", was muttered among the throng of soldiers. One felt the unnecessary exercises were unprecedented; it was a burden to have to exercise behind the front. Upon our return we took the noon meal and our well-deserved rest. Hardly had a few hours passed when there was a sudden commotion. "Alarm! Alarm!" rang loudly through the factory halls. An hour later we sat in the military train; nobody knew whither. The regiment had been pulled back for quite a while as an army reserve. Some thought we would go to Russia and others to Lorraine, but nothing certain was to be learned.

Grey rain clouds crawled ominously over the blood-drenched battlefields of Flanders. The overloaded train slowly and contemplatively rolled into the falling night. We froze; hardly a word was uttered. A series of walls shyly emerged from the darkness. The dimmed light sparingly fell into the inside of the wagon. Lille was the recreation city in the rear. Far off came the incessant thundering of death-bringing batteries. Marquilles was the destination; English regiments had broken the German front. In Wicres we sought makeshift quarters. Hay and straw were found in abundance in the abandoned farmsteads.

The battle raged around Neuve Chapelle. Flares transformed the night into day. The earth trembled. The rat-tat-tat of machine-guns was endless. Outside was the constant passing of artillery, wagons and troops. At 2:00 in the morning we were pulled out of the disquiet camp. We were ordered to march via Halpegarbe toward Neuve Chapelle. A few hours later we were surrounded by dead quiet. It was uncanny; the quiet before the storm. At exactly 6:00 AM hell broke loose. Steel rained down on the assault troops. We advanced through the forest of Biez. Trees cracked, were mowed down and crushed into a thousand splinters and pieces. The terrain was swamp and moor; the mud weighed heavily on the boots. We almost sank; one of my boots remained stuck in the mud. At the forest edge the company swarmed out and formed three lines. It was a stubborn advance. We advanced toward the enemy in leaps. Shrapnel hissed a hair's width over my head. Our artillery did not come down to bear. The air was saturated with smoke and picric acid. Seriously wounded, my squad leader, Ferdinand Huber, from Munich fell. He rolled in his blood, but we had to go on. Help was not possible. The assault lines had become mixed together. I ran toward the shot up hut in front of the trench. Schmitt stood there with a drawn pistol and shouted: "Advance! Or I will shoot you, shoot you!" Hours must have passed when shrapnel cut me down. Warm blood from my neck ran down my back. I laid in the terrain until darkness fell and merciful comrades dragged me back to the emergency bandaging station. The next hospital train took me back to Saint Amand.

Loving hands made me a human being again. The terror of this attack brought

my first grey hairs. On March 14 the regiment was pulled out of the firing line; the English breakthrough had been pushed back. The shadow of death had fallen on 250 comrades in the regiment that day. It was March 12, 1915. One read in the newspaper: "A German attack at Neuve Chapelle threw back the enemy on the front in Flanders."

## Again with the Regiment

The days passed. At the beginning of April I returned to my unit. The regiment had moved a few kilometres to the right. It was at Fromelles. The positions were desolate, shot up and soft in the mud. Between the "Schützenhaus" and the "Ferme Deval" the regiment was stretched out in breadth. This was where we settled in. The position was made bombproof with sand-sacks. The dugouts were fortified with wooden beams and the trench was provided with mighty breastworks. The end of mobile warfare was sealed; we had to settle in. Our neighbour, too, seemed to construct such trench works. This kind of work often evoked thoughtful murmurs in the company's ranks. Not without reason was the motto: dig in, make trenches and dig in again! The terrain was simply too open there and bringing up provisions at night meant many dangers. Since the days at Neuve Chapelle the enemy was rather quiet. In the first days of May he became more active. Our sector was in regular intervals under heavy artillery and mortar fire. The road Fromelles-Aubers suffered especially.

Military engineers had meanwhile helped to nicely construct the soldiers' quarters. Over there in the English lines it was conspicuously joyful. Accordions and string instruments were clearly discernible during the day. The war seemed forgotten in such hours. But we busily worked on the cross trenches and an impenetrable barbed wire barrier.

Spring came unnoticed to the land of Flanders. Tree and bush had put on snow-white dresses of flowers. A Maying and blooming began; the lawn in the hinterland greened and glowed in a thousand flowers and looked like a colourful carpet. The sun shone friendly on the earth and its rays thirstily drank dry the watery field of craters. In spring's golden days my heart often returned to my mountain homeland. The peach tree on the sunny side of my father's house probably already stood in glorious, reddish bloom! On still nights the stars stood clear and unmoved in the endless heavens. On lonely sentry duty, they looked down glistening at me and I softly begged them to convey to my loved ones in the homeland greetings from their distant son. In light of the well-known star lights a hot yearning for them often befell me. Peace reigned in those regions. My soul felt dissolved in it and inside me the feeling was strong that eternity carried me on its heart as its creation.

I was to be rudely yanked from forgetfulness by coarse reality! The Anglo-Saxon became restless. Something was in the air. Merciless war demanded is right. The Ninth of May neared...

We had just relieved the first battalion in the trenches; this time there had hardly been any losses. The regiment's right flank was formed by the 12th company under Lieutenant Schmitt. To our left was the 10<sup>th</sup> company with Lieutenant Bachschneider, an extremely plucky officer. We had watched the magnificent spectacle of flare rockets for an hour already. They alternated in a bright display of colours between red, white and then green again. Otherwise an ominous quiet reigned over the battlefield. We all

felt inside that the enemy planned something significant. Suddenly, planes appeared with their singing motors. Distant detonations! In Fournes they did a lot of damage. The castle was in ruins...and behind the barbed wire death lurked. English muzzle fire flamed out into the dawning morning; a never before experienced drumming from a thousand guns arose, which drove us into the deepest corners of the dugouts. The earth no longer offered any protection. I stared lost into the darkness of the earth hole. Shaking in all my limbs I moaned with desperation, then I lost consciousness. I knew nothing else...

When I opened my eyes, the dugout was half caved in. The wounded called out and cried softly. Over us was twisted iron. I reached for my coat pocket and found a rosary. I wanted to pray, the death prayer... My fingers grasped the wooden pearls as if my life depended on them. In sheer insanity I cast them away, somewhere...doubting in God and faith.

Now German artillery, too, spat from all barrels. The enemy barrage cut off the rear the reserves and command. The barrage raged horribly on the roads to Fromelles. Telephone lines were destroyed; couriers struggled along the path forward.

When the rearward fire set in, we stood ready to defend. Then, at the strike of 7:00 AM, came a gigantic upheaval, followed by a second explosion. To our left masses of earth and body parts hurled hissing through the air. Shrill cries for help then the unfortunate suffocated and fell silent forever. Smoke, foul smelling and yellow, slowly covered the field of death. It was our opponent's signal to attack. The gigantic crater of 100-meter diameter became the mass graves of ninety good soldiers of the 10<sup>th</sup> company. The enemy picked his way over the breastworks and, despite our intense fire, penetrated the gap that had been created. Wave after followed in short intervals. They got behind us. We fought for our lives on two sides. German batteries bravely cut off the enemy's reinforcements. Flank fire and hand grenades made the stay unbearable for him. Around noon we launched a counterattack and stubbornly took back the ground meter by meter. The lost ground was again in our possession. As night fell, we were relieved, and the shrunken group marched back with a tired trot to the rest area.

The sun rose to the heavens blood red. Three hundred life-affirming young men were not allowed to see the new day. The best blood of our Upper Bavarian homeland laid buried in Northern France's acres of death. With what enthusiasm had they set out, only to never again set foot on home soil! The value of a man fell below null.

Fournes, a few months ago still a thriving town inhabited by a few thousand people, laid in ashes. This was our rest area. The terrible experience of the past few days had broken me. Silent and lost to the world, I gazed straight ahead. Death just missed me; I couldn't believe I was still alive.

The evening of May 11th set over suffering-filled Flanders. Everywhere was conspicuous silence. A gentle zephyr struck a cord over shot up land. Intoxicating odor rose from its blooming feathers. Protected by deep darkness, a procession of mourners

walked to the soldiers' cemetery of Fournes. Albert Weisgerber, Munich's young painter, laid shot up on one of the many coffins, a victim of May 9<sup>th</sup>. French earth received the pale heroes of the Bavarian regiment; German earth did not cover them.

The relaxation only lasted two days, then the battalion again occupied the forward trenches. The silence of the grave hovered over the terrain, plowed and tom open by English shells.

It was one big field of corpses. The dead laid out there by the hundreds, many for four days now. Friend and foe slumbered peacefully next to each other; their hearts blood stuck on the awakening spring earth of France. And the horrible: seriously wounded men still moaned between rotting corpses. They fought with desperate strength against the death strangling their lives. He hoisted a white flag and the enemy replied we wanted to clear the battlefield of the dead. We waited and waited...the hours passed. In vain, for the enemy did not negotiate. Instead, he covered the whole field with murderous fire. I relieved a sentry. "Franzl, watch out!" hardly had the words left my mouth and a shell splinter cut through his body. He collapsed, surged upward, shouted...and was then dead. And in front of me? Shells raged and again plowed the mutilated earth. Finally the guns fell silent. The dead had been blasted into a thousand pieces; the next day the sun pitilessly scorched the shredded bodies. The stench of corpses hampered the breath. The air pollution was combatted with chemicals.

One day, it was May 18 1915, I was suddenly summoned to the company commander Lieutenant Schmitt. By first thought was what did he want with me. He made me the battalion runner and told me to report immediately to Captain Lünenschloß. With difficulty I said goodbye to my comrade of the 12<sup>th</sup> company. An inner comradeship had bound me to the few survivors who had marched off from Munich with me. That same day I arrived with all my gear at battle headquarters on the "Roten Bänken". Battalion commander Lünenschloß we nicknamed him "Lünegockel" was a man of special courage and character. This splendid officer was wounded for the first time on October 31, 1914. In April 1915 he was again with his List-men. In later years after the year I often encountered him in Bad Aibling, where he established his residence. Two years ago he voluntarily left this life because of the loss of his health. The daring fighter shared the dry fate of so many soldiers who were destroyed by the war. He was one of our best in the field army. Duty, honor and profession were sacred to him, and the fatherland was the highest. As long as one List-man lives, he will also be spoken of.

The battlefield headquarters was in a shot up house right next to the "Roten Bänken". English shells had long since carried off the roof and top floor. Masses of stones and bricks were piled around the ruins. The evening of the same day I took the first order to the front trenches. After 14 days I was transferred to regiment headquarters. My predecessor had not returned from his courier mission. I took his place and was from this hour on the courier for the staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> regiment, named

the "List"-regiment after its first commander.

## First Encounter with Adolf Hitler

**B**efore I continue the account of my experience in the war, I would like to insert a debunking of the present-day chatter of Hitler's enemies with a short contrast of truth and fiction for the sake of justice. Lately much that is unbelievable, downright defamations of every kind against the soldier in the simple uniform, have been circulated. Disgust overcomes me when I hold a newspaper where Hitler is either put down, ridiculed or defamed. All of them have greatly deceived themselves about this man. Whoever knows Hitler, like me, is of a different opinion. Few have been allowed the good fortune to stand so closely at his side as I was privileged to do so. Three full years, day after day and night after night, both of us lived together in the closest comradeship. Both of us shared the same suffering and the same joy. He, who stood in the service of the Bavarian List-regiment for four long years, belongs in the truest meaning of the term to the "unknown soldier".

One says, "Hitler only ran around in the rear". Whoever says or writes that, either never knew or experienced war or is an intentional liar, who wants to tarnish the honour of a great man. The "rear stallions" ran around behind the front, far away from the shooting, in the bordello city of Lille and in Gent. The largest percentage of these rear warriors was incontestably the sons of Israel. Unfortunately, many nobles were among them, who had probably already been thoroughly bastardized. This kind of German man already had a certificate for being unfit for duty in his pocket before leaving home. But because they also wished to perform "loyal service" for the fatherland, they did it in this fashion. While we at the front awaited death every hour, while we resembled a walking mud cake, this trash of warriors was in the arms of French women. In shooting their mouths off they were great heroes and as such they certainly had claim to be showered with decorations. But the saying of our front soldiers remains eternally true: "Bullets rain at the front and the shower of decorations reigns in the rear." Precisely these slackers behind the front are the ones who are today again eager to cast mud on the honour of the front. With full bellies they now sit as big and little bureaucrats in Jewish newspaper editor offices and spread their poison through the press into the wide masses and besmirch anyone who still values honour and soldiery.

They hate the strong, the unbending heroism; for they can only have their way with weaklings and erotically narcotized people. Their greatest horror is Spartan virtue.

Unfortunately, there are still plenty of dummies who swallow such fat lies like a hungry dog devours meat thrown to it. These people never learned to think. On the other hand there are those who deeply fear the truth and justice that Hitler has always represented; they fear that Hitler is honest enough to give the folk what belongs to it. Hence this flood of lies about the man of honesty. My front comrade Hitler today holds the attention of all of Germany. Hardly has a word left his mouth before it is repeated

a thousandfold put on the scales, approved or criticized. With lightning speed it flies through the countless meters of wire into the telegraph offices and the rotation presses make it public in millions of newspaper copies. And I ask: Where in the world is such a man who has created such a miracle of organization, a concentration of people who only know one will, only the name of Adolf Hitler? How is that possible in a Germany with the highest civilization and level of culture? Where every citizen is taught in school for free thought and action? It can be said straight off it is the boundless will that has become deed, the will to free the German folk from the claws of the Jewish plan for world conquest. It is paired with Hitler's genius. Next to that is the bankruptcy of the present rulers, the obvious inability of the politicians at the government's wheel of our day. If a folk is neglected from above and stepped on, if thumb screws are used to squeeze taxes in order to satisfy the Moloch's insatiable hunger, to placate capitalism, then the end of the lackeys of these life destroying golden idols must assuredly approach, as history teaches us; the primeval strength stirs within the folk and the healthy view of the common people strikes out against the conscious or unconscious government tactics of our ruling stratum. These factors were at work when in such a relatively short time half the nation placed its trust in Adolf Hitler. They did not entrust themselves to him for the sake of riches for Hitler never made such a promise no, so that the inner value and existence of the nation would not be lost forever. That is why the folk elected him their saviour.

The present Germany will not recognize the fundamental formation of the today mutilated Reich in its greatness as precisely our neighbours will. The idea of the National Socialism created by him will one day radiate from Europe's heart across the whole Occident. Our children and their more distant generations will honour in Hitler the national hero and his genius will enter Valhalla and become immortal.

And now to the reader's question: Was Hitler already in the field of this view that he today represents? The answer to this question can only be affirmative. In each action, great and small, he put himself last. I have never heard a moan or complaint from Hitler's mouth about the so-called "swindle". Back then I did not understand his behaviour and so my feelings must be understood in terms of Hitler's restless eagerness to do his duty. We could not comprehend him and so we sometimes thought we had a white raven among us who did not chime in when we cursed the "swinish swindle" and the "big shots". Even in Germany's days of misfortune he carried within himself a new world, the idea of National Socialism, for which he was on the best path to bestow upon it life and blood. Pure patriotism and the quiet hope in heart that he would himself one day be the creator of the regeneration of the German folk made the difficult duty in the field seem easier to him. I cannot help but to remember what he often told us: "Later you will hear a lot about me." We certainly laughed at such a prophecy and misread him as a crackpot. He usually just shook his head at our silliness and looked seriously into the talking group. I certainly believe that even if we Germans had won the war and the Kaiser Reich had emerged stronger than ever, Hitler would have nonetheless founded his party. He would have founded it in the realization that

even the most secure throne must shake in a state whose major leaders included freemasons and foreigners. This danger existed for many German rulers. The close connection of the politics of the freemason Bethmann-Hollweg with Walter Rathenau's had not remained secret to Hitler back then. He alone among us had recognized the fact that the war had been instigated by freemasons and Jewish forces. Unfortunately, many of our blue bloods had joined these circles of agitators, whereby they greatly damaged their standing with the people.

During the presidential election I often heard the "foreigner" Hitler defamed. Most pitiful are just the people who accept even an ounce of such nonsense. That is either maliciousness or boundless stupidity, to blabber one word of this gossip. In my dealings with Hitler I never heard him speak one word in a foreign language. He talked like us with the old Upper Bavarian dialect. The coarse expressions of our dialect used by any Bavarian musketeer were not lacking by Hitler. His birthplace lies across from Simbach, with which it is closely connected by a bridge across the border-river, the Inn. 120 years ago the far bank still belonged to Bavaria, until it was traded by the state to

Austria for some Habsburg land. Present Austria, an ancient German land that was settled by Bavarians since the seventh century, is now called a foreign country, because Hitler, the much hatred man, was born there. No decent person today accepts such rubbish. Quite the opposite: if all Germans were as German as Adolf Hitler was and today it, then our glorious Germany would not lie shattered on the ground. The biggest mouths and agitators against a blameless man are especially those with least mastery of the German language, who should modestly stay in the background. For them it would be best to again populate their homeland at the foot of Lebanon.

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Summer heat laid over Fromelles. June blossomed in red roses. Shy nightingales sang their love song each evening in the castle park, wonderful like in a fable. These dear guests did not want to leave their nests despite the often bombardment of our command centre. At night a fresh wind came in from the sea.

Destructive mortar fire filled the next months. The winged mortars raged terribly; no dugout was constructed strong enough to defy these monsters. The armoured enemy birds in the sky became a bigger and bigger nuisance. Daringly, they glided down and strafed our trenches with accurate machine-gun fire. Our defence measures were initially powerless against this new kind of warfare. But worse, however, was the underground battle of annihilation. The companies were often put in a state of exhaustive nervousness. Boring machines drilled through the otherwise secure earth. Tunnels and trenches were driven toward our line of defence. The fearful feeling to live on explosive-filled ground dominated the trench troops, mindful every second that hundreds of men might be hurled into the sky just to fall back into the crater. The idea of death by suffocation and mass grave was unnerving. This kind of ever-lurking death wore down the strength of even the strongest man.

In May 30, 1915 I left for the regiment message office. Hardy had I become accustomed to being battalion runner when I had to move on. I obediently presented my transfer order to the regiment commander Lieutenant-Colonel Friedrich Petz. He directed me to the couriers battle dugout. After arriving there, I had to take leave of my rifle; it had not left my hand since marching off from Munich. How often had my shooting iron saved my life on dangerous patrols! My future equipment consisted of an army pistol, message case and flashlight. Orders were always stored in a well-sealed envelope in the message case. The importance of the order was designated by the marking on the envelope in the form of a cross. If the order has one cross, one knew there was no rush. Two crosses meant urgency and three very urgent. The courier group usually consisted of ten men. Six men were always on duty in the trenches while the others stood ready. As a rule, two couriers had to bring the order to the front. That was strictly a safety measure, so that if there was an unforeseen event such as the wounding or death of one courier, the other courier would get the important document where it belonged.

My appearance made the couriers quiet happy, because there was a newcomer to tease. Lieutenant Eichelsdörfer functioned as the regiment's adjutant. Hugo Gutmann, a militia lieutenant an officer with Jewish mannerisms often served as his deputy. He was not highly regarded by the couriers. Later this also-officer, trembling with fear, became my unsympathetic superior.

At the moment there was great fun, because Hitler entered the dugout. He returned from a courier task and was tired. I saw him for the first time in my life. We stood across from each other, eye to eye. A pleasant greeting, then his sharp gaze looked me over from top to bottom. He asked me where I came from and rather I was to remain permanently in the group. Hitler himself was emaciated down to a skeleton, his face colour pale and faded. In the deep eye sockets stuck two penetrating, dark eyes; I especially noticed them at the time. His moustache was strong and not well groomed. Forehead and facial expression betrayed high intelligent. It seems to me as if I can still see him standing in front of me, and how he loosened his belt during our conversation. Adolf Hitler, along with Mund Max, became my inseparable comrade.

The next night I, along with Schmied, delivered my first order to the military engineer battle headquarters. The path there did not offer much cover against artillery fire and even machine-gun salvos posed a threat. The positions of the companies were built too deep in a cauldron. Fromelles was open on a hill ridge. After arriving there, we delivered the order to the officer's representative Hoffmann. Taking the reply, we started the return trip. Upon my return I found my comrades had prepared for my hungry stomach. My membership was duly celebrated on this occasion with tea and bread with sausage. Adolf Hitler sat in a corner sunken in a newspaper; meanwhile he slurped some tea from time to time. From time to time he interjected a word into the pleasant conversation, which we usually did not understand. So did the first day at Fromelles end. There was straw in the row of wooden banks. Sleep overpowered us and gently took us into its arms.

Within a few days I got to know all the couriers better. Their names were Schmied, a likable Franconian, Weiss Jakl, an innkeeper's son from Hallertau, Mund Max, a native of Munich, Sperl, Tiefenbeck, Landshammer, Inkoser and Bachmann. The rest quarters consisted of a low old house in which an old Frenchwoman lived, whom he called "black Marie"; she never wanted to leave her home even during the fighting. A mounted courier, Vitus Gasteiger, my countryman from Au bei Aibling, often visited our robbers' den. Vitus Gasteiger never again saw his homeland. He made the greatest sacrifice, his life, for the fatherland.

## Flanders, Flanders...!

The summer was drawing to a close. The battalion still held Gallic soil. And there was still no sign of an end to the horrible murder. Although the will to complete the victory was still strong enough the will to secure the life right of the German folk with the blade of the sword a soft yearning for a quick peace started to unconsciously sneak into our hearts. Who would have believed then that we had not yet fought through one fourth of our unholy world war? Very few realized that the great decision could only come on the western front. Fresh reserves of strength flowed incessantly from nine nations to the French army. The technical precision grew year by year. The war escalated into a nameless horror and degenerated in the next few years into monstrous battles of material.

Whereas in summer the war was characterized more by detonations and mortar barrages, autumn started with artillery and infantry attacks. For two days the Englishman flung lethal iron onto the front line. It literally rained iron from bursting shrapnel. From September 24<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> the belt of fire reached the brewery and castle of Fromelles. Since the start of the attack, heavy shells individually crashed around our battle headquarters, so all of us were already long prepared for the forceful assault.

Hour by hour the battle storm roared ever more threatening, intensifying into a hurricane, until it finally reached its furious peak at 5:00 AM. The whole regiment staff, which was lodged in a house across from us, had fled to our dugout during the hail of shells. Lieutenant Colonel Spatny feverishly worked to re-establish telephone contact with the trenches. In vain! In no time flat the countless explosions destroyed and cut off the three-fold laid wires. Adolf Hitler could not sit still. He walked nervously back and forth. He wanted to go to the front trenches. Then he got the order to find out what was going on with the forward companies. Schmied went along. They ran into the horror and death. On the open ground advance was only possible in leaps. Then they returned in one piece and reported that fires were burning by the enemy, producing thick smoke clouds. The enemy was cutting paths through the barbed wire barrier. The assault was imminent. Our infantry was ready for the defence. Weiss Jakl and I immediately took orders to the battalion commanders. We barely penetrated the churning barrage. Should I relate all the terrors, the desperate search for cover to save my meagre life? No, I cannot describe it in words. We had to wait a while for an official reply. Meanwhile, smoke bombs were hurled toward us; the smoke made it hard to breath and produced a biting pain in the eyes. But the weather god was merciful. Luckily, a westward autumn winds suddenly set in and blew away the malicious smoke.

The sun neared its zenith as Hitler and I again took off for the battalion battle headquarters. I ran out of breath. The batteries raged as we left Fromelles. Death road on their shells. Detonation after detonation followed. To the right and left of the road to Aubers laid broken trees, their shredded stumps defiantly sticking up into air

swirling with dust. Stones and iron ruins whirled past our heads. We turned right into the field. I could hardly get up from the ground anymore...and Hitler pushed onward, onward! I could not understand Hitler, how he could leave the cover so calmly while surrounded by roaring lightning. Again and again he called to me, "Brandmoari, come on!" He did not seem to have nerves. Fear and terror truly seemed unknown to him. We returned. The sweat had formed little channels on our dusty faces. Painful thirst dried mouth and throat. More following forward than walking, we reached the dugout. Paralysing exhaustion seized our burning limbs, heavy as iron. Relieved, I shed off helmet and leather straps and let myself down onto my self-made chest. I expected Hitler to do the same, but I was dead wrong. Before I could look around, he was already sitting at the exit again, helmet on strapped head, awaiting the next order. "Have you gone crazy?" I angrily shouted at him. "What do you know?" was his prompt reply. In that uniform was no longer a man, rather a skeleton. Nonetheless, Hitler was the best courier in our group. He was made of iron; I never remember him getting seriously ill aside from his two wounds. Enthusiasm and consciousness of the greatness of our nation gave him an indestructible energy, even to more easily endure physical exertion.

By late afternoon all the piled ammunition had been fired. The first day of the autumn offensive ended in our favour. The assault launched with such fury and might could not destabilize in the least the front in our sector. Captured Indians and Englishmen were glad to have escaped the hell of La Bassee. The battle that started with such force and great utilization of goods and blood gradually died down and ended in trench warfare.

\* \* \* \* \*

The great death in nature began around this time. Yellow leaves tumbled from the trees. Autumn passed into winter. The unique blueish haze over heights and gulleys that one observes in Flanders in the summer transformed itself into a thick veil of fog. For months the giver of life, the mother sun, hid itself pitilessly behind a grey, impenetrable wall of rain clouds. The winter was damp and without snow, mild and rich in rainfall. We engaged in a stubborn struggle against the wet elements that strained our energy more than the struggle against men. Battle activity receded to the background. Mud and water brought the soldier many hindrances and bodily pains. Under such circumstances it was not surprising that only a few hundred shots were exchanged daily. The regiment's dead numbered by June 1916 only 250, plus over a thousand wounded. Those were losses in peaceful periods on the western front.

The November rainy season brought water and still more water. The foremost trenches were inundated in the rushing flood. Parts of them had to be evacuated and abandoned. This wet element of Flanders made our field-grey men almost unable to fight. But it was a comfort to know that it was no different by the enemy. Aside from our courier duties we had daily problems with the dugout. During this miserable weather the brigade commander, Major General von Kiefhaber we called him the fox-

hole general visited the battle headquarters every second day and demanded a courier to accompany him to the first trench. Kiefhaber was very affable and when I accompanied him, he often asked me for a cigarette if he had forgotten his tobacco. If there was a lot of gunfire, his first exclamation would be, "Damn, the dogs are shooting again today!" A kind fate had ordained that we had such good officers like Major General von Kiefhaber in our regiment, so that in our ranks at least no abyss opened between officers and enlisted men. If it was perhaps like that everywhere, the shameful treatment of officers many places during the 1918 revolution would not have manifested itself so badly. Unequal treatment of enlisted man and officer always avenges itself sooner or later. If the dice deciding the fate of nations should in distant days fall in Germany's favour, may the resurrection of the army find leaders who have the trust of the soldiers!

Although the great battles on the western front ebbed day by day, the advance of German and Austrian troops on the Russian and Serbian fronts became greater and faster. Victory announcement after victory announcement reached the regiment staff. Such news always made Hitler especially happy. Then he stood among us and his excitement knew no bounds. I still clearly remember that time; it does not seem like sixteen years lie between then and now. Our objection against Hitler's standpoint was again and again that we probably could not win the war. Hitler simply could not listen to such talk. In perfect speech he presented the causes that had dragged us into the world war, and he spoke of the invincibility of the German front army and the eventual victorious conclusion of this drama of nations. "For us the world war cannot be lost", were always his final words. Most were convinced of this view and reinforced in it. A few muttered, "Our Adolf doesn't know that, either." He was often disputed out of defiance, just to get Hitler worked up. Then there was a debate to and fro, which finally ended with a general agreement. Each of us knew in advance that we were unable to oppose him with serious arguments. He now became more interested in developments in high diplomacy. In the following years he became a politicizing soldier and he attentively followed events inside Germany. Naturally, Hitler was no longer a newcomer to politics; that was already demonstrated by his eminent knowledge in all possible areas of German history. That made it especially easy for him to top defeat and silence us with a single word. Adolf Hitler bore within himself a different world, but that something special still showed: he was the same as us, he did his duty as we did, yes in him we had a shining example of loyalty to duty and genuine comradeship. His own self did not seem to exist, that is how selfless he was. Certainly, I never understood his behaviour and often said a hard, unjust word to him. Hitler could not be angry with anybody; he was too generous and had deep knowledge of human weakness.

Pumping and panning water had become a daily task for the couriers. Our coat hardly ever left our body. Hitler worked and laboured until the last drop was removed from the dugout. At the start of December, I sought out the regiment clerk Amann. My request was to be granted a leave. Yes, he said, if a substitute could be found, then I

could go on leave. What should I do in such a complicated situation? I went to Hitler and presented the condition imposed by Sergeant Amann. Adolf Hitler did not think long, he said: "I'll do your duty for the fourteen days, too." Hitler, a truly good person, could not say "no". And what joy did he feel when I could again see my homeland for a little while!

On December 11 I boarded the train. The dull growl of shell-spitting gun barrels slowly receded. Belgium cities were passed. Sunken in thought of the homeland I hardly noticed as the locomotive now struggled forward along snow covered tracks. Western Germany was reached on the morning of December 12. In the dark of night I arrived at the Munich train station. After eleven months I again set foot on Bavarian soil for the first time. I rushed through the city and sought distraction and amusement. But it did not seem right. Things hardly gave me pleasure and the people hurried past me; they hardly saw me, the front soldier. I was completely alienated from the pulsating life of the big city. The following day I again saw my loved ones. My arrival triggered joy and celebration. Everything was the same, except that the male gender seemed to have died off in the village. The mood in the homeland was subdued; even at home there was no gaiety. My heart was often out there with my comrades. I was drawn to them and I calmly looked to the day that would send me back to the field.

Christmas approached. I could not experience that closest family holiday. On Christmas Eve I took my departure. This time it was easy for me, because loyal comrades awaited me in Flanders. Before New Year I safely arrived at the regiment in Fromelles.

## From Fromelles to the Battle on the Somme

The cold rose from the ground. The sky was hung with a million lanterns. The moon glistened with silvery rays upon the shimmering swamp landscape. It was a strangely quiet New Years Eve night. The front was silent. We sat together in our dugout in a splendid mood, having a good time. Inkoser brewed a hot punch. I talked about the homeland, about the mood there, and described what I seen and heard there. "Will we also have to spend New Years Eve next year here in this filthy nest?" Bachmann interrupted.

"By then we will long be home!", Mund Max replied energetically.

Adolf Hitler was tidied up and in a good mood in those last hours of the old year. Meanwhile, our cook invited us for punch. Cookies and sweet baked goods left over from Christmas were pulled out and eaten. Nobody had thought about Hitler at Christmas. I wanted to share with him like a good comrade, but he imperiously declined. It was something unique about Hitler. He absolutely did not want to accept even the smallest thing from us. Only occasionally did I manage, after endless attempts, to get him to accept an offering. Usually it was a few spoonfuls of marmalade. He only used his pay for the purchase of marmalade. Since he was a non-smoker, he divided his tobacco allocation among us. Despite my long time with him I never knew of Hitler ever receiving a packet or any mail at all. Curious, I often asked him if he had nobody in the homeland? His answer was always: no! He really didn't know where his relatives were. He was so poor, but he nonetheless knew how to hide his poverty with his dominant, manly bearing.

The day will come when people will sing the great song of war comradeship throughout Germany's provinces. Each was concerned for the well-being of the other, each shared joy and suffering with the comrades, all felt like one big family.

Now months passed without any major operations. Gradually, the thick lime-masses of the flooded ground hardened. A stubborn battle was waged for the Australian position, but it did not bring us one step farther. Patrol skirmishes wasted much energy and unnecessarily shed precious blood. This so-called peace cost no less than 200 dead, all of whom died for a better Germany.

Spring came again to the devastated land. With it new courage and lively hope for a quick decision entered our hearts. May brought us beautiful, dry days. At the same time more combat activity set in along the regiment's full length. From this time on the enemy tried with gas grenades to bring mass death into our ranks.

In dizzy heights daring air combat between German and English planes took place. We often intensively observed the to and fro, the up and down of the roaring rulers of the sky. We were the witnesses of the unprecedented courage of German combat planes, witnesses of how they unerringly attacked the superior opponent until he fell swirling from the sky and smashed onto the ground.

It was July 16, 1916 when spurts of heavy fire were put down on our positions. Telephone lines were shot up and useless. We took order and after order to the trenches. Glaring flares lighted our path. The Australians stormed across the battlefield for the fifth time in vain. Our gunfire repeatedly drove them back to their starting positions. Whoever escaped the rain of bullets from our machine-guns met certain death in the hurricane of German artillery fire.

After the attacks receded our battle headquarters was moved to the "Maierhof". Then in the sector of the 17<sup>th</sup> regiment the enemy had managed to break through the German line. I raced with Hitler to the headquarters of the 17<sup>th</sup> regiment. He hardly allowed me time to catch my breath and then we ran on to the 21<sup>st</sup> regiment. Shells chased us through the darkness of the night. Running, we fell into a water-filled shell crater. Only the light of a rising flare allowed us to briefly regain our orientation. "Now push on!" Hitler said and we scrambled up the crater wall. Soaked to the breast, pants and coat stuck to our limbs. And how did we freeze! Envelope and papers were moist when we delivered them to the regiment commander. He was barely able to decipher them.

The German counterattack on the morning of July 20 brought the position into our possession again. But with what sacrifice and exertion! When evening came, we carried back hundreds of dead and buried them in the soldiers' cemetery of Fournes for their eternal rest. "We did it", were Adolf Hitler's few words after the bloody attack. The raging of the front now diminished and we set ourselves to rebuilding our ruined dugout. Then the yearned for long leave came...

Joy and good mood returned in the rest quarters at Fournes. Mail arrived that day. Each man read the news from the homeland. Weiss Jackl dug around in his parcels until he found the bottle of cherry brandy. One man had nothing Adolf Hitler. Outside in front of our ready to collapse house he cleaned his boots and washed his torn shirts. I also went outside and started to delouse shirt and coat. Then Weiss appeared at the door and yelled, "Linzer boys, look here!" as he, smiling, held out the liqueur bottle toward Hitler. "The hops Jew must have his parcel every second day", Hitler shouted back without envy. By 6:00 PM Inkoser had supper ready. That day there were potato powder with marmalade and tea Hitler's favourite food. "Our foodstuffs have already been consumed", our kitchen dragoon Inkoser began with a worried expression, "and we cannot get more rations until the day after tomorrow." "Something must be done", said Jakobus Weiss. "Adolf, will you come along?" Mund Maxi meekly asked. "No, I can't do that", came from Hitler's mouth. "You can't use him for stealing", muttered Mund... And when the night peeked through the dirt covered window panes, four men sneaked off to Fournes to get booty. "Where is Weiss's cherry bandy bottle?" asked Hitler slyly. "In the parcel". Three soldiers sat around the bottle and emptied it in greedy gulps. Hitler sat aside and laughed robustly, because we had played a trick on the fellow from Hallertauer. We quickly filled the empty bottle with coffee, put it into the parcel and pushed it under Weiss Jackl's bunk....All of us were already in deep sleep when there was suddenly stomping,

cursing and swearing. "Swine rabble!" we heard again and again. Leastwise we pretended to sleep while we suppressed giggles only with great effort.... Then there was silence.

Far off the sky rolled and growled incessantly. Over there on the Somme regiment after regiment was drawn into the swirl of the material battle, only to leave the battlefield decimated and bloodied. Somme...Somme! Irresistibly the power also reached out for our regiment as well. And the long-held presumption took the form of reality. We had been arming ourselves for weeks. Our equipment was renewed and supplemented. On September 23rd the regiment then marched to Haudourdin, was loaded the next day and on the third day at 6:00 AM reached Iwny. After a tiresome foot march via Cambrai we finally arrived in Fremicourt at 6:00 PM.

The first task was construction of a bulletproof dugout. After five days our mined hole was that far along. But on October 2<sup>nd</sup> the regiment was already thrown into the raging battle. We occupied the ground between Bapaume and La Barque. Unknown ground was ahead of us and the dark night made our couriers unsure. Endless rain fell from the sky. Already during the advance we ran like crazy from one battalion to the other. For hours we wandered in churned up crater fields, orders and counterorders crossing; many companies could not be found and others get mixed together. We relieved the 21st regiment at the Ligny position. Mud covered figures, hardly recognizable as men, stumbled out of their holes; we couldn't imagine that we would look the same in twelve days. It took days before we had memorized the location of individual battalions and companies. The regiment staff nested into a half shot-up dugout in Le Barque. Then the couriers moved into a mined hallway so narrow and low that two men could pass each other. One could hardly sit. One fellow stumbled over the other's legs. The air was dull and thick, almost suffocating. A small step led to the open. I had just sat down next to Hitler when a direct hit struck the entrance. The ceiling was smashed and cracked a thousandfold. The splinters flew a long way. Lame with terror, I was not yet fully conscious of the terrible thing that had just happened. When I came back to my senses, I saw how Hitler was proceeding to uncover the four dead and seven wounded. Most of them were telephone operators and radiomen. We carried the misfortunates over to the staffs dugout. A gas shell had destroyed the last safe refuge over our heads. Bleeding on the forehead and with dented helmet, Hitler was now standing on the torn up stair, hardly excited by what had happened a few minutes ago. The poisonous gas had fortunately been carried off by the rain-wiped wind.

In the night of October 4/5 Hitler and I left the battlefield headquarters with an urgent three cross report. Our destination was the 17<sup>th</sup> regiment's battlefield dugout, which we first had to locate. La Barque had already been under a terrible drumfire all day; it is not possible for me to describe the horror we met when we crossed the enemy barrage. We had not yet left La Barque. Trees, beams of flattened houses and piles of bricks were strewn over the road and blocked our path. It was an impassable entanglement! Once a beautiful, stately row of houses stood here, but we now climbed

over ashed and chaos. Stormy wind lashed our faces with rain. We made a stop at the provision's depot, filled our canteens, pockets and bread bag with provisions and dragged the load off, for the companies were cut off from the rear and bringing up food had long since ceased. Then we were off through death and destruction. We fell from shell crater to shell crater. Flares with bright colours rose into the sky in an arch and branched off into endless space. That was the moment when we sprang forward just to again quickly disappear in a freshly churned up crater. Here we feverishly awaited the next detonation. Shell fragments, dirt and iron rained down on us pitilessly. The blood almost stopped in my veins...it could only be seconds, and then a steel-sided monster would rip apart our battered bodies...! Unbelievable, like a miracle, every time Hitler drove me to leap forward, a hissing shell would bore into the same place from which we had just fled. My nerves failed. I wanted to just lay where I was; I hopelessly sank into an unbearable apathy. Hitler spoke to me kindly, gave me words of encouragement, said that one day all of our heroism would be rewarded a thousandfold by the homeland. So did my comrade pull me together in the hour I was lost. We returned with the counterorder a few hours later in one piece. Our faces were no longer recognizable...

When morning came, the murderous fire still continued undiminished. There was still no sign that the enemy was tiring. Quite the opposite was the case. He ruthlessly hurled new army reserves into the gigantic battle. Four continents delivered men and massive material day and night in order to finally forcibly break the back of the German front. But it held firm; the invincible German army did not yield one inch. Whence came this steel-hard strength of resistance? The last and lowest soldier knew that the fate of the German nation rested solely on his shoulders! Only this can explain the sense of duty of even single man of our front army.

We sat squeezed together in the dark dugout for the whole day. If a daring fellow dared to go outside, he not seldom had to pay for his daring with his life. With great precision the English planes shot at anything on the ground that seemed to move. October 6<sup>th</sup> began with intensified drumfire...

An early dawn fell on the hell of the Somme. Hitler had just returned with Schmied from the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. After he had hardly rested, he went with me to the brigade staff at Bapaume. What horror gripped both of us when we had Le Barque behind us! Every road was filled with a single sea of flame. How we got through alive remains to this day a miracle to me. Upon our arrival the staff officers present gathered and discussed the defence against the upcoming enemy infantry attack. Meanwhile we threw ourselves, exhausted, onto a few poor mattresses pushed together in the room. About 1:00 AM we had the counterorder in our hands. On the way back the enemy barrage had meanwhile shifted to the trenches to soften them up for the attack we saw the western sky dipped in purple. German flares demanded a mighty artillery barrage against the English attack. Our path led close by the batteries. Then, suddenly, a drumming the force of the fire repeatedly threw us to the ground. Never before had I seen Hitler so happy. "Hello, Brandmoiri, now they'll get a sound thrashing!" shouted

Hitler into my ear. One's own words were lost in the thundering noise... When we arrived in Le Barque, there was already a report, "English attack crushed by German artillery fire."

Morning dawned. For five days we had not closed an eye. Wherever we laid or stood, exhaustion forced the eyelids shut. The supply depot provided us with strong brandy. It was supposed to make us notice the horror of war less. Courage and strength started to sink hour by hour. We thought we had been living in the bottomless pit of hell for weeks now. But it was only October 7<sup>th</sup>. The troops demanded relief, more loudly and more unruly. On an average the companies only had thirty men left. Intestinal ailments reached almost epidemic proportions. In this miserable condition, we expected the attack today.

At 8:00 AM the fire intensified to a previously unknown scale. Bachmann laid seriously wounded in a collection hospital. Two days ago the offensive demanded its sacrifice from him, too. Six couriers departed in the early morning hours, each with the same order in his pocket, toward the trenches. One of them, the regiment commander figured, would penetrate the torrent of shells and reach the destination. Readers so inclined might construct a view of the fighting in the west that it was no longer warfare, rather an inhuman work of destruction of the young generation. In intervals of five minutes we left Le Barque by pairs. There was great joy when one again saw the other happy and unscathed. "Volunteers forward!" said the regiment adjutant. Nobody reported. Hardly one dared to stick his head out of the hole, let alone voluntarily risk his life. Then Hitler stepped forward, like so often before. The never-tired Hitler and Schmied took off a second time...But Schmied returned alone. We were all deeply shocked when we heard that Hitler had been wounded, our best courier and comrade! He lay out there rolling in his own blood, his left leg shot up. One wrote in the regiment's wounded list: "Number...seriously wounded". Medics carried him back.

When October 13<sup>rd</sup> dawned, Weiss Jackl and I were the only ones from the old squad of old couriers who remained unscathed. All the others were either dead or wounded. In the night of October 12/13 the regiment was withdrawn from the position. A feeling of abandonment had befallen us the past days and desperation carved deep lines into the faces of the incomparable heroes. The corpses remained heaped on the battlefield. Nobody could bury them; we stumbled over our own dead comrades and were glad that the beast of war had not devoured us.

## 1917

**W**e arrived in Sancourt at 5:00 PM. Our cheeks were hollow and dirty, our eyes stared glazed into the new, strange world, our bodies tired and broken. Then we sank and fell into a death-life sleep. Two days of rest had been granted to us. Otherwise we would have forgotten gaiety and laughter. On October 16th at 9:00 AM the train transported us via Douai to Givenchy, where we established our battlefield headquarters in mined dugouts, located deep in a sunken path. The staff sought quarters in Avion. Here the regiment occupied the hotly contested Vimy heights. The hill ridge, once heavily forested, now presented a scene of devastation. Like extinct volcanos the huge crater field stretched into the surroundings. The battle conditions were bearable, recreation compared to the fury at the Somme. Still the mortars that the Canadians sent over to us, 200 by the hour, had a devastating effect. But the most terrible destruction was wrought by the enemy torpedo mines. Here, too, a second enemy hindered us, namely rain with all its side-effects: sticky lime and sliding mud masses.

Adolf Hitler and Bachmann travelled on the same train to Beelitz near Berlin. He didn't forget me there, either. I still have in my possession a photograph with his comradely greetings.

Meanwhile, Hitler was transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> replacement battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> company, in Munich. From there he wrote me the following lines on December 6, 1916:

"Dear Comrade,

How are you? Mostly sit with my swollen cheeks between my four walls and think about you. Was with Schmied a few days ago. In a few days a transport goes to the regiment. Cannot go along, unfortunately. Only old gabbers are taken. Suffer from hunger typhus, because I cannot chew bread, and they also stubbornly deny me any marmalade. It makes one hungry. So how are you? Please write! Best Wishes,

Your Comrade Adolf Hitler."

We celebrated Christmas in Givenchy. I pretty little fir tree rekindled memories of our carefree childhood, the homeland and our wounded comrades in hospitals. At the beginning of February Hitler reported back to the regiment. That was a happy surprise, when he stepped into our dugout looking unexpectedly fresh and healthy.

A star-filled sky arched over the highland of Vimy. Thick frost formed every night. Light snow covered the hills and valleys with festive white gowns. We sat close together in dimly lit dugouts and discussed the front and the homeland. I still remember exactly how Hitler thundered furiously against the ringleaders of munitions strike that had just broken out. He said that if he was the war minister, these major

criminals would be stood against the wall within 24 hours. As well as I remember, Hitler placed the blame mostly on Ebert, then the Reich President. Naturally, we did not judge so bitterly harsh; our vision was not so sharp to see behind all of it what Hitler instinctively felt: the intention to stab the German army in the back. He supported his view by saying it was monstrous treason to agitate the masses for a munitions strike so that we would be helpless against the enemy and bleed. How right Hitler was, was demonstrated a few months later. A painful shortage of munitions set in; the necessary rationing had a catastrophic effect, and to the shame of those irresponsible men it must be said that they have the death of thousands of soldiers on their conscience. Another point was debated, the enrichment of the war material suppliers and the industrialists. Hitler took the standpoint that, if we had to risk life and limb for the protection of the homeland, then these always indispensable gentlemen should receive the same as us, not one penny more. They should be put under constant military supervision. All of us heartily agreed with him. I do not know much about National Socialism, but I believe that Hitler is still of this opinion just like back then in the trenches.

That evening I cooked Hitler's favourite meal, potato powder, tea and marmalade. We were already deep asleep when Hitler was scurrying back and forth in the dugout, a bayonet in one hand and a flashlight in the other, hunting down ravenous rats. He was the same as before; already on the first day he started to slay these irksome varmints. There was no quiet until a boot flew against his head...then there was silence. And when the new day dawned, Hitler stepped forward to do his duty, fearless and indefatigable.

On February 11<sup>th</sup> the regiment marched to Somain to rest and remained there until March 4<sup>th</sup>, when it was ordered via Douai to Hantay. We were now in position on the canal of La Bassee. The assault battalions again stood on the ground where they had already sacrificed their best. From now on the regiment was under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel von Tubeuff. The fighting at La Basse represented a prelude to the spring offensive at Arras. On April 28<sup>th</sup> the regiment advanced toward Biache...

There were no trenches. Spread out, our companies pushed forward. The crater field resembled a gigantic fishing net. So it came to successful battle on May 5<sup>th</sup> at Roeux. Five days served for relaxation and preparation of our own list of casualties. On May 7<sup>th</sup> we relieved the 20<sup>th</sup> regiment. This was done on open terrain with heavy losses. The English artillery hurled gas shells that had a horrible effect and started a blind, frantic barrage.

At staff the orders for all the battalions were ready. I fetched them and it was probably 11:00 when Hitler and I took them forward. We were not yet familiar with the terrain and the location of the various battalions and companies. The night was pitch black. Incessant rain softened the earth. Half an hour earlier the enemy put down harassing fire between Biache and Roeux. The English charged in vain against the German wall of defence. We halted near the railway embankment of von Biache.

Moving from crater to crater, we barely saved our lives. In complete desperation we worked our way through the morass and filth. After hours of feverish search we found our military engineer company taking cover in makeshift dugouts along the railway embankment. The orders were delivered, but where were the other units of the regiment? Nobody knew here. We took off again into uncertainty... My legs nearly failed me and we stood in the middle of an indescribable, hellish fire; it seemed like the end of the world. We had just thrown ourselves into a crater when Hitler shouted, "I've been hit!" The hurting part of the body was quickly exposed and checked out by flashlight. Fortunately, no serious damage could be seen. We suspected a flying stone had bounced off his belt. Then Hitler looked at the map to see where we were. Advancing by leaps, we stumbled on the sentries of our people. To the question where the battalion headquarters was, we received from one of them the answer, "What does that have to do with me?", and the other quoted from Götz von Berlichingen. Hitler angrily shouted, "Silly fellow, it's not my fault!" We turned off to the right. There, what was that? We received machinegun fire from the rear. Although in the middle of Englishmen, we still managed to escape capture. Around morning we reached our destination. On our return trip the sun rose majestically in the eastern sky. Getting lost on the battlefield that night will remain unforgettable for both of us for the rest of our lives.

During these engagements Schmied also returned to us. We never saw Bachmann again; he was transferred to Romania.

The terrors of the previous years would pale against what was to come. If any regiment in the World War made an immortal accomplishment, then it is without doubt the 16<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment of Munich, made up of the best sons of the Upper Bavarian mountains. "Fearless and loyal" was their motto, fearless before the enemy, loyal to the old king. The strength of the brave was still unbroken, although nagging hunger weakened the body. In the last year of the war eternal hunger certainly worn down the whole front army visibly. Over the entrance to a dugout I once read the words, "With marmalade and barras we fight against Arras." And behind the front?...Adolf Hitler once had to bring an order to division headquarters. Upon his return he was full of rage and wrath, so I finally asked what was wrong. Trembling with rage he blurted it out, shouting indignantly, "In the rear they really do a lot. They should be dragged by the scuff of the neck to the front and put in the trenches." Such occurrences made the enthusiastic patriot waver.

The regiment of heroes entered the battle of Flanders on July 13th. We left Roulers at midnight and were put in wagons in Ledigheim. From there foot march via Terhand to Gheluvelt. We again stood on Flemish soil, where the regiment once buried its first dead. Ypem earth one great grave! 25,000 young Germans rest in its dark soil! They rest there peacefully and await the resurrection. Their heroism can never be honoured and celebrated enough by coming generations.

For ten days the battalions held out under drumfire. Miners worked below the

positions and airplane squadrons with 50 and more machines swirled over us. For entire nights the gas-mask never left our face. Then days of rest in Dadizeele followed. 600 men still stood ready for action. Already on July 26th the handful of men were sent forward to the right of the road between Gheluveld and Beceleare. At dawn of July 31<sup>st</sup> the enemy's assault troops attacked along a front measuring kilometres, supported by tank squadrons. Dull horn signals sounded from the sky. Planes carried the attack onward. Fighter squadrons tried to destroy the last remnants of our defence. The path back to the courier dugouts was fogged with smoke and gas clouds.

Our machineguns spat death into the charging English masses. The attack waves collapsed in wild chaos and froze for a long time as rain set in.

At 4:00 the next day the train took us to peaceful Alsace. The courier unit found comfortable quarters in Hochstadt. We felt like we had gone to the Garden of Eden after all the deprivations and constant touch with death. During this time our squad took a 14-day intelligence course. Unfortunately, the months in Alsace flew by all too quickly. For the first time in three years we could enjoy the beauty of summer amid a German population. One saw happy, laughing soldiers everywhere. When the birds flew south in the autumn, we were already back in the old positions at Lizy on the Aisne canal. Fortification work and stubborn trench warfare took up the next few months. It was the fourth war-winter that Hitler, Weiss, Mund, Schmeid and I experienced on the western front. At the end of January 1918 we went to a rest area in Gercy.

## From Montdidier to Chemin des Dames to the Aisne

**R**est. What a pleasant time! Need and misery were soon forgotten. Fear and dread had become unknown concepts during the long war years. So the daily visits of bombing-dropping planes did not in the last disturb our grand leisure.

For weeks we had lacked any news from our loved ones at home. The mail had meanwhile accumulated. Reading one letter, I laughed. Hitler saw that and asked good-naturedly, "Brandmoiri, has Trutschnelda written again?" "Almost guessed it", I replied.

"Didn't you ever like a girl?" I quizzed Hitler. "Look, Brandmoiri, I never had time for that kind of thing", Hitler commented. "And I'll never get around to it", he continued. "You're a funny bird, Adi! I just don't understand you", I retorted. "You're beyond help."

We had recovered again like normal human beings. The beautiful February days drew us outside. A happy crowd gathered around a table. That morning generous pay had been dispensed. "How would it be if we today looked around for a girl?", one of the telephonists said just as a similar subject was being discussed. "I would be ashamed to death to seek love from a French woman", Hitler interjected emotionally. The result was at first a big laugh. "Look at the monk there!" shouted another fellow. Hitler's face had become serious. "Don't you have any German sense of honor anymore?" Hitler started again. And he went on until we ourselves were ashamed of this behaviour lacking dignity. Now nobody wanted to follow up on the previous suggestion. In this regard Hitler was strictly correct and hard. There are still enough witnesses alive today to confirm this, but none to twist or deny it. Adolf Hitler was certainly no morality preacher, although he possessed a deep faith in God, but he could have never forgiven us for such behaviour.

At that time there was a lot of talk about the defeated Italian army. The peace with Russia also reinforced our hope that white flags would soon be hoisted and we victorious. All of us felt within ourselves the nearness of the long-desired peace. Peace going home just the thought alone gave us courage and confidence to patiently endure on France's battlefields the few months the war might still last. A homeland song on our lips for the first time in years, the assault battalions of the glorious List regiment returned to the old positions on the Oise-Aisne canal.

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After four weeks of stubborn fighting with the French, the regiment marched to Fourdain on March 25th. The following nights we camped out under the open sky. Departure the next day at 7:00 AM, advance via La Fere-Vouel into the forest camp at Ville. For two days we defended the position at Chiry. The baggage train laboured onward. A scene of boundless destruction passed by, and we marched only reluctantly

did the ground pass under the dragging boots and marched, day after day. Baggage train and other stuff were hours behind us. They advanced only slowly. Artillery and munition trucks kept forcing us off the road. Whips lashed down into martyred horse bodies. Bathed in sweat, their bodies steamed, until they tripped over obstacles, one here and another there. One then remained there with a broken leg. The long column of batteries halted. Curses and blubbering from the artillerymen one man gave the poor animal the merciful bullet, the reins were quickly redone, and the guns limbered and clanked onward along the road riddled with shell craters. Many kilometres were but behind us each day. Then we met fierce resistance from the French. France's last reserves were concentrated at Montdidier. Across from us was the 1<sup>st</sup> Algerian Zouave regiment. It is not possible for me to describe the fighting and suffering, because that alone would fill a book.

In a few days there was no longer one house standing in the fire zone. Only scattered ruins remained as silent witnesses of the bloodiest event that ever took place on the planet. Across the broad battlefield the ruins pointed toward the heavens like ghosts in the bright, moon-lit nights, mourning for their past splendour.

We couriers sat in the cellars of the badly damaged castle, perhaps the ancestral home of an ancient, noble family. The supply with provisions was so bad that in the first eight days genuine famine set in. The whole courier squad had to make due with one loaf of bread per day. Hitler and I would sneak out at night and search the terrain for dead cattle. With joyous hearts we cut some meat from a no longer very fresh horse cadaver in order to give it to our cook. Rain puddles offered halfway usable water. And when the nausea rose in our throats, the painful hunger simply overpowered it. The men become nervous. It was high time for us when we were finally relieved after 26 days.

Nameless misery! Four day return to Chery les Pouilly. Camping out in driving rain escalated the terrible misery to infinity. The regiment had lost 1200 men through death, wounds and sickness. Since March 16<sup>th</sup> we had removed neither shirt nor pants from our bodies and now it was May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. Our faces had grown old, the eyes red from the long sleepless nights. The uniforms hung in rags. Whoever was at the front will never forget the bloodbath and such suffering. An image of the war will always rise from his memory... Montdidier...

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Spring had arrived. But we hadn't noticed it. The fourth time and without news of peace. The tree tops bloomed again with a garment of blossoms. I should have been allowed to breath the bliss and beauty of just one single day in May in undisturbed hours!

We groomed our bodies and received fresh wash and clothing. We looked like human beings again. Then, sudden noise and commotion in our ranks! An urgent order! "Immediately occupy the positions at Anizy-Lizy!, "Swinish rubbish!..." "Bloody swindle!" growled one broken fellow of the past few days. He was the first when we

departed on May 4<sup>th</sup>. Everybody cursed, but each nonetheless did his duty.

The badly decimated regiment took over a five-kilometre wide front. At an interval of five and six meters the brave men resisted each attack. For ten long days, despite fifteen-hour drumfire, not a foot of ground was yielded. Clutching it, fighting almost jealously for this small piece of earth, we fought with the irreconcilable enemy. The German artillery saved munition for the imminent breakthrough at Chemin des Dames. In the morning hours of May 15<sup>th</sup> troops of the 6<sup>th</sup> division relieved us. Dizzy and ill from prolonged breathing of deadly gases, we stumbled back. Two couriers collapsed unconscious.

The morning sun still fought with the floating veils of night. We camped in the forest positions of the Siegfried Line. The bloody first dance of the commencing battle opened on May 26<sup>th</sup>. Assault against

Soissons-Fismes. The following night the German drumfire erupted like a volcano. Gas clouds slowly crawled across French trenches, heights and gulleys, destroying all life. The enemy was hardly able to defend himself. Uphill and downhill, through thick and thin, we were close on the heels of the almost fleeing men. Trench warfare seemed to have transformed into mobile warfare at full flow. The victory bidding day drew to a close. Falling night covered the ravaged land protectively in its black cloak.

With Hitler I looked for surprisingly fast advancing companies. Spotlights flashed and put a fullness of bright light on path and forest. The French had meanwhile regrouped. Desperately, he resisted our onslaught. We ran through raging fire. High explosive shells struck us. Their flat burst made us sheer crazy.

That was my last courier mission with Adolf Hitler in the World War... .back then... it was at Iuvigny.

The next day I was ordered to the brigade. I arrived in the battlefield headquarters there at 3:00 AM. The brigade was moving westward, unstoppable, in the direction of Epagny. In the course of the morning I delivered the first order from the brigade to the regiment. I met Hitler there. Our joy was great, as if we hadn't seen each other in years. Then Hitler asked whether I liked my new surroundings. "Hopefully, you'll come back soon!" were his last words. "Certainly", I replied as we parted forever. I would not return. The goddess of fate had already decided my lot. The coming day, the last one in May, brought my unexpected fate.

All morning long the whizzing metal vultures had been flying nervously over our heads seeking prey. Their chain of bombs with high explosive detonators created confusion and terror among the German troops. Half-dead after delivery of an order to the 17<sup>th</sup> regiment, I fell into a deep sleep in the forest camp at Epagny. Suddenly there was a mighty explosion. It felt like somebody had cut off both my legs with a massive wooden log. Filled with terror, I dragged myself by hand into a hole. My feet refused to work. With my last strength I pulled off the blood-soaked shoes and

leggings. What a sight! The effect of a bomb series was horrific. 27 men seven of them immediately dead fell victim to it. Two artillery-men carried me on a canvas to the church of Iuvigny. Next to me laid a very young infantryman with a shot up stomach, screaming for hours, until merciful death took his hand. Scenes so horrible and sad played out in this house of God that I had never seen anything like it before. Finally, after 24 agonizing hours, a doctor and medics appeared. The church was bursting full of wounded. Many had already gone to eternity; no pastor had come to comfort them.

At the end of September, after four operations, I came via Soissons-Metz-Ttibingen to the reserve hospital 2 in Munich. At the beginning of November 19181 was well enough to go to a recuperation company in the Luisenschule.

Here I was surprised by the revolution.