

The Scientific Humanitarian Committee was the world's first gay rights organization, founded in 1897 in Berlin. It published a journal for its members. During the First World War, the journal was called "Quarterly Reports of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee." Below is an excerpt from one issue of the Quarterly Reports. (Material inside of quotation marks is directly translated; other material is close paraphrase of the German.) (Translated by Laurie Marhoefer)

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Quarterly Reports of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, April 1916, volume 16:2
(*Vierteljahrsberichte des WhK, April 1916, Jahrgang XVI, Heft 2*)

"Reports from Wartime," (Part 6) (pages 51-65)

The purpose of these issues, these quarterly reports, is to report on how homosexually oriented people took part in the horrible world war. ...there are probably tens of thousands of homosexuals taking part; there are now about 10 million Germans in the military...

Recently, many homosexuals gave their lives for the Fatherland, and their friends who remained at home were thrust into life-long sorrow. We received the following letter from a friend reporting his friend's death on 15 Dec. 1915:

"I feel compelled to report to you what is for me an exceedingly painful fact, that my dear, good, true heart's friend, who was also known and valued by you, has fallen too, a victim of this abominable murder. With him, one of the best is gone. You know how tightly he and I were bound together; we were to spend our lives together, and now violence has wrenched him from my side, sacrificed in his best years, and in ghastly pain, without me at his side to comfort him, to look once more into faithful eyes, to grip his hand one last time. I can say that two lives were destroyed, because there is nothing in my life anymore. With him I lost everything, because what are earthly possessions next to the possession of a beloved, understanding way, with which one is united in an inner harmony of the soul. I will never find another friend with a character like his, I will never find such a deep love again."

He was a splendid, sweet-natured person with a distinguished character. His friendly, agreeable manner and his sunny jocularly endeared him to all whom he met. In addition to his boundless love I relied on his fine (*vornehmer*) character, his noble mentality, his practical hand, his clever advice, and his sound opinion. In all ways, he was a foundation and support to me; now, I am helpless and abandoned, and I will spend the final phase of my life in bleak desolation. The sunshine went out of my life along with him.

In April of this year he was drafted (*als ungedienter Landstürmer*). He was in training near K., and he did not adjust to the stresses and drudgery of training, but became ill. He was in one military hospital and then in another, and then in Seebad K.. In July I visited him there and was for a full four weeks in K., because he felt much better when I was there, and because I didn't know for how much longer I would still have my friend. When we parted he said, if he should fall, at least we had a few lovely weeks together here.

In September he was traveling from N. to K. and had a day stopover in Berlin: that was our last time together." He left at 11 o'clock from the Friedrichstrasse train station. "before he

got on the train he gave me a last kiss. As the train began to move, we reached out our hands through the windows once more; we could not see each other anymore; it was night and two soldiers were leaning out of the window singing something like, 'Don't cry, don't be sad, don't make my heart heavy, because this front-bound train is not an express train,' (*"Drum weine nicht und sei nicht traurig, mach mir das Herz nicht schwer; den dieser Feldzug ist ja kein Schnellzug usw."*) He did not want to ever let go of my hand, except if the train was leaving. I thought later, will that be the last time we clasp hands? And it was, it was! He was one of the doomed." In his next letter, he did not write about the journey, so I asked him how he had endured it, and he wrote back that [following is a quotation of the friend's letter], "It was an indescribable weight on my heart..." I can't describe it with words, it became sobbing, "I pressed myself into a corner that I took possession of and let my thoughts go back, until I fell asleep." And when I awoke, I was back in a better mood. [end quotation of friend's letter.]

He went to G., then to T., and from there by a difficult march he came near the most eastern part of the front, a situation for which he had to 'thank' the fact that he was a good shot. Here he reported, as follows.

[quotation from soldier's letters]

"31 October, the Lieutenant says we're going somewhere and should be sparing with the bread as it will be a long journey by train. Here it snows constantly. We operate amidst snow and ice. I am lodged with eighteen other men in a private house, I am the senior man in the billet (bin Quartier-Aeltester) and so must make sure that all is right in the house and that all arrive on time for service; thanks to this duty, it's been episodes of annoying bother with both comrades and superiors. Yesterday I had a steam bath; it was a treat to get the dirt off. Today I don't have the pain in my chest, but as soon as I have to carry a heavy pack or jump, it is back, so that I worry about what is to come, but – worry means nothing!"

Russia, 3 Nov. Monday I went by train back to the border town L., spent the night there in a barn; practically frozen. Yesterday an eight-hour trip by narrow-gauge railway in an open car in cold, wet weather. We arrived at T., which was completely destroyed. Here spent the night in a stable. Then was a 42 KM march to Sch., which took us two days with full packs. Then by train to Dünaburg, where fierce fighting is to come. Weather rainy, occasional snow, the roads abysmal, in between clear ice.

Sch., 5 Nov. Yesterday and today two march days. It was horribly difficult for me, I thought I certainly founder, as the pack pressed so badly on my lungs. Also blisters on my feet. Another 4-5 days of marching are ahead of us. It is the worst that I've had to endure so far, and it's going to get worse. Hopefully I can make it through. Weather simply abominable, one can't ever get one's feet dry."

8 Nov. It's Monday evening, I've come to the trenches. Please send right away a battery light, wool socks, insoles, soap, food, materials to write with, etc. I'll tell you later where I've been and where I'm going; our letters are opened. I also can't say where I am. From under the thunder of cannons and a brightly illuminated night sky, I send you "heartfelt (innige)" greetings.

9 Nov. *This was the first night in the trench, where the water is up to our boots. The wetness, from which one can't get away, is horrible; you sweat and freeze ... can't make fire because the Russians are too close.*

16 Nov. *I'm still alive, but it's not easy. I want so badly to write you a long letter but I can't do it. All my senses wait for the light I requested, and it'll already be three weeks till I get it. Please, send a second, so many packages don't come. Send also warm underwear, cocoa, canned food, etc. Because the enemy is near the field kitchen can't do much; also the roads are bad. I stand watch, I cut trees and drag them, etc., that's what I do. Always with cold and wet feet. Every second night I sleep in cramped conditions that are not always dry. And all is done while I'm at great risk of losing my life. Send also a newspaper, so that I can know what's going on and if there will be peace soon. "From my head to my feet, I'm so filthy, you've never seen anybody like this."*

18 Nov. *In trench. I'll try to quickly finish a letter to you. There's a day and then the next, and this hard time goes by. You can make a picture more or less of what it's like here from the cards I've sent you. We're now building trenches and dugouts, then they are shot to pieces by the enemy artillery. "One is in danger day and night and in constant stress." Every third night one gets peace in a dreadful constrained space. There's water in the trench; one's feet are always wet and cold. Most dugouts have no light, and sometimes you can't make fire. The frost causes terrible pain in the hands and especially in the finger nails. Field kitchen brings up little, one is always hungry. "A few times we have hard-boiled some potatoes we found, and they made a meal that was beyond reproach. Yes, one is humbled! If you sent me something, if you sent things often, those items would be very welcome.*

(I sent him parcels every day, and later, I sent two large, ten-pound packages to the field hospital, and of course also a number of letters, that he wanted so badly, and of all of the things I sent, he didn't receive even the littlest portion of it; he died without any contact from me.)

Field Hospital Schloß W., bei D., 27 Nov. Maybe you have already had news of the events from one of my comrades but if not, here it is: on the afternoon of 24 November our trench came under heavy bombardment by artillery. We disbursed behind the earthworks. Then came a flying piece of shrapnel; I heard it in the air over me and in the next instant it knocked me over. At the same time I felt a terrible blow in the thigh and thought that for certain the leg was off. At the same time, the most horrible pain. I was brought into one of the small dugouts and given emergency bandaging. It was too light to transport me out, and thus too dangerous. After two hours, during which each minute felt an eternity to me, my four comrades, who had spent the time dividing up the contents of my packsack, carried me for a hard hour across rocky ground, through brush and thickets, through water, a journey that was for all involved a potential martyrdom. We came to the field office (Schreibstube) and the bearers went back. I came on a small farm wagon that was carrying straw; the 6 km on the wagon were the worst of all. Then I was at the triage station where there was a doctor, who diagnosed an injury to the spinal cord and shot lodged over the hip. The whole lower body is lamed, also the sex organs, all I can feel is a horrible pain and burning in the thigh. I was at the triage station two days, then taken further, both nights horrible, pain hammering the whole night long. Injections bring only some relief. Yesterday I was brought in an ambulance to a field hospital and examined thoroughly. It

is doubtful that the paralysis can be cured. So I lie here helpless, perhaps a life-long cripple, I can barely endure the horrible pain. But I have not broken down. (Aber ich bin nicht verzagt.) Too bad about the packets in the mail that won't find their way to me now.

Should you try to send me something here? I think so, yes; in fact, during these four days I have been allowed barely any tea to moisten my dried-out lips; this will certainly change in the next few days [because they cannot have me starve here.]

The pain and fever are coming back, I must stop writing; only one more thing – the ball is still in my body, and it feels like that part of me is dead and doesn't belong to my body.

29 November—I have to stay here probably 3-4 weeks, before I'll get another transport. My body is still in the same bad state, a helpless lump. The endless Russian night! But the pain isn't as bad anymore as it was in the beginning. With food it can't be helped, but I have to comply. Have always such a dry mouth; do send me little sponges to moisten and perhaps some cherry juice. I crave a decent mouthful of fresh water, of which there isn't any here. There is absolutely nothing to read; please, do send newspapers. But above all, write very soon.

That was his last sign of life. He lived another ten days, but he was too weak to write again. Probably as he wrote he was hungry, because the whole fifteen days after he was wounded he was not supposed to eat, because the paralyzed lower body made defecation impossible.

Now he is spared all physical and mental suffering. It was hard for him to take up arms against his fellow humans, who had not done anything to him personally, but who just happened to be born under a different piece of sky. He has been relieved of that moral scruple now because he himself fell to a murderous bullet. He has lost his bright life, a life of action, a life he loved so dearly, for the Fatherland, a Fatherland that persecuted him because of his natural orientation, for which he was not guilty. That persecution injured his sensitive soul deeply.

It is deplorable that the Fatherland still makes it impossible for good citizens (*Bürgern*), upright people with excellent characters, to feel comfortable and to feel that they are equal with others, due to a short-sighted law, and that the Fatherland ostracizes them or condemns them and treats them as pariahs, simply because nature saw fit to organize them differently than ordinary people. I am sharing this with the Scientific Humanitarian Committee because it is another example of how people (*Menschen*) who by nature are orientated toward the same sex, do their duty and their part fully and completely. It is finally time **that the state treated them in the manner that they treat the state.** (*Es wäre doch nun endlich an der Zeit, daß auch der Staat so an ihnen handelt, wie sie an dem Staat handeln.*)

With sincere greetings, in deep sorrow and loneliness,

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