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Otto Wortmann internment camp papers, 28 August 1917-8 September 1918
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Tuesday, 28 August 1917

So here I start the fourth volume of notes! The fourth volume in captivity! And this brilliant captivity has now lasted more than two years! Yes, my dear fourth volume, if I were to scribble a foreword, an introduction on your belly [sic], it would be meagre and lugubrious because, frankly, I have little faith in you, you are too thin, not hefty enough to accommodate a weighty content. Each notebook that I start here is filled with my hope that one of its pages will contain the day that brought freedom to me and peace to the world! Yet, I have little faith in you, because you are too thin, and if your predecessors, despite their sometimes almost indecent obesity, have not managed to achieve this, why should you? But who knows? Maybe you will be the one? Maybe with this unhopeful, dissembling foreword I shall manage to dupe fate

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and the Good Lord – who knows?

Outside it is raining; a very light rain. It is foggy and damp. A dampness that penetrates your clothes and the walls, that makes everything look slimy and slippery, that even makes yourself feel slimy and drab. – The sea is one drab, dirty-grey expanse, the sky is grey, leadenly grey is the beach, are the meadows, and the mountains and hills are hiding behind curtains of fog and smoke. A whole symphony in grey and dirt that does little to enhance the shabby Australian landscape.

And so, on this god- and goddess-forsaken day, early in the morning, I'm sitting here at my table in my prison cell, trying to write, but mostly I'm staring out the heavily barred opening that pretends to be a window, and above the high granite wall I can just barely discern a 10-centimetre length of sky, and I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming instead of studying or working, but this captivity, this prison life has made me so weary, so drained

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of energy that all I can do is dream! The thoughts take wings and carry me home, to Mother; I'm going for a walk with Mother, Father, my siblings; I'm looking at German women and friends, or am at the theatre, at the tavern; or else I'm standing among New Guinea's Kanucks, arguing, swearing, sweating, asking for work, or even working, and happy and content; or I'm hurrying towards the ocean liner that will bring me back home, back to the loved ones. – But then, somewhere outside, a harsh, vile and repulsive sound, and the prisoner of war is back with all his petty worries about clothes, money and the future, with his eternal wait for a decisive event, for redemption!

Sometimes, nay, quite often when the sun shines, the sky twinkles and the sea glitters, or when reading a pleasant newspaper article or letters from home, or at the theatre, or when

playing cards or over a good book, good music or a good conversation, we can forget the worries and pains; but this too is but a dream, because we just temporarily forget our surroundings and escape

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to somewhere unreal. Pleasure and prison and loss of freedom do not mix. Music and theatre plays are bound to end; when playing cards, one is usually being slaughtered and definitely robbed of one's money, which sobers you right away. But as for the conversations, their language, expressions and content, they simply stink. The language is a mad mix of German and English, peppered with expressions from exotic idioms like Chinese, Japanese, Malay and Kanuck. Expressions are hard to explain, but at least every 3 minutes you hear: bacon chaser, racket, konzi, gamble, capitulation, remake the hops, etc. etc. No real meaning, just prison slang! Another remarkable achievement is the prison complexion, a hue that most of us have acquired over the winter months, except for the hoarders of brown pigment. To cut it short, all would be bearable if it didn't last so long.

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Concerts, theatre and food turn boring and repugnant when dished out with such endlessness. Of course, our furnishings and coffee-making facilities are well appointed and pleasant. Just note, it's "our" appointments, because if it were up to the government which so irresistibly invited us, we'd be living on the bare floors, without beds, chairs, tables. Whatever there is was created by our hands, our money, and although it is nicely done, it tends to bore you when you have it for too long.

Will there be peace soon? I do not know, I cannot tell the future, not even guess! In Australia they are still on strike: railway workers, tram conductors, naval workers, coalminers! The local rags feast on the no doubt welcome event, pushing the war to the back, and only occasionally do we hear of an English, French, Italian or Romanian offensive; what really happens behind the scenes remains a mystery. But let's hope, and I do so with fervour, that we won't have to spend another Christmas here. 10.30am

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Monday, 3 September 1917

And so, helped by God, we have stepped into another September and thus into another beginning of spring. Well, what happens to be called "spring" in Australia. The sky is a bit bluer, and at one stage during the day, the temperatures are a bit warmer, but most of the time a terrible wind is raging, blowing dust and grime into every nook and cranny and into our eyes. Since there are no flowers in our camp, we lack the usual harbingers of spring like violets, and so for me, that is already the extent of the Australian spring. Summer will bring more of a change, that is, a heat so dry that we humans end up barely crawling, like flies in their last minute of life. In winter, it's the opposite; we are cold like a Papua nigger who is transplanted naked to the North Pole. In summer you can't wait for winter, and vice versa. Well, that alone is a lovely change of pattern and a glorious entertainment! What else do you want?

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There is nothing springlike to my mood, however. I'm disgustingly edgy, jumpy and lethargic. I'm losing my temper over the smallest of trivialities, and if I start twenty different jobs, not one I will finish. It's the most horrible fact that, not knowing when this terrible war will end, you start telling yourself every hour how you will have to endure umpteen other dreary days like this one, see forever the same jaded people, endure over and over again their eternally same jokes and phrases, be forever without money and cigarettes; or else you rack your brain with unanswerable questions like how much longer will this last? How much more of this dull routine will you have to endure? If I were told that two years from today there was to be peace, I would jump up and down for joy to have finally a definite date; I would, like a kid before Christmas, make myself a calendar and each evening strike off another day with colossal joy; and if I ran into another one of my darlings, I could consult this fabulous calendar and note with satisfaction that, thank God,

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I will have to see this darling only 400 more days, and 399 more days from tomorrow, and will have to hear his silly jokes less and less often! However, it's all different. The Australian newspapers – we don't get any other ones – only report the Allied victories; at the moment, it is all happening in Italy. The Italians took the Bainsizza Plateau and if you want to believe their fanfaronade, they are about to take [Mount] Hermada and Trieste. The English are advancing at Ypres and Lens, the French at Verdun; the Romanians defend their position, and only the Russians yield some ground at Siret. Every now and then, America cheerfully sends troops and ammunition to Europe. The U-boats are failing. In Germany, strikes, famine and dysentery are raging. The Italian offensive will definitely be the death blow for Austria, and possibly for Germany. That's one side of the coin. The other side, which I much prefer, looks different: In Australia, pretty much everybody is on strike. The export business is dead. The "Merinda", in whose fabulous hold I was transported as a prisoner to Australia, is finished, she entered Sydney ablaze,

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her cargo and fittings all burnt to ashes, the ship herself sank, three-quarters of it, and to boot, the workers declared her off-limits and downed their tools! In America, England and Russia, various unions are striking. In Russia, Kerensky and Kornilov are at loggerheads; they also fear German attacks on Riga and [Saint] Petersburg. In England, heavy storms, etc have destroyed a large part of the crops. Furthermore, an Allies-Socialist conference is being held that seems to have different ideas than Mr Lloyd George and also wants Germany to keep Alsace Lorraine and get back her colonies. The Stockholm Conference is also due to begin. And since I am confident that our submarines are still being successful, I hope for peace this year.

Apparently, Ballin and Admiral [Max] von Grapow are lobbying for Germany's colonies, suggesting among other things that the South Seas colonies should be extended, defended by cruisers and garrisons. The Australians cry blue murder, as if they suddenly couldn't survive

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with Germans in their neighbourhood!

Unfortunately, I have not had any mail from anywhere. The others like Jerssen, Stegmann and Buttke received their clothes and belongings from Rabaul, but I didn't get anything, so I must assume that nothing is left of my stuff. So I have little choice but to buy some shirts this month, although I'll be damned if I know how to achieve this financial miracle. (11am)

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Monday, 10 September 1917

Riga has fallen! The German troops are already within 34 miles of the conquered city. Gloria! Victoria! A step, a giant step towards victory! Towards peace! The prophesy of good old Geibel may come true: "The world will be all the better for German endeavour." Hopefully my hope will come true, too: peace before the year is out!

It's definitely time to get out of this shithole where nothing is ever new or ever will be. Well, one needs to lament and protest. Whingeing has become a necessary ritual for the people here, but it turns really vivid when they play cards or roll the dice; one of the three players invariably whinges and yammers heartbreakingly, even though he almost as invariably has the best cards, and tells the innocent bystanders – not that there are many of them left: "Man, if I don't whinge, I will never win at all." The idea of all the whingeing is to con himself, the other players and the Lord. If we don't whinge, we may not ever make it out of here because nobody will have pity! Thus, keep whingeing!

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At the moment, I'm not doing too badly. Spring seems to be in the making at last. Sunshine and blue skies all day long! Since I'm feeling healthy I'm going for a lot of walks and also often avail myself of the shower installation at the "little fisherman", who functions as our pool attendant. This morning I showered for 20 minutes, alternating between warm and cold water; that was truly invigorating! – The financial conundrum solved itself surprisingly well this month, I received £5 from Rabaul. It is not clear whom I have to thank for the extra £2; maybe a friend has donated it, or else Rabaul has compensated for the fact that, unlike Jochen, I was not sent any clothes. Well, no point in racking my brains over it, I have pocketed the money, paid off my debts, ordered some shirts, and hopefully, I will be comfortably off this month.

Unfortunately, I have had no mail from either New Guinea or Germany. I'm often nursing unhappy thoughts because I haven't heard from my loved ones for so long and I worry that once again something has happened at home, that someone

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might be sick; on the other hand, I try to convince myself that mail can get lost or captured. Recently, for lack of new mail, I have dug out the old letters from home and lapped up all the love they contain; it made me sad to think of Edy and of my mother's pain, but I also enjoyed the crazy rumblings of Ada and Richard and had to laugh when I thought of "Schmucki", "Ricki", "Giggus" and "Gaggus". – From Rasmus Schmidt in [indecipherable] I received a

lovely letter, he says he is doing very well and he deserves it, it seems he gave the Rabaul chiefs hell; he also promised to send me cigarettes but so far I haven't received any.

There is, however, one sore point, and I feel sick when I think of it – my future. How will my future life pan out? I have not the faintest idea because I have no foundation, no certainties on which to base any plans, and that is so bad. (11.30am)

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Monday, 1 October 1917

Spring has arrived in the meantime. Lots of wonderfully warm days full of brilliant sunshine and mild nights. The storm has prepared the ground by sweeping the whole landscape clean. The sea is aglitter in a luminous blue, and even the grass and ferns that cover our hills, usually so taupe and drab, are sporting little yellow and red blooms, resembling the German heather. Nice to be able to walk and amble through God's wondrous world in such brilliant weather.

If I haven't had a chance to write for almost a month, it's mainly Lembach's fault. He proposed to the camp to publish a book after the war about our captivity and this idea was greatly welcomed. The book shall cover all the prison camps of the Far East, reporting the main events of our captive lives, and be illustrated with photographs. The whole thing will cost 10 shilling per copy, and the only problem is that this will have to be funded here and now. I have volunteered to write the report of the Rabaul camp, how

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this will turn out is another question, since I have hardly made a start on it yet! My main job is to function as Lembach's "secretary", typing, making excerpts, keeping book, etc, etc, and for this I shall receive the princely sum of 1 shilling per day (not that I have seen any of it yet, but it will happen). Thus, I'm happily occupied with a task that quite pleases me for now and that will help while away the days.

Of the world out there I hear next to nothing. I haven't heard from my loved ones back home in all this time and I often end up worrying myself sick over how they might fare and whether they are all well. Of course, thinking rationally one knows that letters are getting lost, that there is no room for mail, that whole heaps of letters might simply be thrown overboard, but, alas, one is not always rational. From New Guinea I had word that our monthly stipend of £3 is being paid at the suggestion of R. Schmidt. Whether it is a gift

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is not clear from any of the letters, probably we will have to pay it all back one day. If that's the case, the whole rat pack be cursed, since the hypocrites are now even subsidising the have-nots in these faraway camps, without any repayment obligations; everybody is getting their money, just not their own former employees! Well, maybe it [our monthly £3] is a donation after all. I'm inclined to be peaceful and think positive these days and to indulge in good hope. – Rasmus Schmidt is indeed a lovely guy and I owe him a lot. Not only has he put some heat under the seats of these gentlemen, he also writes nice letters and has even sent me 300 "Simon Arzt" cigarettes. If you never have smoked the great label "70P" and had to

make do without it for years, you won't appreciate this. Not much seems to have changed in New Guinea. K.B. Müller-Rabakaul has died of a lung infection! I will have to offer my condolences to his wife ("Schnucki")

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today or tomorrow, and also thank Rasmus for the cigarettes!

If you wanted to believe the local newspapers, the only development on any of the European and other war fronts consists of thunderous British victories in Flanders. The only strange thing is that the British gentlemen aren't gaining an inch of ground!

As for the other fronts and countries, there is an eerie and ill-boding silence. No idea what's happening in Russia, for example; we can only guess, and we guess towards a separate peace. And I still, or at least for now, consider peace and freedom possible this year.

Well, you can see that I'm rather bursting with optimism! Incidentally, it's exactly 2 years today that I came to Trial Bay! Not much has changed in these 2 years. Although we do have a new commander. Two years ago I slept on the floor, now I have a pretty fancy bunk bed and we have just rearranged

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our furniture to allow even more light in.

As far as health and occupation are concerned, it's much the same; we have now institutionalised a game of after-lunch "whiskey poker" at the "Duck Coop".

Thus, to wrap it up, I wish myself all the best and that I will not have to endure another 2 years here! (8.15pm)

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Wednesday, 18 October 1917

Should peace really happen this year, the much revered and hotly desired angel of peace better start making its preparations, because in 9 weeks Christmas will be here. My fifth Christmas away from home and my third in captivity. It could make me cry if I weren't already so dulled and stultified. – If there will be peace is hard to tell from the news available to us; one day it looks possible, the next it doesn't. Mostly we hear of the usual [Allied] victories on the western front, of mutinies in the German Navy, our efforts in Russia – although great big silence on the finer points – and, in neat succession, of famine in Germany, England, France, Russia. Other than that, the usual English hubris! – In Australia, they are still on strike. Also, 2 or 3 ships exploded or were incinerated, and to their great horror, a minefield was found near Gabo Island, or so they say; thus, the local rags

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are full of rabble-rousing attacks on the Germans. –

I don't seem to receive any mail from Germany anymore. I hope my loved ones are all well and I often dream myself into their presence. In the camp, the same old same old. We have managed to vote Lembach into the 17th caucus and he expects information from Melbourne

any day on whether our request for a border expansion has been granted. Our new sports ground has been inaugurated, but mere spectators are not allowed out there.

The days go by without much variation, it's galling! Mornings and afternoons I work for Lembach, mostly at the typewriter, and for this I get the princely sum of 1 bob a day. I can't say I mind the money, but I do find I have little time to myself. Today I've taken a lurgy and will now go for another walk, since the weather has been very good, although rather windy. Captain Oefner, from Würzburg, has waylaid me, and I had to have coffee with him last Sunday! Horrible! Horrible! Theatre: Thoma's "First Class", quite enjoyable; especially Dr Defregger was so good he made you cry. Hirschfeld's "Pauline" on the other hand was a dead dog. The Trial Bay camp is publishing a new newspaper called "The World on Monday" and to appear each Monday, but so far it has come out once in 4 weeks! It all sucks! (4pm)

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Monday, 5 November 1917

Well, let's lighten up this busy work period with a day of rest and loafing. On Saturday, I have successfully finished Lembach's first piece; yesterday, unfortunately, it was Sunday and, even more unfortunately, it was raining all day, which meant that Hayer wouldn't budge from the shack; today, however, he is working again and so I am the undisputed ruler of the coop. So far (10.30am) I have celebrated the nice weather with a walk.

The past days all ran the same course. I got up at 7.30am, had breakfast, got dressed, took a walk until 9.30am or 10am, worked from 10am to noon, read the paper from noon to 1pm, had lunch at 1pm. At 1.30pm off to the "Duck Coop" for a round of whiskey poker with Lembach, Stegmann, Brugggraf and Otto; this affair always lasts until 2.30pm, and every 2nd or 3rd day I end up paying. Then another walk until about 3pm, we are now allowed to use the road almost up to the Tommy barracks.

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From 3pm to 5pm, back to work and, whenever possible, another whiff of fresh air from 5pm to 6pm. At 6pm, roll-call with subsequent dinner, and then a last walk with Stegmann, always around the block, and then reading until 7pm; played Pinnacle once, and every 10 days I would go to the theatre. At 9.30pm we sweep out the shack and at 10pm we're off to bed, lights-out at 10.15pm, and the rest is silence. –

There's nothing new to report from the camp. Nothing is happening. People scatter into the four corners; sports ground and vegetable garden keep about 50–60 men busy every day, the others are bustling for the good of the community or for themselves, and those who don't either play cards or talk politics.

And still I haven't heard from Mother, Father or the siblings. I often worry quite a bit, but I tell myself, or am told, over and over again that mail does get lost.

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Quite some time ago I had news from Schuh, who was at one of the many fronts; I hope he manages to keep safe. Alma Spagl wrote to tell me that her mother has died; the poor girl is

all alone in the world now. – From the rest of the world I have no news whatsoever. Especially the gentlemen in New Guinea are masters in keeping mum; still, the money, the weekly £3, arrives regularly. As for the war, I have a premonition of peace; the tidings are excellent. Russia is finished for good, in all respects, Riga has fallen, and we have captured all the islands in the Bay of Finland, and have embarked on a new landing on the Werder peninsula. Even the English newspapers say that Russia is done. On the western front just a few skirmishes; the English and French still haven't managed to break through the line. And how about the Italian

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offensive! The Italians are being thrashed day and night. Whatever they had arduously annexed in $2\frac{3}{4}$ years they have lost in 2 days. We hold Gorizia, the enemy has retreated all the way to the Tagliamento and will most likely be pushed back to the Adige. So far we have claimed 180,000 prisoners and 1,500 cannon. In my opinion, a separate peace is just a matter of time. Our U-boats are still effective, and every now and then they shell London. All countries are in turmoil. It just smacks of peace. Well, let's hope anyway! Apparently, Michaelis has resigned as Reich Chancellor and Hertling has replaced him. (11am)

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2 January 1918

And so I have once again begun a new year in Australia – without much celebration or festivity, without booze, sentimentality or joy! This brand new year, which right now looks disgustingly shabby and desolate because it has been raining non-stop from the word go, has the goddamn duty to behave and turn out a lot more favourable than its predecessors in terms of events that lead to peace, freedom and joy! I would like to address this year with a moving speech, send it on its way with a bagful of exhortations, give it such a pep talk that it cannot help but remember all the poor souls called prisoners of war and civil war prisoners, who are still awaiting their freedom.

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Well, I had all these good intentions for the year and particularly for tonight but guess what, Hayer's playmates have arrived with their noisy chatter, discussing timber and construction and god knows what. However, since I have the shack all to myself during the day, I shan't complain; I'll quit the writing and hopefully continue it tomorrow.

3/1/18, 9.30am. All quiet on board. Hayer went to work and I am all alone. The weather has cleared up a bit, I've already had a swim and a walk, so to the arms!

I have made a resolution for the new year to do at least some work every day, i.e., to write, study English or agriculture, or whatever else there is to do. The last months of 1917 I have idled away with admirable mastery. In early November I still did a few days of typing for Lembach, but soon I gave up on that because partly, it was too hot in the cell and partly,

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the pay was too minimal; also, the sloth period got into full swing, where the day's work consisted of swimming in the ocean, eating, sleeping, walking, reading a lot and doing an hour of "Sandow training" [bodybuilding]. Once I worked in the vegetable garden with Stegmann, Hieber and Loellein [?], plus a few musical evenings, card-playing evenings, 8

theatre performances, 2 coffee battles at Hieber's beach hut, one coffee party with Ullrich and the radio technicians, and that's the extent of the earth-shattering events!

For Christmas and New Year, the friendly government that is hosting us came up with a big surprise. The past three years we had been able to buy beer or wine for the occasion, but this year – nothing! The outrage was enormous and you could hear people rail and rant with abandon. And thus Stegmann, Hieber, Jenssen, Walter and I spent Christmas Eve in the hall, listening to a shabby concert and

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stuffing ourselves with pie, coffee and non-alcoholic beer, and everybody was relieved when the affair was over and we could crawl into bed at 11pm. New Year's Eve was even shabbier, if that's possible. From 7pm to 10.30pm, I was at the theatre with Hieber and Stegmann, enjoyed for the second time a fabulous Dessau play, "Just like the oldsters crooned"; later the three of us and Walter played "66" in Stegmann's cell until 1am. In the hall, meanwhile, the band played a program that scared away even the bravest of the brave, and Berblinger's speech at midnight would have killed off the rest. At least half the camp was in bed by 10pm. I stubbornly clung to company, because if I hadn't, I would no doubt have ruminated about the loved ones, about better times, and would have ended up in a crying fit. And here's the finding: If a man is not allowed to spend Christmas and New Year surrounded by his family, then

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he should at least be given heaps of booze! As for the Christmas presents, they were grander than expected. New Guinea, overall, sent a few thousand cigars and cigarettes and because I and Täuffert and Stegmann were the ones to mete out the lot, I ended up with a box of cigars and some 80 cigarettes. The Germans in Batavia sent love parcels that resulted in every man in camp receiving 10–15 cigars. Mirow sent me 100 very good cigarettes and Rasmus Schmidt sent 500 "Simon Arzt 40R", and I'm much obliged to both of them, particularly to Mr Schmidt.

Mail is bloody rare, however. Schmidt is the only one to write from New Guinea. Schuh and Alma Spagl the only ones from Germany. I haven't heard from Mother, Father and the siblings in months; I can't help but worry and rack my brain, and yet I can't make reason or rhyme of this sorry fact.

I won't bother with politics and war events today; I happen to be rather optimistic but

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I don't want to be embarrassed again by my optimism. In short, the situation is this: the U-boats are doing efficient work, the Germans are attacking in the west, also in Italy; the Italians should soon be pushed back to the plains and Venice will fall. The English have captured Jerusalem. We are negotiating peace with Russia and I'm pretty sure that we will soon sign the peace pact at Brest-Litovsk. So far the motto is "No annexations, no indemnities", but the border states of Courland, Lithuania, Finland, etc should be allowed to choose, unburdened and voluntarily, if they want to declare independence or become part

of Germany or Russia. It seems that Courland has already declared itself for Germany and if others follow, we surely do not need any annexation. Germany should regain its colonies, and the Suez and Panama canals, etc should be made neutral. They say that Germany has already resumed trade with Russia. – And if one party has made peace,

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the others, maybe starting with Italy or France—Romania is already negotiating—surely will follow suit. –

Australia has pulled another huge boner. Despite their promise the previous year not to stage another referendum if the conscription vote failed, they were trying again to force the issue. Huge campaign. The Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, loudly pronounced how he was staking his political future on this referendum and that he would resign if he couldn't pull it off; meanwhile, in Queensland and NSW, they were pelting him with rotten eggs and pebbles; and shortly before Christmas, the beautiful referendum crashed with a huge “No” majority, yet Billy Hughes is still prime minister and people don't know if they should laugh or cry! –

Here in camp, nothing new. The theatre is great fun, Grimme-Nanni is the new primadonna. The “ladies” proliferate, not only on stage. Homosexuality is rampant.

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Both the committee and the commander are powerless in the face of the perversities, we just have to tolerate it all. One guy openly maintains a ship's boy, built him a cabin within the compound, complete with a “salon” where the darling services not only him but various other lovers as well, all payable in cash of course. On Christmas Eve, two guys who obviously felt unobserved hugged each other, “Oh, I'm so happy! Are you still crazy about me?” Kisses, tears – and fornication. There's petting and buggery behind rocks and bushes, “Oh, how lovely you look”, short of “How beautiful is my Princess Salome tonight!” – it's hard to know if we should be outraged and wish hell and damnation upon them, or if we should just grin and bear it, which is probably wiser.

[Annotation added later:] Read once more on 8 September 1918, Otto Wortmann, Holdsworthy East.

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Monday, 7 January 1918

The long-awaited mail from Germany has finally arrived and my fretful premonitions, which again and again I tried to make fun of or shrug off, were not baseless. Mother had to have surgery on her appendix on 29 September. According to Father's letter, all went well and Mother recovered fast and will be healthier than ever. But I know my mother; she will bear her aches and pains in silence and pretend that all is well just to spare her loved ones any worry. And in her last letter, Mother did not sound as strong and battle-ready as she usually does. She wrote that before the operation, she had averred her best wishes and hopes for us; that she would do anything to remain in our midst, and she begs me to come home as soon as possible since I surely couldn't put up with the tropical life much longer. For now, God had been clement, but her heart was weak and she didn't feel so

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robust anymore. God! Who and where is this God? This God with his all-encompassing love who tortures a woman, a mother with illnesses and pain, who condemns a mother to cry out for her children in vain? A charitable God who lets such maternal dramas happen? – Of course, nothing has happened yet, Mother is still well, but a tragedy can happen any time. My dearest wish, my greatest dream, that of returning home one day and hug the best and dearest mother of them all, may not come true, could fail. How much would Germany, my country, be worth then?

To have to be in captivity with all the worries about one's dearest person, one's mother, with thousands of daily worries, without a job, without an occupation, is a never-ending and constantly gnawing pain. A man has to become riddled with anxiety if he cannot let out his anger and misgivings on another human being or on any other target on a daily basis; he will end up sick, sullen,

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bitter. At the moment, everything around me disgusts me, every chair, every man, every noise repulses me, I would want to lash out, to spit, to scream, but five minutes later I'm laughing about myself. – Never before has the newspaper been so impatiently awaited, and never before has it so disappointed. There's no progress in the peace negotiations, and the next day we hear that they have been abandoned. A more thorough perusal then lets you conclude that war will rage for another two years. Just thinking of it completely enrages me. (10am)

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Thursday, 17 January 1918 Thomas Campbell [this name seems to refer to the passage between x's below]

The extreme tension, the nervousness that has been gripping the whole camp continues unabated, let alone has an explosion defused it. Every day we await the newspaper with great expectations only to throw it disdainfully into a corner after just a few minutes because, as usual, it tells us nothing; day after day, hour after hour, we hope to hear about peace, at least with Russia. I can't remember now who it was who said: x Coming events cast their shadows before x but it sure makes you philosophise, build up a hefty amount of optimism that something big will happen, because this calm before the storm, this collective waiting are said shadows of a coming event! What would man be without hope and faith?!

For a change, I've been sick. Diarrhoea and fever! I fasted for three days, had these crazy pains, and felt as feeble as a day fly that has already gone past its miniature life's

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zenith. But I recovered well. I'm still nursing a handsome cold, but that's a common side effect of seasonal transitions, from relatively cool to very hot weather. It is so stinking hot that I often jump out of bed between 5am and 6am and stand under the cold shower for half an hour until I slowly became human again and my Adonis-like body stops melting away. It

would be good to be able to stay outdoors until 10pm, but once again we have been short-changed, since the evening roll-call is as early as 7pm on a cloudy day, and 7.30pm on a clear day.

The heat and the nervous tension pretty much keep me from working. There is no shortage of good intentions, but I have yet to start the "Story of the prisoners of war at Rabaul" that I have promised Lembach to write.

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At the moment it's not just the flesh that is weak, but also the mind. The mind, if you can call it that, instead conjures up orgiastic images and it happens that I, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of other dreamers, revel in the vision of big, frothing steins, Kuntschi beer, whisky soda and "cold ducks". There's a sense of humour in this that I like; whether other people share the feeling I don't know and don't care. The health of my wallet is rather unsatisfactory, however, because I'm sure that even in these climes it is detrimental to have an empty stomach for too long. (10.30am)

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Monday, 18 February 1918

On Saturday, 9 February the local rags reported a peace pact between the Central Powers and Ukraine; on Tuesday, 13 February other reports said that hostilities between Russia and the Central Powers had ceased and that Russia was demobilising. From here it's hard to judge on what basis peace was achieved, and what the agreed principle is: reparation through annexation of large territories or compensation through wide-ranging, favourable trade agreements, etc. The Australian newspapers that we poor devils get to see do not elaborate. At any rate, it is a tremendous success for Germany, an unparalleled victory, to have bested the strongest enemy in the east; the beginning, the foundation of overall peace is laid. The first defeated opponent will and must open the trade routes and food sources to the Fatherland. Germany will receive more food. Armies and thousands of freed prisoners

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will be available to fight against the remaining enemies. Our generals will be able to lead the first soldiers wearing the laurels of victory to new victories. The courage and enthusiasm of the people will be rekindled by the triumph; renewed patience will enable them to persevere until a lasting peace is reached. Because this peace will come, has to come, even if Romania still refuses to lay down the arms, despite the vain boasts of the Allies. Italy is checkmate and, like England and France, suffers food shortages. England and France tremble in anticipation of the German offensive on the western front, which is expected any hour now. The English Cabinet, led by Lloyd George, is taking flak from all sides and is wobbling. There are air raids over Paris and London, and constant loss of tonnage inflicted by the U-boats! America is the only possible saviour and helper. Uncle Sam, however, watches from the sidelines half grinning, half in tears; Wilson talks and talks and promises and

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promises, one day he threatens, the next he appeases, fully knowing that he can't keep any promise because the Yankees won't play ball any longer and America is as war-weary as any.

Thus, there is reason for hope that after a last intense and concerted effort victory and a most favourable peace will finally be ours!

Ever since the Russian revolution, Trial Bay has forecast and awaited peace in the east. But it failed to happen again and again, and when it finally did happen there was but a brief hurrah since it seemed such a foregone conclusion. In the evening, with patriotic ~~sentiment~~ music, the mood became briefly jubilant once more, before the old apathy took hold again. We all have become lethargic, listless and dour. Everybody niggles and carps. The newspaper, a bit of gossip and quiet are all the entertainment we seek. One big hope sustains us all – peace and freedom in the near future.

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Camp-specific political battles are still driven by enthusiastic rage, but enthusiasm and rage are short-lived. Attempts by the opposition to topple the “Bolshevic” committee, or the caucus or whatever else, invigorated the camp for a while but ended in settlements. A by-election in the A wing prompted more fights but has not been held to this day. Dalliances and homosexual misdeeds proliferate to an appalling degree, but the government reportedly does not prosecute such cases; maybe even the Australians, notwithstanding other tortures, consider it too harsh to condemn people to sexual abstention for years and years. Playing cards trumps all other activities, but music, theatre, newspaper also flourish. Yesterday they performed Thoma's “Medal”. Entertainment, Bavarian dialect, farmers and liver dumplings: I laughed with abandon but very nearly also got homesick.

My life takes its course devoid of stumbling blocks, boring, oily, insipid.

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If it is not raining, I get up between 7am and 7.30am and disappear to the beach after breakfast, for a swim in the ocean, and the remainder of the day is filled with reading, working, walking and occasional games of poker and pinnacle. The weather thankfully is warm. Sunset around 7pm is spectacularly beautiful most of the time. Yesterday, the sky was set aflame by coppery-golden clouds that glowed against the dark canopy like ember. The shiny clouds tinged the sky in a slow transition from purple to lilac to steely blue to pastel green. Mountain peaks of the darkest purple enclosed the bay, while the ocean reflected all the colours of the sky and silvery waves gently lapped against the dunes, which themselves turned a shimmery green from the multi-coloured reflections. After such an evening it's particularly hard to return to the cloyingly hot and muggy prison cells. I used the end of this beautiful January to finish the long-promised story of the Rabaul camp for Lembach and

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then had myself another week of nothing but loafing and reading. No news from New Guinea. From Liverpool we have word that four or five of us poor souls will be allowed to return to Rabaul, where the English administrator, Sir Samuel Pethebridge, has died; maybe life will be better under his successor. Personally, I believe the exact opposite will happen; I'm certainly not a friend of the Australians, but Pethebridge always tried to be fair and he knew the colony well. My friend Hücking managed to return to Rabaul, but apparently he

risked such a lip on the steamship that he was immediately arrested upon arrival in Rabaul and is now expected back in Australia by return ship.

There are tensions again in Liverpool. Due to their guards' mistake, a batch of prisoners arrived so late at the swimming hole that there was no time left for swimming. On the way back there must have been a heated exchange of words, because back in camp six of the prisoners, identified by the guards as "agitators", were arrested.

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Their comrades protested against the punishment and demanded that either the guys be released or all of them be imprisoned. The major on duty ordered his soldiers, bayonets at the ready, to clear the grounds before the prison tract of all protesters; during this heroic intervention, 2 Germans were badly wounded and four others lightly.

It seems that things are rather farcical in the "criminals' tract" as well. The "criminals" interned there were put on half rations after insulting an Australian officer. With the result that the next officer who showed up there was abused even worse, so then the inmates were put on quarter rations. This resulted in the commander's Newfoundland dog being lured behind the fence, butchered and eaten. The next day his pelt was hanging from the barbed wire, with a note attached to it that simply said: The beast was rather tasty. – Then, when the new railway line

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from Sydney to Liverpool was inaugurated, the Tommies staged a huge sports meeting. The sports ground is right next to the Germans' "Sing Sing" tract. A rather large, if not exactly beautiful, contingent of ladies also attended. To the astonishment of the spectators, 30 Germans suddenly appeared stark naked on the roof of the "criminals' tract" and presented their bare and sunlit arses to the crowd. It took protracted negotiations to get the "criminals" to leave the roof. The next day, they had their full rations again. –

I have good news from home: Mama is doing better, thank God; she'll be back to her old health and I'm much relieved. Father and the siblings seem to be healthy and happy as well. Ada and Rickel have developed a good sense of humour. The only problem I have with Ada – he wants to become a farmer. Should I discourage him, or are the circumstances more favourable now? I have written to Rosa and am curious to see her reply. That's it for now, the newspaper has arrived! (12.15pm)

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Wednesday, 13 March 1918

You better remember that we here in Trial Bay already celebrated the Russian peace rather extensively and that President Berblingen derived a pretty enthusiastic speech from the message of the angel of peace. Yet all these efforts proved once again futile. The beautiful negotiations of Brest-Litovsk came to a less pretty but sudden end when the German troops advanced victoriously and dangerously close to St. Petersburg and Reval, while the Austrians quickly occupied Lutsk and cleaned up the Ukraine. Apparently these last and resolute lashings brought the Russians to reason and the new terms of peace were signed. I say the

new terms of peace, but really they were the old ones, which weren't so bad at all, with an added clause—that Russia cede Kars, Batum and Ardahan to Turkey—and so Russia's short, and hopefully last, war game of 8 days cost it dearly enough. Russia and Romania have signed a separate peace. And so did the Central Powers

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and Romania, besides favourable trade agreements similar to those imposed on the Russians—it seems [the Central Powers] are eyeing Romania's oil fields—while Bulgaria annexed Dobrudja and Hungary the Carpathian passes. Both peace treaties are not ratified yet, but the last decisions should be taken any day now, and it seems that both countries have little choice anyway if they don't want to lose even more territories than the aforementioned Finland, Lithuania, Estland, Courland, etc. Or, as Count Czernin said, be wiped of the maps. The Allies' press is crying blue murder and agitates for a Japanese-Chinese intervention in Siberia and Manchuria, but this neat plan has no great future since America, jealous and fearful of Japan, strenuously opposes it, while England more than ever depends on the United States. – On the western front and in Italy all's quiet. But I'm convinced that those gentlemen, too, will get their drubbing, and the thought of peace along similar terms than those imposed on Russia and Romania could rob me of the last bit of poise and

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make me cheer. Still, the big question remains: when?! It's exactly the uncertain answer to this question that makes the people here tense, moody, averse to anything and lazy. Daily the newspaper is fetched with great expectation but 20 minutes later is being tossed in a corner, the frustration of 300 men palpable, because it becomes simply tedious and nauseating to read of the Australians' heroic tales. And yet the newspaper remains the day's big event. The camp's internal politics are hardly interesting; on 1 April, however, Berblingen and the rest of the committee as well as the caucus intend to step down, and everybody thinks it is overdue, although hardly anybody believes that it will actually happen, anticipating instead one of those popular “trick games”. When it's raining, life is unbearable, when it's nice, at least we have the beach and the walks and exercises with the chest-expander. The rest of the day is filled with reading, numerous visits—Kirchhoff, Ullrich, Jerssen, Stegmann—, every now and then a hand of poker or pinnacle, lectures, theatre. Health good, mood lousy, especially in the mornings, when one would like to yell out along with

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Faust in rage and pain: “Woe's me! Still prison'd in the gloom of this abhorr'd and musty room! Where heaven's dear light itself doth pass, but dimly through the painted glass!” In my case, you'd have to substitute the “painted glass” with “barred windows” but you'd easily recognise my present reading matter: Goethe's “Faust”. Before that, I spent quite some time with [Wilhelm] Bölsche's “The Love Life in Nature”, followed by the exact opposite: Dr [Carl] du Prel's studies of occultism, hypnotism and metaphysics.

However, even the most carefully selected reading matter will not stop the monotony eroding your imagination and dulling your senses. When you think of home, you no longer have a vivid picture of the loved ones, the cities, the tramways, the women, etc. Schuh

recently wrote that he was getting married and I sent him my best wishes but also said that I could hardly summon the image of a sweet little woman anymore,

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try as I might. For us poor and downtrodden prisoners women and girls have become what angels are for a practising Christian: something very, very beautiful, but you can never be sure if they really exist, if angel and women are but a figment, a product of your imagination. If our predicament continues for a few more years, we will eventually leave as shy and unworldly creatures and become the showpieces of European mental homes. The premise is there!

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Wednesday, 3 April 1918

After a long and generous fortnight I'm getting another chance at writing. The past weeks were packed with work, activities and excitement, which was a godsend and temporarily let us forget the dreariness of our lives here and made us tired enough at night to fall into a dreamless sleep. We have redecorated our cell once more. We got busy with carpentry, making beds, tables and dressers, planing and oiling them. We drilled holes into the walls, which we had to cement because our beds are now suspended below the ceiling. We decided to give the cell a fresh coat, and aided by Jerssen, I spent half a day painting. As the makeover's pièce de résistance we built a podium across half the room, about one metre high, resting on poles and covered with floor-tiling timber, on which the new writing desk sits; this way I get a lot more light when writing at the desk during the day, whereas at night, Hayer resides in lofty heights and I sit at the old table below, so we enjoy a degree of separation and privacy. After an almost endless amount of sanding, painting, sweeping, etc, the new flat is ready and we

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greatly enjoy it. At least for the next few weeks the newness of it will keep us entertained. The only but major drawback is that the whole affair was ridiculously expensive and thus put me into debt. I am already trying to relieve Ehrmann of 10 pounds and hope that this will be met with success. –

The camp's internal affairs have deteriorated quite strangely and quite badly, and it seems that the camp is now split into two parties: "Bolsheviks" and "Roialysts" [sic]. It happened roughly like this: At a general assembly, the committee and the 17th caucus had been attacked, mainly by Burckhardt, Wehrs and Hering, the spokesmen of the opposition. The caucus members immediately resigned but then resumed office until 1 April, when they would officially step down; on the same day, Berblingen and the other committee members also resigned. Before that, a commission, which after much insistence on our part also included Burckhardt, had revised the camp's statutes. The statutes were presented to the camp with the request for further suggestions, but only one suggestion was forwarded, by a group of 20 men that

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included me. Our proposal aimed to drop the committee completely and have the camp run by the caucus. This caucus consists of 20 representatives from the camp's various residential divisions, each elected by majority vote and thus invested with his electorate's trust. These 20 men select a chairman who chairs the general assemblies, etc and who, supported by 2 caucus members, acts as spokesman in any dealings with the military authorities. The other 17 gentlemen will, according to their talents and propensities, form the various commissions in charge of camp kitchen, cooperative, finances, general welfare, etc. In this way we hoped to avoid any personal animosities or overbearance in future operations. This well-intended proposal met with little appreciation and was widely derided, which really didn't bother us too much since we were all going to vote on it at the general assembly; we didn't lobby for it or took any other steps in the matter. Sadly, however, the opponents did. Who the author of the following rabble-rousing letter is we do not know yet, but

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Neubrunn and Dovemühle undertook the dirty work of collecting the signatures for it and to swear the adherents to secrecy. The letter, intended for the general assembly, had the sole purpose of silencing the main spokesmen for our cause, Burckhardt, Wehrs and Hering, and was addressed to these 3 gentlemen. The sublime document said roughly this: that the undersigned wished to restore peace and quiet to the camp and that the 3 gentlemen and their supporters were to refrain from further meddling in the camp's affairs; should the gentlemen ignore this request, they'd better had themselves transferred to another camp on the spot. The insolence of this request has to be seen in light of the fact that the only other camp available is Liverpool! It is certainly easy to restore peace and quiet in camp if you silence the opposition, resume the command and bulldoze your comrades. By chance we heard of the existence of this letter, which also accused our spokesmen of acting

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and speaking only in their own personal interest since none of them had ever cared one iota about the general wellbeing of the camp community. At the general assembly, Burckhardt demanded that the letter be handed over or at least made public by reading it aloud right there and then. At first, the existence of such a letter was flatly denied, then admitted, but delivery of the letter was refused. In this case, Burckhardt said, he and his supporters would leave the assembly and keep out of any camp matter. Thus, some 200 of us left the assembly and from now on don't care about anything anymore. The commander advocated that the letter be handed over but had no success; its content was made public, however, and interested parties could request to see the signatures. The commander is now on leave but promised to pursue the matter further upon his return. All "Bolsheviks" resigned from their public activities and are keeping away from camp matters. 320 men elected Taeufert [*the diarist uses various spellings of this name throughout, from Taeuffert to Täuffert to Teufert*]

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and 4 other men as president and members of the committee. And thus, Berblingen at last is out! (11am)

Friday, 12 April 1918

I'm irresponsibly lazy, so incredibly lazy that I'm even too lazy to find a reason for my laziness.

It's possible that laziness is as contagious as measles and scarlet fever, in which case we'd have a laziness epidemic in camp. Hardly anybody is doing anything, except for a few lessons and lectures. While the tensions over the camp's internal affairs have subsided, the German offensive in France and Flanders, which we judge to be the final battle for the winner's trophy, is fuel enough for much excitement, speculation and prophetic guesswork and keeps the whole camp in a permanent state of feverish emotion, which reaches its peak each day around 1pm, when the newspaper is due, and only

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dies down at 10pm. The Australian papers report far too little for our taste on the raging battles in the west; but even they cannot quell the fact that Germany has gloriously won the first stage of the "Kaiserschlacht". On 21 March, the battle began along a 50-mile front, and yesterday the German troops were already within a few miles of Amiens, which we expect to fall any day now. We have driven an enormous triangle into the enemy line, the "Kaiser's nose" as the English call it, which extends from La Bassée past Arras and Amiens to Montdidier and Noyons – a rather magnificent and formidable nose. Germany threw huge numbers behind her attack, with [indecipherable] and giant cannon, the "gobler guns" [gobbler guns?], which means rapid devouring, and is shelling Paris. England is scared, Lloyd George sends near-hysterical begging letters to the dominions, the age limit for military service is being raised to 55, in Ireland they foolhardily attempt to introduce conscription and, what would have been unthinkable before, the French General [Ferdinand] Foch has been made commander-in-chief of the Allies at the western front.

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England, however, still dispatches reassuring telegrams into the world and only reports heroic tales of English, Canadian and, sadly, Australian soldiers, while talking about immense German losses that will automatically put a stop to Germany's plans and barbarian antics! In the east, however, we are safe. Italy is afraid of a new offensive and, despite their boasts and slogans, both America and England tremble before the German sword, and so I hope once again that the "Kaiserschlacht" will bring victory, peace and freedom!

Thanks to the edifying news from the theatre of war, the personal animosities in camp have subsided, even if the last big mess hasn't been forgotten. Taeufert has taken on the presidency and instantly made a lot of friends by authorising a cinematograph for the camp. It is supposed to arrive very shortly. Everybody expects quite a lot

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from this entertainment after we had to make do without it for years. And it was indeed necessary to introduce some new form of distraction; the theatre has gradually lost its appeal. We have to give credit to the actors for all their efforts to excel, but they are amateurs after all, who never quite managed to grow above a certain level of accomplishment and only have a limited range of gestures and expressions. Unfortunately,

we always knew in advance how each actor would express joy, dread or surprise. And that becomes tedious after a while, and even nauseating. To choose such a tasteless and bad play like von Gutschow's "Lieutenant of the King", which deals with Goethe's family, and to have Goethe played as a starkly effeminate young rascal is the straw that breaks the camel's back and puts you off the theatre. Hopefully the cinema will alleviate the situation, as we can then reduce the number of theatre performances, which in turn will make the acting endurable again and, above all,

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will make it possible to watch the men-women without any rage. Men-women is probably the wrong term, because some of these actors who play nothing but women on stage might well become so effeminate that they no longer want to be men in their own life either; after all, the saying goes "semper aliquid haeret" [*something will always stick*]. But it's not just aliquid [*something*], it's a lot, a real lot. Some of these guys behave rather coquettishly, their gait and gestures womanish, and fiery handshakes and kisses are no rarity. How much of it actually reflects their sexual preference I dare not judge, but you could definitely apply the term hermaphrodite to these men-women, if not their sexual capacity, if you were less thinking of the classical Greek definition of perfect beauty, but of the modern and rather infamous connotation.

When it comes to sexual misdeeds, the theatre people actually are but a negligible quantity. Couples who indulge in regular sexual intercourse, or sometimes just in mutual masturbation,

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are however appallingly numerous; nor are male prostitutes who take money for active or passive pederasty all that rare. A truly idyllic state of affairs, which mostly, however, has its origin in the prolonged captivity and the concomitant sexual abstinence. Who knows if such propensities will persist after the war. (11am)

Thursday, 25 April 1918

Spring is taking over in Europe. Spring, the season that most lures you outdoors, into the awakening nature. Spring which covers trees and bushes with young and silken bloom, which scatters among the old leaves and grasses the first, shy flowers and lets fresh green leaves sprout; spring which with its smiling sun turns everything golden, which with its full cheeks blows mild zephyrs over nature and humankind, rekindles life and chases away sorrow and pain. Spring, created for love and enjoyment. Yet Europe is in the grip of the big slaughter, a bloody war that makes people callous and dead to all things good and delicate!

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Still the enormous, intense battle in northern France is undecided, still the enemy desperately struggles against the German onslaught, but already it has ceded ground, already it has lost confidence and may even be defeated. It would be such a glorious victory, a triumphal parade with flying colours across the conquered land, bathed in spring's sunshine and smiling skies!

Still, for me it's still nothing but a dream and phantasy. A dream that shows me the sunny side, while I'm sitting on the dark side; a dream of victory dreamt by a prisoner; a dream of spring dreamt in autumn. Of course, even here the sun shines today, and the fields and the ocean look like scoured by godly hands, clean and smooth; but the scarce flora is brown and dead. Before it had been raining for eight long days, the air was cold, damp and unhealthy. The concrete floor of the cell is still sudden from the humidity and even the granite walls feel as cold and slimy as those of a crypt.

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The penned-up men groan and moan, every other man sneezes, croaks, coughs. All complain about headaches, colds, rheumatism: the general mood is miserable and there's a lot of cursing and swearing going on. This morning, however, the sunshine aroused a few spirits that hadn't died yet, one could hear whistling from some cells, or even singing, even if often out of tune and somewhat croaky.

The [German] offensive remains the main topic in camp, which makes for a lot of political talk. However, this excitement on the one hand and the eternal waiting for an uncertain outcome on the other hand makes us all hyper-tense, impatient, moody and fidgety. Lately I have often stayed in bed until 10am, partly to avoid seeing people or even hearing them, partly because at night I find little rest from nervous tension and silly, abstruse dreams. I haven't had any news from Germany for more than 3 months. I'm worried and fret over the reason for it,

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probably a disruption of communications since none of the men here has had word from home for at least 2 months. New Guinea follows the example and keeps mum. A fact that is hugely worrisome for me; I have asked Ehrmann for £10 and will get into hell's kitchen if I don't get them, because I already have debts of £5 and placed orders for £2. The outlook is not rosy! Not much is new in camp. The government under Taeuffert is quietly efficient. The cinematograph has been approved, ordered and has even arrived, but for now won't be of much use because the theatre has to be equipped for it. Patience is required. The music is lousy at the moment; everybody curses Dr Müller and his band. Dr Berg has stepped down as director of the theatre, and Rubber or Condom Fischer is the new director. The latest play, "Cumin Leaves", was quite nice and the primadonna Lehmann was ravishing!

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I sleep a lot, read a lot, go for frequent walks, listen to Dr Jacob's chemistry lectures, philosophise with Dr Graebner, will do a surveying course with Wittfeld and astronomy with Dr Defregger, work some, and on the side teach Stegmann in economics. Sadly, in the evenings I mostly play cards with Jerssen, Hayer, Broadbelt, Drucker or Usadel, pinnacle, poker or whiskey poker. From 10pm to 11pm we have visitors, Usadel, Jerssen, Broadbelt, Grope, and talk politics or reminisce about travels, and then the so-called still of night starts. (11am)

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Saturday, 7 September 1918, 8pm, Holdsworthy Eastern Compound, Liverpool

Today at last, after 5 months, I get to retrieve my old diary and ruin it with some new entries. Big events, truly big events, a huge change like I could only dream of in the monotony of Trial Bay, have kept me from putting expensive ink to cheap paper. Our beautiful, idyllic, lazy and monotonous camp in Trial Bay was suddenly dismantled and, without being told why, we found ourselves on the train — a train ride again after 2 years! — to a place that we all dreaded, whose name we didn't dare say without crossing ourselves, to a place that our hosts often threatened us with, as you would threaten an unruly child with the “black man” — in short, to Liverpool. And, to add insult to injury, not even to the Liverpool of yore with its 5,000 men, its restaurants and cafés, casino, theatre

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and cinema, but to a Liverpool that isn't even Liverpool anymore. They isolated us, put us away like mangy mutton that is carefully separated from the herd, into a cold and drab square of nothing but barracks but artfully fenced in with multiple layers of barbed wire, and this for almost two months; there we shivered from the cold, cursed, ate, slept, ranted and ultimately got bored stiff. Figuratively speaking, they needled and harassed us with roving hot pliers. On one side of the barbed wire, the inmates of the “grand” camp promenaded past, on the other side we shivered, swore below our breath, coughed out loud and howling like hoarse wolves, and all our noses dripped with the cold. They neatly separated Germans from Germans and strictly forbade all communication with the other side.

It is not worth describing all these niceties on these last few pages; still captive, I have to begin yet another volume, but this will not be possible until I get permission from the Australians to buy another notebook at the canteen.

The ordeal of the interim camp is over! For a month now I have been in the newly built eastern compound of the camp. It is shockingly cold in the doorless barracks. Outside, in the soldiers' camp, the Tommies are watching a movie; to the right of our division, they are playing Skat, to the left they are talking politics. The equinox winds are howling across the plateau, spring is waiting in the corner, but way out there, the immense world war is still raging, the battle for life or death of millions. We still have not fought to the end, the enemy is still resisting, still more lives will have to be sacrificed to the cause, still no end is in sight. It's not clear if we might get released because of peace or in an exchange of prisoners of war, we are left with nothing but hope. And, to close the circle of this booklet, there remains but one big question: “Quo usque tandem, Catilina?”

7 September 1918, 8.30pm, German Concentration Camp Holdsworthy. Eastern Compound, Division 8. Near Liverpool, NSW, Australia.

[Transcriber's notes:

Pg. 9. Albert Ballin; credited with inventing the ocean liner and active as a mediator between England and Germany in the lead-up to World War I

Pg. 59. Kaiserschlacht : the Spring Offensive, also known as the Ludendorff Offensive, along the Western Front, marking the deepest advances by either side since 1914

Pg. 59. Noyons should be Noyon

Pg. 69. "Quo usque tandem, Catilina?" The whole quotation reads: Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra? How long, O Catiline, will you abuse our patience?]

[Transcribed and translated by Rosemarie Graffagnini for the State Library of New South Wales]