

Oberursel, Summer 1941

Dear Mother,

I want to write to you that I have arrived well here at the Gausiedler School. Comrades come from all over. There are also some folks from Plauen and Oelsnitz here. In the morning we do military sports (6 o'clock), after that we have breakfast (rich!) in the big hall. Seminars on animal husbandry, agriculture and settling in the East followed. I don't learn much new, most of it I know from home. But I like being here. They say that we will bring National Socialism to the world. I heard yesterday that the Fuhrer may soon pay us a visit. Just imagine, I will be able to see our Adolf in the flesh then!

How are the sisters? Is everyone well? The harvest will soon start. Can Werner help you when he gets home leave? I don't know if I can come to you for a few days before fall.

Please send me sausages made by Mr. Grünert. In spite of good food, I'm always hungry and fall into bed dead tired in the evening.

I want to close for today and will contact you soon.

Don't worry, everything is fine here!

Yours truly, Franz

PS: Forgive me for not telling you before leaving for Hesse. I know it is hard for you, but you would not have let me go.

Utrecht, Winter 1941

Dear Mother,

I am writing to you now from Holland. During training in Oberursel, my comrades and I received a hint that we could volunteer for the Afrika Corps. This is my chance. If we beat the Tommies down there, maybe I can make a career home in the Reich afterwards. After all, all doors are open to a warrior who has served under Rommel. I would love to work for the Reichsbank and go to Berlin later. I can learn foreign languages quickly, and I'm good at math and economics. People trust me. If Berlin works, you can come to stay with me. The sisters will surely also like the big city.

Utrecht is such a beautiful and well-off city. From here it is not far to the North Sea. I have already been to the beach to see the sea. Our movement is already strong here, too. I saw the party conference of the NSB. There must have been a few thousand people there, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the party in the Netherlands. Adriaan Mussert founded it here in Utrecht in 1931. Soon it will all be part of our empire. All of a sudden, so many things are possible, Mother. Who would have thought that someone like me, the son of the village cobbler from the Vogtland region, would one day travel the whole world? Father would certainly have been proud of me.

Tell me, have you made good provisions for the winter? Write me if you need anything. Our rations are good and I have saved up pay. I can make you a package.

Give my regards to the homeland and Werner should he come to you over Christmas.

Yours truly, Franz

PS: I have met a nice girl. Her name is Katrijn, she is from Tilburg and works in the pharmacy of the train station opposite our barracks. I will send you a photo of her.

Naples, Christmas 1942

Dear Mother,

Thank you for your letter and the Christmas cake! We have already eaten many of it. Our ship moors in the military harbor below the old town now. It is only a few minutes on foot up to Via Roma. It's a long, very elegant shopping street. The weather is great here. We have sun and 20 degrees. It rarely rains. Yesterday I had my portrait taken in the elegant La Rinascente department store. You will find one enclosed in the envelope. You see me in my dress uniform. The photographer's name is Mario Pennasilico. He was very kind and patient with me (I was too excited), he also knew a few words of German. He fought in the Alps during the Great War.

Just a few days ago we received our marching orders to Tunisia. At the beginning of the New Year we are heading for Palermo. Now we are finally leaving!

I will write to you soon from Africa.

Give my best regards to my sisters and have a happy New Year! Is there any news from Werner?

I will send you a package of sfogliatelle today and hope they arrive safely. We eat them here almost every morning. They are very fine and sweet.

Yours truly, Franz

Tunis, February 1943

Dear Mother,

The 11 days in Palermo have been really beautiful. It rained only a little and was already quite warm (17 degrees). Now we have been in Tunis for almost a month. The influence of the French is clearly noticeable - the language is spoken anywhere. Large boulevards and villas adorn the city center. We've also been out and about in the medina, a huge, dense, covered market maze west of the city center. It's hard to get your bearings there because you can't see the sun. At one point, we got lost. Inside, there is an abundance of oriental clothing, jewelry, food, fabrics, people, animals, candy, good luck charms, instruments, carvings. I can't hardly get enough of it. I bought the sisters beautiful robes and sent them to you in a package. I hope it arrives safely. It is said that we will soon be marching off to our deployment site. Pont du Fahs is the name of the town in French, El Fahs in the language of the Arabs. We are supposed to take up an anti-aircraft position in the mountains close to the city and to the Tommies to pieces. I'll report back when we arrive.

How is the weather at home? Do you have much snow?

Give my best regards to all of you,

Truly yours, Franz

PS: Did you receive the letter with the photo?

Grombalia, May 1943

Dear Mother,

It's over. The trap has snapped shut in front of Grombalia. Day and night the Tommies and Americans shelled us with everything they had. It was a nightmare. We were afraid that they would catch us when they find our position. We couldn't defeat them anymore. No supplies, no ammunition, no more strikes from our airforce. Now it's just over.

For days I have been lying here with thousands of Italians and Austrians on the railroad tracks outside the city. There are so many of us, the whole plain is full of comrades.

The Tommies are bizarrely friendly to us. The Americans too. I thought they would hate us.

I hope you will get my letter. I don't know what they are doing to us now. There is rumor that they are taking us to Algeria.

I will write to you when I have news.

Do not worry about me.

See you soon,

Yours, Franz

PS: How is the situation at home? Do you have news from Werner? It is already hot here. Sometimes almost 30 degrees. The summer has begun.

Constantine, April 1943

Dear Mother,

From Grombalia the Tommies took us by train to camp 208 near the town of Constantine. The heat, the dust, hardly anything to eat. It was hell. We travelled day and night. We now dwell like Arabs here in field tents on the bare ground. The nights are short and cold. During the day there is gloom and boredom. The British guards seem to be battle-hardened lansquenets, Indian troops are deployed too. I don't know if I can receive mail from you here. Maybe you can try to send it through the Red Cross. We were able to save parts of our rations on the trains, but here in the camp we are on short commons and always starving. I had to weigh myself and barely reached 75 kg.

Our division has remained together so far, we have a few wounded, but nothing serious. I'm doing fairly well so far. Could you please send me, if parcels are possible, a good woolen sweater for the nights? I wish I had news from you. As soon as there is information about how things are going, I will write to you again.

Do not worry about me!
We will meet again.

All the best, Franz

PS: If you can, please send me some pencils and paper as well and maybe one or two of my books on economics in the wooden box under my bed. Spiritual food in dark times. Thank you very much indeed!