

## Personal Stories of Paul Gustav Gromm

\* **9 September 1877 in Niemaschleba, Roßack's Büdnergut No 23**  
+ **28 January 1972 in Alsfeld**

The village where I was born was called **Niemaschleba** and belonged to the city of **Guben**. My grandfather came from the even smaller village **Augustwalde**, which was 3 km away, in the direction of **Merzwiese**. The village houses were all built in "joist", = *In architecture and engineering, a joist is one of the horizontal supporting members that run between foundations, walls, or beams to support a ceiling or floor*), with multiple log layers. The roof was thatched, a small barn was beneath the gables and there was also a small stable . The residents of the 10 existing houses all worked in the city forest, my grandfather, too, went – as was said at that time – "in the monastery heath". I still remember my grandmother, she used to sit in front of our house in **Niemaschleba** and had an eye on me so that I did not run away. The earnings that came from the work in the forest were rather small; therefore, my grandfather decided to buy a horse. Soon afterwards, a second horse was bought, enabling my grandfather to do transportation services. The monastery's wood was transported to Guben for the bakers and when my father was 10 years old he was allowed to come along. In the forest he collected old wood and resinous pieces of wood<sup>1</sup> for the older women. He got his first own money, spending money, 6 "Dreier" (*drei meaning three*), the coins were made of copper and stamped with a "3" and one was able to buy quite some things with them.

In the so-called "Pusch"<sup>2</sup>, peat was digged, cut and afterwards also needed transportation, either to **Guben** or to the ferry over the river Oder at **Polenzig**. My father had 4 siblings (*note: Actually, there were 6 siblings, but maybe Paul Gustav Gromm didn't know all the brothers and sisters of his father*) and sometimes there was no fodder for the horses so that in summer the animals were brought to graze on the pasture in the evening and in the mornings they were brought back. Later on same was done with the cattle, however only during the day and most of the time we took them to the forest. There, the boys had to tend the cows which often grazed on forbidden grounds thus arising the anger of the old forester. However when he tried to catch and punish them, they were able to escape every time.

The children went to school in our village, breakfast often being a chunk of old bread or some potatoes. When my father reached adulthood, he started working for the railway, building the tracks which were running close to our village. His military service lead him to the city of **Luxenburg** where he served 2 years in the infantry regiment No 35. However, as the railway tracks had not yet been built up to Koblenz, the recruits had to walk many kilometers by foot. When taking his leave from the army, he married a daughter of Grunert's Büdner estate in Niemaschleba, house No 27, and went to live there, taking his mother with him. Soon after he took over the estate, however was drafted again in 1864. His regiment participated in the storming of the Düppeler Schanzen (= *entrenchments*) on 18 April 1864 as well as the passage to the isle of Alsen on 18 June. He received 2 commemorative medals in reward for his bravery. After only 1 year at home, he was drafted again because of the fratricidal war against Austria which had started in 1866. This time, his regiment belonged to the reserve and was not involved in bigger fights. Nevertheless he again received a medal. As member of the territorial force he again fought in 1870. Also in autumn of this year, he received the message of the birth of his son Ernst. He was very delighted and allegedly drank a lot of wine with his comrades, being in France where you had a lot of wine. The following year he returned to his family in Niemaschleba.

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<sup>1</sup> Kien = resinous wood

<sup>2</sup> Pusch = peaty area

On the estate, 2 siblings of his wife were living, both born deaf-mutes. Nevertheless they had attended school in **Seitwan** and learned to read and write scantily. Sometimes I have worked together with the man, e.g. raking hay or else. We were able to communicate fine through sign language. Around 1874 father's wife died and – after the year of mourning - he found himself constrained to look for a new wife and mother for his little son. He chose Pauline Lampe, daughter of Christian Lampe, Büdner (Rochatz estate No 23). Marriage took place in 1876 and the following year in September I was born. In 1879 my sister Alwine and in 1882 my sister Wilhelmine were born, altogether now 4 children , enough for a Büdner estate. According to tradition it was decided that Ernst would one day inherit the farm, therefore father felt the urge to look for a new home. Soon afterwards, he bought a Häusler's lot, however, for the time being, the apartment was let to someone else. In 1886 the farm of my grandfather burnt completely down, same as Matschke's and Lock's. Due to the new buildings necessary there were quite a lot of debts and when grandfather died, none of his children was able to take over the farm. Then father bought it and paid out the heirs' shares. For the moment, the land was leased.

In the 1880s a soldiers' society was established, all former soldiers and veterans joined. A banner was bought and every member got a sash. Father was elected chairman, probably because he had received the most medals out of the three military campaigns. He had six medals. The banner was then kept in our apartment.

On Emperor William's birthday, 22 March, the members of the society lined up at 2.00 PM and the banner was unfolded. Then the society marched – accompanied by music - along the village road to Grimm's tavern (house No 64), where they stayed for an hour, having a barrel of beer and some liquor. The orchestra played several military marches, then they went on to Gromm's tavern (tavern of Pauline Gromm, married Frohner, house No 14) and last but not least to the society's tavern at Dammaschkes' (house No 95). In the meantime it was 6.00 PM, an hour later the dancing started, usually until dawn. The evening before was the military tattoo, at 9.00 PM the society marched from one end of the village to the other, accompanied by the marching band. The society cultivated comradeship. When a comrade died, they escorted him to his final resting place. The coffin was carried by 10 comrades; it was placed on a stretcher as there was no hearse. After the funeral, the 8 members of the shooters' group fired 3 fusillades over the grave. The wife of the deceased received 15 Marks in aid out of the society's treasury. When the society of one of the surrounding villages got a new banner, the neighbor societies were invited to the consecration of it. I witnessed the consecrations of the flags in the **villages Neundorf, Merzwiese, Wellnitz and Kl. Drenzig**. After father died, the mill owner Emil Gromm became the new chairman.

Most of the Büdners of our village had a yoke of oxen, we however had horses and often earned money with transportation services. Large faggots and beech poles from the Guben Heath were to be driven to the Oder side near **Polenzig Lahmo** and **Kuschern**. The "Faschinen"<sup>3</sup> (= large faggots, bundles of brushwood) were used for the renovation of the groynes of the Oder (in order to avoid erosion or water damage); sometimes we had to go as far as from *Jagen 4 to the Poloer (?)* boundary. We used to harness the horses at 4.00 AM because during those days in May it would be too warm in the forest. The country road was not yet built, therefore on rainy days the path was very difficult, deep holes filled with rainwater and mud. One day, we had to deliver the faggots to **Lahmo** over the dam to the river, we had high water and the horses were in the water up to their bellies. Longwood was driven quite often, once from Jagen 79 over Bober to the cutting mill shortly before Krossen, which took us 18 hours. Longwood was also driven to **Guben**. Often during winter when it was bitterly cold, at least the paths were frozen. Thus, when anybody was building a house or one of the farms had burned down, the bricks were most often transported in the winter, e.g. also to **Heideschäferei**. The bricks were taken from the brickyards in Germersdorf and Kleindrenzig.

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<sup>3</sup> Faschinen = fascines, fascine work

The brickyards owner, Pischel, often rode with us to Drenzig and during lunch hour, when the horses were fed, he told us stories after first having bought a liter of booze (or more).

We used to be 5 – 6 carriage drivers and there were horses that found their way home through the city forest, when the coachman fell asleep. One day when my brother was sitting up the coach box, he fell asleep and then off the carriage. His head came in front of the carriage wheel, scalping him. The doctor from **Guben** had to come during the night and reattach the skin to his skull. As there were no cars at that time, cabman Türke brought the doctor to our house, the horse owner requested 12 Marks for the service.

We also had a foal breed; the farmers did make some nice income when selling a foal. We had plenty of hay, however little oat land; therefore we had to buy 1 sack of bran (150 pounds) per week.

When in 1898 Ernst decided to marry, we moved to the house where mother was born, No 23.

## **Our village**

The name of our village **Niemaschleba** means “never bread” in Polish. There were several names for the fields. In the direction of **Merzwiese** there was Buchhorst or Bukhorst, bordering on the Guben forest was the Torfpusch, then Plateau, Salstken, Zetmin, Owin, Grobleinsken, Lamoer Ecke, Sasmuke, Oderpusch, Grebenluke, Kommolken (2 words illegible), Anger.

The river Oder is 3 km away from our village. The Strieming is flowing through the meadow, part of it building a natural border with the field mark of Polenzig (Polenziger Feldmark). Up until 1850, the owners and workers were bound to render hand and transportation services for the manor. However, then the land was measured and the forest divided, every owner became a piece of forest; farmers, Kossäten and Büdners. Every owner was given acres and meadows. Of course, there were different kinds of soil in the field mark, e.g. clayey, sandy and boggy soil. Every owner received a plan of all 3 kinds. That’s where the names of the areas come from, several were named Anger, Qualle or Quelle, Kranichsee, Griebe, Torfstich, Schiefen and Winkel (1 word illegible).

## **Youth memories**

My first youth memories go back to the times when Grandmother still played with me. In front of the house there was this bench and she used to sit there often, having difficulties to walk as she always had a “Stemmelstock”<sup>4</sup> in her hand. Our neighbors also had lots of children of our ages, e.g. Stordaks’ and Nitschkes’ families.

In the winter we visited one another, in our house we played puppet theater, and best of all was Christmas. Our Christmas tree was a spruce, fir trees were not yet known, and there were lots of apples, nuts and small cakes hanging on it. We were also given presents: one year a drum, or a tin trumpet, a violin, later an accordion. On Christmas Eve, father put a bundle of hay in front of our door so that the horse of Santa Claus could munch on the hay while Santa Claus was setting up the Christmas tree and the gifts in the living room. Christmas service was at 6.00 AM on 25 December and when we returned at 7.30 AM – no, when we awoke – the Holy Ghost had already been there and the candles were lit on the tree. Full of joy we did not eat a lot but drank just a grog to make us feel warm. In the course of the morning we

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<sup>4</sup> Stemmelstock = walking stick, cane

visited our neighbor's children in order to see their Christmas trees and presents. Music was made and of course the harp did not miss.

In later years I brought the Christmas tree myself from the forest, also I bought Christmas ornaments from Thuringia.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Easter holiday all children visited their godfathers and –mothers early at 8.00 am in order to receive their presents (“dingein”). Each of us children had 4 godfathers or –mothers. First, it was Trösters, that was father's sister, second it was Woitschaks, third the tavern keeper Gromm, that was father's brother and fourth Rocherts (= Roßacks), mother's sister. The presents were 2 colored eggs, 1 “Tocke”<sup>5</sup> with a picture, 1 large braided/woven bun and 20 pennies, except for Sandkisters, who were 8 children. However, because they also wanted to have a Groschen each, we all got 80ch. Woitschaks often gave us handkerchiefs or scarfs. In front of our house there was a playground where the children came together and played “Laufball” (= running ball game) when the weather was nice.

In winter, we went onto the ice. Often the meadows were flooded and there were big frozen surfaces, sometimes also the Strieming<sup>6</sup> froze. Ice skates were not yet used, however we built a sledge from wood with a seat on top, beneath were three iron rails. The sledge was moved forward with two “Stigger”<sup>7</sup>. Also we used to nail wire rails underneath our wooden shoes. Later on, I also learned how to ice skate.

In Rochard's (= Roßack's) garden there was a big lilac bush and from its wood I built a “Pottlack”<sup>8</sup>, sprinkled food on its tongue and when a small bird landed there the lid closed and the little finch was caught. Soon after, however, I set it free again. Often I visited my grandfather, on his lot there stood 2 cherry trees which carried every year lots of sweet cherries, one of them lasting until 1910 and then dried up. There was also a large old pear tree which only was felled after the World War. My parents took me with them when they drove to the city, the horses were unhitched in the tavern “Golden Schiffchen” and we had breakfast, most often pig head's meat and buns.

Because of his two deaf-mute siblings, father had a lot to do at the local court. Mother and I went shopping on the market where lots of stalls were standing. Once we already went to **Guben** on Sunday for Whitsun Fair, we slept on covers at friends of ours, Reickes. The market place was full of merry-go-rounds and stalls were you could see interesting things. Later when I went to **Guben** I had to go to the station's hill first to see the trains roll by. I was very enthusiastic about the railroad! Often my friends and I went to **Augustwalde** on a Sunday to see the two express trains come by. One of my special tasks was to look after the petroleum lamps in the evening. Each day I had to refill them with new oil and clean the cylinders. When you went down into the cellar to get beets or potatoes, you took a small oil lamp with you. They were made of tin and had an oil tank and a wick. The cylinders of the oil lamps were made of glass and often broke to pieces.

## School Years

As my brother was seven years older than me, he took me with him to school. We beginners started with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. There were three classes with two groups each and only two teachers. For a long time, Gürtler was the main teacher.

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<sup>5</sup> Tocke = rectangular gingerbread with picture glued on and sugar frosting

<sup>6</sup> Strieming = small river or stream/creek

<sup>7</sup> Stigger = wooden sticks

<sup>8</sup> Pottlack = meaning unknown, probably a small wooden cage to catch birds

Both teachers had a cane and being naughty meant several strikes on the palms of your hands. For real mischief, the boys had to come up front, bend their upper bodies over a school bench and were given hard strikes on their bottom. During the last year I was No 4 in the first school bench, the children were seated according to their knowledge. No 1 was the teacher's (pet and) son, Hans, however according to his knowledge he should have sat in the 4th row; No 2 was Paul Schulz, who for some time was my playmate; No 3 was Konrad Türke, son of a farmer and later on also a teacher, now living in Berlin; No 4 as I said myself; No 5 Wolf Nitzschke, living in Göhlen and coming to visit me often.

Religion was taught by pastor Ehrlich. During winter we went to school from 8.00 – 12.00 AM and in the afternoon from 1.00 – 3.00 PM. When there was plenty of snow, we used to have snowball fights. One half of the village's children against the other half, we were somewhat less children and often lost.

During summer our school hours were shorter, from 6.00 – 9.00 AM, because at 10.00 AM the cattle was led to the pasture, the geese also wanted to be outside. When I was old enough I was allowed to look after the geese, first 14 days behind the barns on the village meadows, afterwards in the garden/orchard, a lot with lots of fruit trees, land, meadows and water because it was an area with a spring and lots of little trenches which lead the water away, also there was a hut providing shelter from rain or heat. First, the little "Pilchen"<sup>9</sup> were driven or carried, later they had to walk.

The first meadow for the cattle to graze was in the Oder field at the Sandberg. Ernst was shepherding the cattle, however it was no good "Hutung"<sup>10</sup> for shepherding as there was no water and often when it was warm we had to lead the cattle to the Strieming to let them drink. Also, there was less and less grass as it dried up in the heat. Ernst was not a good shepherd, he rather went playing with the other boys, he even went as far as the Oder dam when there was a steamship to be seen. When the cows were not guarded, they demolished the fences with their horns and ate away the grass of the neighbors, also their beets and potatoe greenery. In the evenings, the damaged neighbors came by and complained to father about the shepherd. He was scolded and beaten, however he was incorrigible. He always had an excuse or other ideas, e.g. he got some ropes with which he tied the cattle to the fence. Once he came home with a dead goose explaining she had been running against a tree...

At the beginning of the 1890s, a Bauernwirtschaft (farm) was sold to a Jew from Krossen (Kron)<sup>11</sup>. Father bought 21 acres of acres and meadows, land which bordered on our garden. Now we had more meadows and the "Hutung" was placed on/in our garden. A small creek ran in the middle of the meadow so that the cows and geese had enough water to drink. Soon I was old enough to shepherd the cows, too. As a pass-time, I built a water mill at the bridge, windmills were also built. Not to forget: a small merry-go-round with horses from bark, it even had a real turntable. Sometime later a wooden structure was erected with a Trapeze. I have very often played on it, also other children came to visit and play. When Ernst took over the farm, the "Hutung" was relocated to the Strieming. It was even better there because one could bath and swim in the Strieming, when it was too hot. But even there the grass dried up and got less in summer and the geese didn't want to stay there. Then the shepherds were happy when the rye harvest was over and the geese could be driven onto the "Stoppel"<sup>12</sup>. It was a welcome change, some days the geese were taken to Heidewinkel, others to Bukhorst.

Ernst did his military service when he was 20 years old; he went to the infantry in **Insterburg**

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<sup>9</sup> Pilchen = little geese

<sup>10</sup> Hutung = meadow/ground on which cows graze/are shepherded

<sup>11</sup> Kron = name of the Jew. He had a textile company in Krossen, was the creditor of the vendor and sold the farm partially to third parties

<sup>12</sup> Stoppel = corn fields after the harvest, stubble fields

(East Prussia), No 41. Father often had to send him food parcels and also money. During Christmas 1899, a comrade of him was on holiday at **Siebenbeuthen**, district Krossen. Father took a parcel there for him to deliver it to Ernst. I was 13 and of course went with him; we went via **Polenzig, Schönefeld** and **Mühlow**. In the evening I was very tired. Every year there was a merry-go-round to our village, it always stayed for 8 days. We boys made the merry-go-round go round, so every once in a while we were given a free ride. Also there was a puppet theater with dancing puppets. Later on, there also was an air swing (boat swing?). Smaller works had to be done by us children. Gathering wood and bringing it into the houses, also peat, or preparing "Brocken"<sup>13</sup> for the cows. In spring, the canvas was woven and ready and we had to put it every day out to bleach on the grass and sprinkle it with water three times/day. This could take up to four weeks because it had to be completely white. In order to produce canvas it takes a lot of different works before: the flax straw (hemp?) has to be soaked and then roasted<sup>14</sup>. Then the raffia was removed by breaking it, it was then hatchelled and spun, again soaked and then made to yarn on the spinning wheel, cooked, and last but not least wound on bobbins. In the winter, the weaving loom was put up in the parlor and the yarn was woven to canvas. The coarse canvas usually was used for sacks, e.g. a farm girl was given up to 30 sacks for her equipment/endowment.

The finer canvas/linen was needed for shirts, towels, aprons and trousers for men and blouses as well as pouches for the shepherd boys. The spinning was done during the day and in the evenings the young girls met in one of their spinning rooms to sit and spin together till about 9.00 PM. Then the pipe was full and now they were playing together as in the meantime young men had arrived. However, sometimes they did not behave well and it happened that one of the "Wocken"<sup>15</sup> caught fire, however this was not as terrible as it was an old tradition. Songs were sung and sometimes people danced. But now I have told enough about those childhood and youth years.

School term always ended shortly before Easter, on Palm Sunday, three weeks before we gathered "Berenkraut" (= bear weeds) and wound wreaths and tendrils for decorating the church and school. On consecration/blessing day (held on Palm Sunday), the confirmands met with their teacher, thanked him for all his efforts with them and gave him some money, 1-2 Marks. Same was done with the pastor, however he received 3 Marks. On we went together and singing into the church and after the sermon we were examined. Afterwards we had a splendid afternoon, paying visits to one another, boys and girls and everywhere there was plenty of fine food and drink. We even went as far as **Friedrichswalde** and on Easter Sunday event to **Heideschäferei**.

Easter itself had its own traditions. I have already told about the so-called "Dingein"<sup>16</sup>. However, on the morning of Easter Sunday, while we kids were still sleeping, father took the so-called "Easter Water" and bedabbled our foreheads with it, so that we stayed healthy for the next year and not got ill.

Other people – however mostly young girls – also collected "Easter Water", it had to flow from North to East and one had to be silent when collecting it, also it was forbidden to turn around and look. That's what led to encounters with mischievous young men and often a bucket of water was taken from a well and more often a young girl had to return home drenched and soaked.

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<sup>13</sup> Brocken = split beets

<sup>14</sup> The flax straw was soaked in the Strieming and then roasted in the baking oven (source: Frieda Lehmann)

<sup>15</sup> Wocken = the stick on which the flax is wound that is to be spun

<sup>16</sup> Dingein = visiting the godparents on Easter Sunday and receiving small presents

## Carnival

Now I want to tell about carnival and how our village used to celebrate it. Youth – of course only the male part – was gathered 8 days before in order to confer about the festivity. First and most important of all – who should participate, second the music to be ordered and how much it should cost - however this usually had already been discussed 14 days before – because during the last Sundays, the “carnival brothers”, for so they were called for the time being, went in unison to the parents asking whether their daughter was allowed to participate. Usually they readily gave their approval when drinking something together, even though it meant financial expenses. The girls had to buy white dresses and each girl had to buy a “carnival bouquet” for her dancing partner which was to be sewed with a big red bow onto his hat and left there for 8 days.

Also, the permission to dance for three days had to be asked for from the head official. He lived in Heidekrug. The innkeeper saw to the necessary drinks. At 2.00 PM the carnival brothers marched with music, often drum and timbales, across the village to one of the young girls' homes where the rest of them had already gathered. Soon the young girls took the hat from the young men with whom they wanted to march to the tavern and sewed the bouquet onto it. The dancing lasted till 3.00 AM, then there was coffee and cakes. On Shrove Monday morning a 9.00 AM, the brothers met to “zamper”<sup>17</sup> and elected the “Specklope”<sup>18</sup> whose job it was to collect bacon, sausages and eggs from the village people. Also a treasurer and secretary were nominated to collect and record the donated money. Now three musicians and the brothers went from house to house and played to songs at every house. Often they also danced, giving hope that the flax might grow for a long period of time this year. Beer and brandy was drunken with each house owner, the booze carrier usually was the youngest carnival brother. Lunch was eaten in the house of one the young girls, as determined beforehand. In the afternoon children coming from school accompanied the “Zamper” people from house to house until darkness came. The money collected/donated was used for paying the bill and the music. During the evening, games were played and of course, the young girls were there, too. It started with a dance called “polonaise”, going over tables and banks and through windows, also tug of war and others...

On Shrove (also: Pancake) Tuesday, dancing started again at 2.00 PM, before that parade through the village as on Sunday, then in the evening pancakes with bacon. As the Specklope was unable to do this alone, the mothers of the girls helped him, also providing coffee and cakes for the final breakfast at 4.00 AM.

On Ash Wednesday it was tradition to ride white horses. This was how we did it: In the morning, two white horses were made: The two best runners of the carnival brothers put two old sieves one in front of their belly, the other behind. Then a bed sheet was spread over them, neck and head were made of a white woman's stocking. The tail was made of flax. The legs were also white as were body and face, only the hands were blackened with soot so to make a black sign on the cheek of everyone they met, sometimes the whole face was smeared in black. The school children were the first victims; however the young carnival girls were actually the ones the white horses tried to catch. The girls however were not to be seen during Ash Wednesday, they locked themselves in one of the houses, sometimes even the attic. Masked people and an organ grinder accompanied the white horses, also begging for presents and donations. In the evening, again everybody gathered and had fun and the party went on. On Thursday the village was again paraded and music band playing. This time, however, they were visiting each of the carnival girls, playing three songs for each one – a religious one, a Polka and a Waltz. Each girl had to donate 3 Marks. Pastor and teacher were also visited, as were business men, sometimes even up to **Heideschäferei** and **Friedrichswalde**.

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<sup>17</sup> Zampern = <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zampern>

<sup>18</sup> Specklope = he who carries the hawkers' tray to collect bacon and eggs

Then on Sunday the bill was presented in the tavern, i.e. the innkeeper presented his list of costs for the drinks of the five days as well as the cost for the music. The collected money (dancing, zamper, serenades) was taken to pay for it, however usually the expenses were higher than the revenues, the gap was to be paid by the carnival brothers, usually about 5-8 Marks per person. The innkeeper then poured out 1/8 (= about 30 liters) of "brown"<sup>19</sup> beer and then the great carnival time was once again over for the running year.

I have forgotten to tell about the cigars, they were taken directly from a box; usually each participant was given 5 cigars per day. The first carnival I attended myself was celebrated at my uncle Gromm's (Uncle Gromm was the brother of my father, Friedrich August Gromm, who in house No 14 had a tavern), I was 17 years at that time. The following three years we celebrated at Dammaschkes' and then I had to do my military service.

### **Pleasures during summer**

Usually during summer there was this disc shooting. The young folk who had celebrated the carnival week also participated in this event. The gunsmith from Guben and the music were ordered to come. The shooters met at Dammaschke's tavern and – together with the music band – the paraded to the shooting stand with the disc. The announcer led the parade, carrying the disc on his shoulders. The shooting stand was erected just out of the village on an empty space. The announcer was sheltered by an earthen rampart from free flying bullets. After each shot, he went to the disc and announced the hit. When the impact of the bullet could not be found on the disc, he waved his hat as a sign that the shooter had missed the disc.

When the bullet hit the bullseye, he placed his hat onto the disc and the music played a fanfare. The shooter with the most hits and rings counted won the tournament and was "Schützenkönig" (= champion shot). In the meantime the girls and ladies had also arrived and the champion was put a wreath of flowers onto his shoulders by them. Then he led the parade through the village to his house, walking first place behind the music together with the dame of honor. The disc was brought to his house; it was his property now and was fixed to the barn gate the next day. After a serenade, the whole group went on to the tavern and the dancing started. In the evening the champion was lifted up onto the shoulders of the villagers and he thus felt obliged to pay a round of beer – usually a small barrel – for the men and some liters of liqueur for the ladies. The vice champion had less to pay. I also was champion once.

During summer there were not many dances, therefore, friends and me often went to **Polenzig** for their Sunday dances. It was only a 3 km walk/ride, however the Oder lay in between and we had to call the ferryman to take us over. We like to go dancing in Polenzig, it was a sailors' village, also they had two big dance halls/floors and the girls liked to see us coming, as the young men of their village were on ships and away most of the time. Often enough, when the ferryman had already left it was the girls taking us to the other shore and then we did not have to pay anything. Quite often we also went dancing in **Guben** when there was the fair. We danced on/at Schneider's hill, which at that time was the biggest dance hall in Guben. When we had our fair, a lot of people came, also guests from Guben and our dance floor was overcrowded. Later the innkeeper built a bigger dance floor with parquet and a stage and now the associations also had more room. Thus we soon had a singing association/choir which I also used to join, a shipping association as well as the soldiers' society who from then on met regularly at Dammaschke's.

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<sup>19</sup> brown beer = young beer

## Hunting

In the south our Feldmark bordered to **Guben's** city forest. There were a lot of protected plantations in the forest, i.e. replanted pine trees, in which the game could hide easily. There were deers, roes and rabbits which came out by night in order to search food on the fields and acres. In the adjoining Oder fields there were a lot of partridges, foxes were not missing either. The hunting was leased out by the community and the hunting money was a nice income. In autumn we had drive hunting (= battue), we boys were the drivers and afterwards carried the shot rabbits to the collection point.

The hunting leaseholder was master baker Drescher from **Guben**. My father also was a passionate hunter and was given the authority for the hunting ground so that not too many poachers were carrying out their nefarious deeds. The leaseholder had to come up for the damages the game caused and because it was difficult to hunt deer and roe during the night, the animals were tricked and shot at night. The following happened: usually the game comes out of its forest hiding places during dusk and searches for food on the fields of the farmers until 3.00 or 4.00 AM. We then made so-called "Lappen", which were made of strings about 100m length, intertwined about every meter by red-and-wide fabrics 50cm long/5-6cm wide. These Lappen were wound on a large roll.

Now when a hunting day was decided upon, the evening before it 4 – 5 young men gathered at our home and we developed a plan. At 11.00 PM everyone took 2 rolls of prepared Lappen and we started. We first made a detour up to the boundary of the Guben hunting ground in order not to disturb the animals. From there, 2 of us went to the right and two to the left, one of each group tying the Lappen to the trees, about 1 meter above the ground. When we finally reached the field where the animals normally grazed, it was about 3.00 AM and when they tried to reach their normal position, they saw the Lappen and drew back. However, in the meantime we had already tied them along the border of the field and thus encircled them. At 8.00 AM the hunting leaseholder came together with some shooters and from our village also shooters and drivers arrived and the hunting started.

Father had walked the hunting ground before in order to find out whether deer were also encircled. First the hunters encircled the replantation, then the drivers entered the replantation from the opposite side and drove the game out of it, making some noise. Deer and roe are quite frightful animals and therefore escaped immediately. The rabbits kept hiding as they seemed to know what would happen to them. Around noon the main hunting work was done, everybody ate something and the Lappen were put down and away.

Next, the hunting on the field replantations and the fields itself started. A long chain, like a halfmoon, was formed, alternating a shooter and a driver every 40 meters. When dusk settled we all went to a tavern and the tenant bought a round for everybody, the drivers received their pay of ,75 – 1,00 Marks, afterwards the hunting leaseholder drove with his loot back to **Guben**. The hunters from here but also some from **Merzwiese** stayed for some hours, drinking beer, joking and telling tales about who shot most of the rabbits. That these were mostly cock-and-bull-stories, is understood.

Hunting in the Oder fields concentrated mainly on partridges. A family consisted of 15 – 18 birds. A hound did a great job there, he found the bird families, showed when he sensed them, and suddenly poising until the hunter reached shooting distance. A hound was also good for finding and fetching the lame and wounded partridges that hid in the potatoe greenery and brought them to his master who tied them with a sling to his hunting pouch. It might happen that up to 125 partridges were shot during one single day. The hound also found the rabbits hiding behind the Oder dam in the willow thickets and bushes. During winter, when parts of the Oder froze, the ducks searching for food came to the Strieming and the Mühlenfluss and were shot there. Also sometimes, wild boars visited our Feldmark during the nights, however they were more difficult to hunt resp. shoot as they did not use the same the same corridors to

come out of the woods every time. Often, however, they visited an oat field and my brother really wanted to shoot one.

That's why one evening he went – together with another hunter – out to hunt one of the wild boars. The hunter then sat down next to a ditch at the border of the field and Ernst climbed the raised hide, a seat in the tops of a tree with a ladder against its trunk. Finally after waiting a long time, the hunter heard the rustling of the cornstalks near the tree Ernst was sitting on. He wondered, however, why Ernst did not shoot? Was he afraid of the wild boar? When looking for him, the beasts run away and he saw that Ernst had fallen asleep.

The bullets for the guns were filled by us and often I did it myself. First you need a certain amount of gun powder, then a felt clot and last but not least grains of shot of varying sizes depending on the kind of game to be hunted: partridges, rabbits or big game. I remember wanting to hunt roes one afternoon on the hunting ground of the "Goldpüschchen"<sup>20</sup>, hiding in a quite large bush, in front of me a small meadow where I expected the roebuck to leave the woods and graze. It took him quite a while but finally he emerged very slowly and carefully. I was excited, however raised my gun slowly, aimed and fired. When I came out of my hiding bush and the smoke had vented, there was no sign of the roebuck. I found it however – lying badly wounded – some hundred feet into the woods and gave him the coup de grace with my knife. Afterwards I carried him home on my shoulders.

My father had a heavy time due to the poachers who hunted illegally. By then, there were several of them hunting in a group. On Whitsun Sunday at 4.00 AM father went in the woods in order to check whether everything was OK and that the game had not caused greater damages. Suddenly he saw two poachers ahead, about 150m sideward, he had recognized them as the sun was just rising. Fortunately they had not noticed father, otherwise they would have surely tried to shoot him. That they were able to do so shows the following incident: Poachery in **Guben's** city forest was also blooming and therefore the four foresters decided to watch out and agreed on meeting at a crossroad at a certain time and date. It happened on 20 September 1890 at 5.00 AM, 400 meters into the woods on the road to Heidekrug. The 20-year-old deputy forester Gründke was the first to reach the meeting point. As his three comrades were not to be seen he thought he was late and that the others had already gone further in the direction of the fields as there was a raised hide where the poachers assumably were to be found. However, the other three foresters were not early but late and suddenly they heard a shot in the direction they were heading to. They immediately went there to look, thinking that one of the poachers had shot a deer. However when they came nearer they saw that instead of an animal the poacher carried a person on his back and tried to hide sideways. The foresters followed him but one stepped onto a dry branch and the poacher heard this, let the dead body fall to the ground and started to shoot at the three foresters. They had seen by now that the dead person was their comrade Gründke and fired back at the poacher. They stopped firing when they saw that they had wounded him at the hand and decided to return to the village, informing the authorities and trying to find the murderer by seeing who was missing at home. Three people were not at home: one was fishing, the second was transporting wood. When the foresters went back into the woods at about 10.00 AM they found the third missing person lying dead, 200 meters from the Gründke, he had shot himself. The other two suspects were imprisoned, the main suspect received a 15-year prison sentence, the young follower 4 years of prison.

By then we knew who were the crooks that visited our fields and took cucumbers, fruit and vegetables during the nights. Nothing was safe from them! They even managed to steal a cow from a Polenzig farmer and to drive it to the cattle market in Guben to be sold immediately. However they were not successful as the police was informed, yet before being captured they let the cow go and escaped themselves hastily. Several barn fires were on their account also,

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<sup>20</sup> Goldpüschchen = name for Feldmark

the fire being laid during the night but breaking out around midday. Especially my father had to suffer from them. The trees in front of our house were damaged severely so that they dried up, later on the plum trees along the road on our land, father had planted them, were simply broken down. One night, all the fruit trees in our garden were damaged with an axe by taking off their bark so the trees withered. Weeds were sown among the flax, the "Hutungsstangen"<sup>21</sup> were thrown into the Strieming and other stuff like that.

Logs were sold from the Guben heath to the bakeries in Guben, real drive hunts took place and everyone was afraid and didn't say a word when he knew something. This was the end of the second crook: After having been in prison for 15 years, he went home but as he had not change to be a better person, complaints increased, e.g. that the grass of some farmers' Hutung was grazed during the night. Indeed I had often seen the person in question coming with his 4 – 5 cows from the **Polenzig** Feldmark where he had let his cattle graze. This was no longer acceptable and so **Polenzig** farmers decided on a field guard who would look after their fields at night in order to find out who the thief was. One morning we heard that the person in question was found dead next to his cows. He had been found while stealing and was directly shot from behind by gun.

Fishing was also extremely popular in our village and the Oder gave us plenty of opportunities. In the summer, days and nights, could be seen so-called "Hamen"<sup>22</sup> to catch the fish, even though it was forbidden to fish in the Oder. Only the fishermen from **Krossen** were allowed to fish, nevertheless there were always several young men trying their luck to catch a large pike. One of the men stood on guard while the rest was fishing, however often enough they had to escape because if they would be caught not only their nets would be taken but also a large penalty would have to be paid. Yet most of the times when caught they were able to settle this dispute peacefully. The Strieming was let on lease by the community. 8 – 10 men leased parts of it. There were two parts, one from the bridge on the way **Polenzig** to the border of the **Lahmo** Feldmark, the other from the bridge upwards till Hammernitze, a small river building the border to **Merzwiese**. In spring, when the river was still cold, they fished from the riverbanks, but on Whitsun everybody was there and everyone had a "Hamen" and a so-called "Strudel"<sup>23</sup> in order to drive the fish out of their hiding places. Every 300 – 400 meters a net was stretched across the river so that no fish would escape. Then the men went into the river, one after the other, with about 3 meters space in between. They hit right and left the riverbanks until they reached the net which was pulled out of the water quickly and all fish caught came into the "Kobers"<sup>24</sup> hanging from everybody's shoulders. When the Kobers were full, no further fish were caught. Then they divided the fish: first the big ones were sorted out and taken apart in as many pieces as there were fishing men. The white fish and the smaller ones were measured with the hands. One of the men had to turn around and the partitions were raffled. Father was always among the fishing men, we boys also accompanied him every time and in the evenings the fish were cleaned.

## Military time

I started my military service in 1897 and will now tell about these service years. There was a service duty when young men reached their 20<sup>th</sup> year and in spring all young men were ordered to **Guben**, led by the community's official. In the shooters' clubhouse every one of us was thoroughly checked by a doctor and was given a medical certificate on his fitness. There were also some officers present. For us this was kind of a holiday because in the evening

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<sup>21</sup> Hutungsstangen = poles building the fence around the pastures

<sup>22</sup> <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamenfischerei>; either boats with large nets on each side or nets (= Hamen) with which the fisher can catch fish standing on the banks/shore of a river

<sup>23</sup> Strudel = word not known, probably a device needed for the Hamenfischery

<sup>24</sup> Kober = basket or pouch

there was music and dancing. Those certified fit were again checked during autumn and then it was also announced which part of the troops would be most suitable. For me it seemed to be the dragoons in **Schwedt-on-Oder**, however shortly before the conscription on 27 September I received a new draft order to the regiment of the "Ulanen"<sup>25</sup> No 11, garrison in **Saarburg /Lorraine**, 11 miles from **Straßburg**. Alsace Lorraine was Reichsland since 1871; therefore every province had to station a regiment there. Our Brandenburg regiment had been stationed in **Kapritz?** and **Königs Wusterhausen** before. The recruits all came from **Brandenburg** and **Berlin**. The 15<sup>th</sup> army corps was stationed in **Straßburg**. Our army commander was the old Härfehr (?). Father saw me to **Guben** and in the train to **Kottbus** there already were several recruits from the Krossen area. At 2.00 pm our train started, we went via **Halle, Bebra, Frankfurt** and **Straßburg** and reached **Saarburg** the following day at 2.00 pm. We were about 150 men and after being brought to the barracks, were divided into the resp. squadrons; I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> squadron, together we were 50 recruits. The following day we received our uniforms and had to send our civilian clothes back home. Soon afterwards we went to the horse stables where we were again divided into so-called "Beritts" (= riding troops) and after that we had to clean the horses.

The barracks were situated on the outskirts of the city on a hill, giving us a nice view into the surrounding area. In addition to our regiment, there were two further regiments, infantry No 97 and No 99, then the Ulan regiment No 15 and also the riding division of an artillery regiment. There were three apartment blocks, the first accommodated the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron, the second the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the staff and the third the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> squadron.

The spacy yard first led to the kitchen and canteen, next came the casino/mess. Afterwards in a rectangle the horse stables with 2 roofed riding tracks. The inside of the rectangle was the riding area during summer. By the time we were done with the cleaning of the horses, we started riding on the riding tracks, by now it was winter. Our corporal's name was Fritsche, the sergeant's Wittstock. There were also two comrades from last year, one from **Polenzig**, the other one from **Seitwan**. There had also been one from **Merzwiese** but he had been released earlier. Same as with the comrades who had served their three years, the old horses were dismissed in autumn and young horses – we called them "Renonten" (\*) were put in the stables. The new horses came from as far as East Prussia and were brought by train. We recruits were trained horse-riding on the best of these horses, first on a "Woilach"<sup>26</sup>, then with a saddle and later on with spurs. My horse was called Quirl; each horse had its name. In the spring our recruit time was over and inspection time came, then we had to go to the big drill ground and we had to learn to ride in the squadron. The drill ground was about half an hour from the city, however we had music on our way home and when we had no music we had to sing. Anybody not singing was put down by the sergeant and had to do an extra stable shift.

Our service started early at 5.30 am. The trumpeter blew a signal and up we went and out of bed, washed ourselves and made our beds. In the meantime those who had "room duty" had fetched the coffee from the kitchen and we had a quick breakfast. Muster was at 5.55 am in the yard; afterwards we went to the stables. The horses had already received their fodder; this was done by the stable guard. The stable guard were 8 men and a private, their service started at 9.00 pm, 2 men had to do the first shift, there were to stable to watch, each shift took 2 hours, then it was the turn of the next two and so on until 5.00 am. At 5.00 am the fodder master came, gave out the hay and the feeding started – it was done quite fast. The other 2-men-shifts were sleeping, huddled in their blankets and it was the private who should wake them up when it was their turn, however he never did. The guards' task was to see that nothing was stolen and that the horses did not tear free and ran away. There were some that gnawed and bit their Woilach. The Woilach hang on the saddle and the saddle was put on an iron rack.

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<sup>25</sup> Ulanen = ulans, cavalry armed with lances

<sup>26</sup> Woilach = woollen blanket to be folded and used as horse blanket

Often the guard was revised by the corporal on duty. The entry of the barracks was also sentinelled. The iron gate was shut down in the evenings at 9.00 pm. The guard on duty was a corporal; the keys to the lock lay on the table of the guards' room. Those who arrived later than 9.00 pm and had no leave permission had to be reported to the sergeant.

During our first year, we recruits were not allowed to leave the barracks without given reason. During our second year, we were able to take holiday, however only 1 hour till 10.00. In the beginning, we recruits had a lot of work in the evenings. For every soldier there was a stack of three uniforms in the uniform store, the fourth was the Sunday suit which was handed out only for going to church and had to be cleaned and given directly back by Monday. The fifth was our riding and weekday uniform/suit, we had to keep it clean and orderly ourselves and therefore almost every evening someone sewed or patched his. The lights went out at 9.00 pm and some were still working on it.

It was my job to keep the corporal's stuff orderly, i.e. brush his suit, shine his boots etc.

On the other hand I did not have to participate in all the mustering down in the yard. There were plenty of musterings there, some just with the uniform/suit, some with shoes/boots, later on with weapons. Every Sunday the stable lane/corridor had to be cleaned and sanded, we had to check whether all Woiache were still there or ragged; the saddles had to be cleaned with sponge and saddle soap until it shone. The bridles, curb bits, trowels and chin chains were already polished on Saturday afternoons; also the stirrups had to shine.

Every squadron had to sergeants, one doing the written work in the office, organizing the services for the next day, assigning the guards' shifts, distributing the mail, informing the cavalry captain about everything necessary and imposing smaller penalties. The second sergeant was the so-called "weighing" sergeant; he had to watch over the horses, riding and foot services were under his guidance. The feed master, usually also a sergeant, had to see to oats, hay and straw. There were extra horses and the carriage men were called "Kremper Kutscher" as they were not good at horseback riding!

The young "Remonde"(\*)horses were broken in by the corporals and the best horse riders, usually the privates, an hour per day. We recruits also had a daily riding lesson in winter; we were given the best horses. The youngest lieutenant on duty gave the riding lesson, there were different divisions like A, B and C.

Normally the riding ended at 11.00 am, then everything had to be cleaned again, a guard was left in the stable and everybody else went in "closed formation" back to the barracks. Often however it was already several minutes past 12.00/noon and we had to race up to our rooms and get our bowls out of the cupboard. As the recruits had their rooms on the third floor it took us longer to be downstairs and muster up in the yard than the older soldiers and often some roughnecks stood along the staircases and "helped" the slowest of us to line up, as everybody was hungry. Everybody received the same measure of food into his bowl, together with a piece of meat or bacon and then we went to the canteen, sat down and ate. If you didn't like it, you poured it into a ton and bought yourself buns, sausage and beer in the canteen; of course you had to have money to do so. A "Schnitt" (= slice, probably meaning size of glass or mug) of beer cost 10 pennies, 10 pennies also for the liver sausage from Brunswick and 6 pennies for 2 buns.

After lunch at 1.00 pm the foot service started, first gymnastics on the wooden horse. Then outdoor exercising, marching, jumping, later lancing/jousting and fencing, after that we had carbine rifles and went to a shooting place in the woods where we had to fulfill certain exercises. Those who shot badly were given penalty exercises with their rifle in the afternoon. Before actually shooting, we were of course given instructions on the carbine rifle, its components and had to practice to take the lock apart. The afternoon service took about two hours. Once I won a price when there was a price shooting, it was a large book with nice

pictures, mostly of the war of 1870.

In summer the regiment's drill began. When it was dry and hot outside, the galloping horses whirled up much dust and after the exercising we were dusty all over. Rain was worse however, as from the galloping hooves you got lumps of mud in your face and everything was dirty, horse and men, and had to be cleaned afterwards for the rest of the afternoon. Jumping over hurdles or water-filled ditches wasn't easy as well as there were always horses that shied away or to the sides or threw their riders out of the saddle.

The squadron was divided into 4 troops, a troop leader rode in front of each troop and 50 meters in front of everybody rode the cavalry captain, giving his orders to the trumpeter next to him who blew the resp. signal. Some of the horses were very hot-blooded and when we started to gallop they ran away, the rider being unable to stop it and soon overtaking the cavalry captain. Of course, this ended in a row!

On the riding tracks of the barracks, we also had to exercise fighting with a wooden lance on horseback, man against man. The spearheads were wrapped in cloth with white chalk so that every stab of the opponent could be seen. The three best fighters received a combat badge which was stitched to their uniform sleeve. I received one, too. We often exercised with lances. On the riding court there were wooden poles every 50 meters with a head of straw on top. We had to gallop past them and to joust our lances into them.

The riding lessons on the riding track were not so easy. First we had to train the right posture, which was head up, chest out, the correct handing of the reins with upper arms close to the body, lower legs back, feet correct in the stirrups. Then the correct distance between the riders, 6 feet towards the one in front of you. First walk, next trot, then canter. Also turnaround on the horse's hindquarters, i.e. hind legs resting while forehand makes half a turnaround. We exercised right and left canter. We also "schänsieren" (??) through the middle of the riding track and we jumped over hurdles. Often the cavalry captain visited us, he had three riding horses to himself, lived in the city and his name was W. Borten. We had nothing to laugh when he was in a bad mood.

On Whitsun we were given 14 days home leave, I applied for going home and the sergeant approved my request. However if the applicant had misbehaved, his request was torn. Going home was costly, first the train ride for 15 Marks, then boots and a private suit. It'd take one day to go home and one day to come back, thus 12 free days at home and they went by so fast! During this short time I must have made the acquaintance of Miss Berta Grimm. Later we had a nice exchange of letters. Upon return to **Saarburg**, new services started. We now exercised in the fields and had an autumn maneuver.

Our sergeant had ended his 12 service years and was therefore looking for a private job, being away several weeks. I was helping him and his family, often doing small errands for them like message or food deliveries. The new sergeant had the same way of treating me so that in the afternoons I was always released from services and had to take care of his things. First, I took part in the mustering and he gave me a wink to disappear for these duties, later I didn't even go to the mustering at all but started directly with his stuff. My room was now also close to his office.

The autumn maneuver was held in Lorraine. The farmers did not like us very much and when asking them the way to our accommodation, they were not able to understand us... When the maneuver was finished, so where the "old" soldiers, meaning that their service had ended and that new recruits came. Our age-group was called "the Blue". I spent my Christmas holiday again at home. In the meantime, Ernst had married and he wanted to start on the farm. He had married Terese Woitschack, a farmer's daughter who still lives in **Wellnitz**. Our father moved his family to Rochatz (Roßack No 23) farm. There was a lot of work to do: First a gatehouse was built, then a pigsty, also a lot of renovation had to be done in the house as the

former tenants had been quite negligently. Our regiment's regulation said that when the old soldiers had done their 3-years-service and left, 2 soldiers who had only served 2 years at that time were also sent home. Those were called the "kings of holiday". I was one of them. This was really great, however in July I had to leave again for there was the emperor's maneuver and everybody had to participate. Our part of the troops joined another one's (the opponent's?) party and in August we went via Blackforest to Württemberg. I did not see much of the actual maneuver as the horse vet ordered me to be his groom and so I took care of his and my own horse and did not leave our quarters often.

When dismissal day came nearer, the joy was growing among those to be dismissed. Many of those coming from Berlin had served their 3 years without once returning home as they had been denied their holidays due to their unfavorable behavior and spent rather long times in father Pfilipp's jail. Some of them had been given as much as 51 days of imprisonment - they had 51 "thick" days as we called it – meaning that they were given strict arrest. For example they were not allowed to go out on Sundays what they nevertheless did and when they came back late (after the "taps") this was recorded and punished. Others had no money to travel home. Some never had money: when came payday off they went to town and soon the money was gone. Even others were able to climb a very very high wooden fence.

During the last night nobody was able to sleep: it was loud, everybody sang and celebrated the farewell. The uniforms had already been returned to the uniform store and everybody was wearing private clothes for the first time. A picture had been taken from the dismissed troop. A cane had been bought in reserve, as well as a tobacco pipe, in its head the names of all dismissed were engraved. I even brought home a beer jug. The next morning, accompanied by music we crossed the city on our way to the station. Our lieutenant accompanied us till **Kottbus**. Soon upon my return home, I was affiliated in the soldiers' society. We younger ones founded a choir. Our clubhouse was at Dammaschke's tavern. The older soldiers had already founded their own society and met at Grimm's tavern.

### **Songs<sup>27</sup> that were sung during my military time:**

Heut scheiden wir aus euren Kreis  
Ein Graf bei seiner Dienstmagd schlief  
Steh ich in finsterner Mitternacht  
Morgenrot, Morgenrot

### **Turn of the century**

The turn of the century was celebrated at Dammaschke's, at midnight the music band played a choral and several songs from the tower. The tower was ablated within the next years as it had a crack from top till bottom, presumably from a stroke of lightning. Up to the height of 15 meters it was built with field stones. These were now taken for the new country road from **Guben** via **Germersdorf, Wallwitz, and Niemaschleba** to the Oder ferry at **Polenzig**. The farmers also brought their field stones which they had collected from their acres Schidlose. Many of the young people helped with the earthworks and earned some nice money. However there were also disputes within the community meeting because there were many people against this project, allegedly because it was too expensive. The community was to pay 2.500 Marks which they said was too much money. One said that children and grandchildren would still dispute about that, another said that up **Guben** had been reached without that country road up until now and would be reached so without one in the years to come. The situation

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<sup>27</sup> songs/titles are not translated, German texts on the German part of the homepage

was quite similar to the time when the railroad had been planned and could have included our village. However the farmers said that their horses would panic and that the workers would be distracted from their job. This decision against the railroad had often since been regretted.

Nevertheless, when the country road was ready, everyone was happy and the costs were not that high, remembering that the bridge over the Strieming had cost 25.000 Marks. During the first months, however, the horses and carriage men had to get used to the cars on the road and it happened every once in a while that the horses jumped into the ditch next to the road and the tow bar broke.

My girlfriend used to live in house No 115. We got to know each other closer and closer and in the evening of Sunday 5 December 1905 I had to go and look for the midwife who was at Dammaschke's as there was dance and before midnight our son was born. The following year we married in October. The year after that the farm No 34 was parceled out. My father-in-law bought the house together with stable and barn. He moved there with his family after selling his old lot. In the meantime my sister Alwine had married farmer Emil Ludwig. Finally my youngest sister also got married to the mason Emil Lehman. Both sisters are still alive, one living in **Wellnitz**, the other in **Göhlen**, their husbands both dead already.

In spring 1906 our Frieda was born and I still could not bring my little family home as grandmother was still living in the small parlor.

In 1908 when Emma was born I was assigned the farm, i.e. I bought it from my parents for 6.000 Marks. Of course I did not have to pay the whole money at once in cash. My wife had brought 3.000 Marks into our marriage, however not cash. My father-in-law had taken a credit from the savings and loans institution which had been organized some years ago. My sister had to pay off her part, i.e. to pay interest on. 3.000 Marks had been the calculated value of the "Altenteil"<sup>28</sup> for father and mother. The "Altenteil" was not sparse, this is about what it was:

\*free apartment,

\*free cellar,

\*one cow fed with same food as the farmer's cows.

\*Furthermore 3 "Zentner"<sup>29</sup> good hay, straw too,

\*6 "Zentner" of rye,

\*25 "Zentner" good potatoes for eating, the amount of feed potatoes I do not recall.

\*2 carriages full of beets without leaves,

\*shredded firewood same as the farmer used.

\*Several "Klafter"<sup>30</sup> of peat.

\*Free linen (bed-sets),

\*free doctor and medicine.

\*Free walking around the farm.

\*annually one free transportation service up to 15 km

\*the right to receive visitors

\*free burial

\*half a year 4 eggs per week

By and large, however, the "Altenteil" wasn't taken too seriously. Father received 10 Marks per month for military services done. Mother was still helping vigorously on the farm; she was up front when it came to hoeing the potatoes, often even pushing the rest. They also had a strip of land to plant vegetables.

We never had disputes about the "Altenteil". My wife and me lived quite economically as we

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<sup>28</sup> Altenteil = contract between parents and the heir of their farm regulating e.g. accommodation, heating, food, clothing, care, money etc.

<sup>29</sup> Zentner = hundredweight/ centner = 100 kg

<sup>30</sup> Klafter = ancient length and square measure, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klafter>

still needed some farming machines, e.g. a mowing machine/harvester. We wanted to pay the debts directly. Also we had leased additional land at the Oder (Schnirstein). On Mondays, we often went to the market in **Guben** to sell potatoes and hay.

In autumn 1913, father died of a heart failure, he was 75 years old. The rest of us had also not been spared of sickness: Paul had pneumonia twice, once I had to drive to **Guben** very early in the morning in order to get the medicine and I borrowed a bike from P. Schulz to get there more quickly. We did not have one at that time and I was not very good at riding it. Indeed I walked more than I rode, as I had to take a detour through the forest because the country road was not yet finished. Bertha often had a tracheitis and had to go to the doctor every other day to be treated with iodine. For 14 days she drove alone – with a horse of her father - to **Guben**. This was during the hay harvest.

## **World War I; 1914 – 1918**

Every year we young reservists got an induction order from the district commander to participate at a certain mobilization day. Together with my two friends, Paul Richter and Ernst Lehmann, I had to show up in **Spandau** within 4 days, we were assigned to the ammunition convoy of the footed artillery regiment. First we got all our stuff and a few days later the horses arrived. Every man was given 2 horses, the next day we received bridles and tack and immediately afterwards we started with riding. After 8 days we were ready to march. Both my comrades had to join another convoy and so we had to part. On 16 September we were loaded and went by train via **Belgium**.

Our convoy consisted of 17 wagons for ammunition, each loaded with 36 shooting grenades, 15 cm in diameter, weighing 85 pounds each. Further to that 2 wagons of reserve stuff such as tools and office belongings and the last wagon was the blacksmith's, also laden with horseshoes. All in all we were 20 wagons, each pulled by 4 horses, each of the left horses with a rider on top. Every wagon was accompanied by 2 squads of canoniers by foot.

So I had to leave our farm and Berta was alone with the children. We also had to give away our best horse. As my brother-in-law also had to join the army, grandfather all of a sudden had to take care of 2 farms. However, he soon received help from the prisoners which were assigned to the farms where the owners had been drafted.

Near **Aachen** we were offloaded. We went via **Lüttich** and were stationed for some days right before the fortress of (Str..ür??). On 23 September we marched on. A 42-cm-battery from **Ostrich** bombed the way and we saw one of the forts. The next day we received order that the reserve corps was to be directly shipped to **East Prussia**. So now we were travelling across all of Germany, our wagons were greeted enthusiastically on every railroad station we stopped. We were given food, cigarettes and flowers in abundance. We travelled to **Königsberg** and one station afterwards were unloaded. Then we marched via **Warschau**. However soon afterwards our division was once more loaded and next we drove to Silesia, being offloaded there and marched through **Gleiwitz, Torenopol** where we spent one night, ? and **Beuthen**. It was some hours later that we passed the border. Due to bad roads, wheel collapses were not seldom. The following day we crossed a sandy desert. There, our pioneers first had to build a supported way with willow mattresses to cross the sand with the heavy guns. At **Iwongrad** (?), a fortress we first came to a halt and after several days we retreated. However, marching back was not easy. Due to rainy weather and the uncountable wagons, the peaty ground in the forest was soggy and unpassable. At a length of 100m, 8-10 horses had to pull each carriage to move forward, however at a certain point, the horses were up to their bellies in the mud. Our next order was to march toward **Warsaw**, alas winter was coming and combat actions were put down with the target to start fighting the offensive in spring. Then we took **Warsaw**, passing it to the left and reached the fortified places **Pultusk** and **Gradno** (?) along the Weichsel. During winter we took quarter in a small village. We had little to do

unless moving the horses, thus we went for long rides with them.

One day in April we received order that all farmers were granted seeding leave. We were 8 farmers to take the leave, however when we wanted to go home there were no trains nearby. The nearest train station was 51 km, therefore one of the carriage man drove us 25 km, the rest had to be marched, yet we were in a good mood being able to go home. We came to the station at 2.00 pm and the train left at 6.00 pm. The following morning I reached **Merzwiese** and shortly afterwards was at home. It was a great joy; however Emma did not recognize me as I was wearing a full beard. Days went by in a hurry and too soon I had to part again.

In the meantime our convoy had marched on and I had to search them for several days. When reaching the borders to **Poland** and **Russia**, we were ordered back, this time shipped to **Flanders**. This time, there was little enthusiasm when riding through our country. Trench warfare had started all around and often we had to drive munitions during the nights. An offensive had been started, yet came to a standstill. We were about 40 km from Paris, had to hurry back however to avoid being captured. During the next offensive we had to drive munitions for 14 days to the front, which were then covered with grass and blankets in order not to be detected from the hostile planes. From 6.00 – 9.00 am we fired barrage (drumfire) into the enemy lines. 5 rows one after the other was heading towards the enemy, again successful beginning, again standstill after 3 days. Our opponent was able to rely on reserves, unlike us who had to get the munitions from way back, driving day and night. One night, in the city of ....., the residents of the upper stories were shooting at us; also the train station was being shot at with several aerial bombs. Again, winter brought some rest and peace and at the beginning of spring season, we farmers once again drove home for 14 days, doing the necessary farming works, seeding etc... The offensive near **Peronne** at the river Somme brought damages to our battery and convoy as well. Franz Schulz from Berlin was deadly wounded by a shrapnel next to me. Again we were moved into reserve quarters and were stationed in the villages **Sumain** and **Bermrain**. We helped doing the fields with our horses. One winter was very cold, when we kept guard during the night; we put a Woilach<sup>31</sup> on top of our coat. Finally, we were assigned to a battery and had only to drive munitions for them. The battery had 4 cannons. As we belonged to the reserve convoy, we often had to change our quarter. When there was no train connection, we had to march. We often marched through **Kambrai**<sup>32</sup>. **Walenzieme** (?) was also quite known to us.

During autumn, I was again granted 14 days farming leave. First great joy to see everybody at home, however the days went by very fast and again I had to leave my family. During the last year 1917/18 our batteries remained in Flanders. The British now used more and more heavy guns/cannons and we had severe damages. Every evening at 8.00 pm we were ordered to drive munitions. The shells/grenades were first fetched from our storage place and then taken to the front. This was only done by night. By then, our carriages could only load 25 shells, often we had to take field paths, the regular streets were bombed and full of shell holes. Not all wagons were used every night, depending on whether the munitions had completely been shot the night before. The best driver was a comrade from **Brankow** and soon he was sergeant of our convoy. One afternoon when we camped next to a country road on the slopes of a grassland, a hostile plane came flying towards us, flying quite low and ready to bomb us. We were lucky that our plane was also on the spot. During their single combat, the hostile plane crashed and fell down, the plane bursting into flames. If he had succeeded throwing its bombs at us, half of our convoy and horses would have been lost. As the plane had crashed down only some hundred meters from our camp, we ran there, about 20 men, Gallas among them. The flames shot up really high, we stood there in a circle, watching. Suddenly one of us said that perhaps this was no good idea with all the bombs possibly exploding and all of a sudden the explosions started. Gallas was hit by a shrapnel, only a small wound at his neck. Our orderly dressed the wound scantily and sent him to the military hospital. Three days later

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<sup>31</sup> Woilach = horse blanket

<sup>32</sup> Kambrai = Cambrai, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlacht\\_von\\_Cambrai](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlacht_von_Cambrai)

he was dead. He was buried together with a lot of comrades on a military cemetery. One of our corporals also was torn by an artillery shell and I was ordered to take his place. Now when more than 8 wagons drove to the front they had to be accompanied by 2 corporals, one at the beginning and one at the end of the convoy. When there were only 3 wagons, 1 corporal was sufficient. It was always dangerous for us to pass a crossroad as the enemy used to shoot the junctions occasionally.

And it was extremely difficult for us leaders when the cannons had been moved due to extensive bombing. We had to search them in the darkest hours of the night then. Once I returned from such a search, it was 4.00 am and at the entrance of an abandoned village a house was hit by a shell, splinters of it hitting the first wagon (I was riding in front of it). 2 horses and both riders, Holzmann and Gutermuth, were instantly killed. The confusion and tumult were high as the remaining wagons fled and I had to bring back one of the wagons first in order to transport our dead comrades. One of the canoniers had also disappeared, however recovered and found us in the evening. Another night – we were again transporting munitions to the front rows – we were suddenly shot at before having found our cannons. Ibis, my loyal horse, was scared by some shooting, shied away and threw both of us in a ditch. While I was still checking my bones and found myself unhurt, Ibis ran away. This was very bad now as of course I should not march or run around there. It took me some time to return to the shelter of our battery and nobody was happier than me finding Ibis peacefully standing there. At that time and in this area I have met Bernhard Donath, a comrade also belonging to our division, several times.

Aerial warfare became more and more of a problem and several planes crashed down, burning. Immelmann and Bölke, both fighter pilots flying and fighting in this area were shot down and died. Each of them had defeated about 60 – 70 enemies. There were also cases of gas poisoning in the infantry. Once we heard the injured who were in a military hospital coughing, 14 days later they were dead. I was appointed Sergeant shortly after having been granted the Iron Cross. Our convoy had lost a lot of men by that time. Only very few were left from the original troops. Compensation came in terms of young boys with no experience, and the horses were getting less and less also. Several weeks we spent in a military barrack near **Lyon**, the city is on top of a hill. There we were able to go to a theater on Sunday evenings; however this was in 1916 already. The daily rations for us and our horses was getting worse and worse, we received 3-4 times dried vegetables per week and the horses rotten hay.

When during the last year of war the Americans joined with new troops, our infantry troops were barely able to keep up their front, as the actual size of the company was only 1/3 of its former troops. On 9 November 1919 we first heard rumors and the following day it was a certainty that the war would be over soon. Some days later we received order to retreat. Discipline was lost rather quickly and the epaulettes of the officers were torn down. The withdrawal was quite difficult as streets and country roads were clogged with military masses, marching also during the nights. It was agreed to clear a certain space each day and the opponent followed on the spot. We crossed the river Moselle and soon afterwards the Rhine. By then, the food rations were splendid, we had lots of meat to eat and the food could often not be carried away or hidden fast enough before the arrival of the enemy. On a train station we saw a whole train load with food, however it was not transported away. We were not shipped but had to march for 8 further days, then had to camp 14 days. Finally, in mid-December we could take a train, reached **Potsdam** in the night and went further to **Spandau**. The next day there was a big horse auctioning and on 18 December I was back in my Heimat. We once more went to **Spandau**, getting private clothing. Now it was important to save money as Paul would leave school the following year and he wanted to learn some more, attending the Farming School in **Guben**. He was given a nice bicycle to ride to Guben, however it was stolen soon.

## Savings and Loans Bank<sup>33</sup>

Paul Schulze, the calculator, died in 1920 and a new one had to be elected. Herman Türke, a farmer, was his successor; however one year later he was fed up with it and resigned from the job. Again, a successor had to be found and they chose me. I reckoned Pauln<sup>34</sup> could help me with the written work and so I accepted the election. It was a difficult task because soon after the big inflation/depression<sup>35</sup> started. Savings books, credit certificates, security mortgages, bills of exchange and many such documents had to be issued. A constant correspondence / money transfer with the Co-operative Bank<sup>36</sup> in **Berlin** was to be done. Soon the tax collection was conferred to the Savings and Loan Bank, the paper money was increasing rapidly, first 1.000M, then 5.000M, 10.000M, 100.000M to 1.000.000M e.g. M1mio was not enough. However when the numbers reached the billion, the columns in the diary were too narrow. Change came in 1924 when M1bn was worth 1 Rentenmark. Interesting to mention that the taxes of the owners required such an amount of paper money that my whole family had to help sort it and Paul was forced to carry the money in a Rucksack to **Guben**'s revenue & tax office.

Now to the meaning of the co-operative. There were about 100 members, the board of directors consisted of 3 persons: the director, the deputy and the "Rendant"<sup>37</sup>. Later the latter was called "Rechner" (meaning calculator). The calculator had to manage the day-to-day business. The co-operative joined the Association of Farming Co-Operatives with its head office in Berlin. Money transactions were done with the Provincial Co-op Bank in **Berlin**, Chausseeufer 106. The purchase of goods e.g. coal, fertilizers, potash, "Thomasmehl" so-called Thomas ground basic slag<sup>38</sup>, nitrogen, calcium oxide, machines was done through the affiliate in **Guben** but also through the head office in Berlin. The association delivered the accounts and bank books. In addition to the board of directors there was also a supervising board consisting also of 3 persons. These members had to supervise the management measures of the board of directors and had to approve their resolutions. There were regular meetings, usually in the apartment of the calculator. The resolutions were recorded and signed from all parties being present.

Annually after the end of the financial year and the detailed balance, calculation of interest rates and the profit-and-loss-accounting, the board of directors called for a general meeting. In turn this took place in the restaurants of Frohner (inn of Pauline Frohner, born Gromm, house No 14) and Dammaschke (inn No 95). The board of directors had to report on their management, the total amount of the savings, the loans given to the members, movements/businesses of the members, credits with the bank, purchase of goods and so forth. Also elections of new board members – directors and/or supervisory – took place.

Upon suggestion of the board of directors, the general meeting decided on the use and division of the net profit, usually between 500 – 800M. Part of it was used for the reserve fund, then there was the dividend on the shares, 4%. The value of a share was 200M. The remaining part of the net profit was spent for charity purposes. When the agenda, reviews and the discussion (critique!) were done, often a member of the main co-operative held a presentation on fertilizers and purchase of goods. That done, the pleasant part of the meeting started: each present member was given numerous glasses of beer and booze, also cigars. Those were the charitable purposes... Further to that, the meeting was recorded; the records were read out loud, approved and signed. The balance sheet cost 200M and often Paul had

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<sup>33</sup> Spar- und Darlehnskasse

<sup>34</sup> Pauln = his son, Paul Gromm

<sup>35</sup> Invalation = Inflation??

<sup>36</sup> Genossenschaftsbank

<sup>37</sup> Rendantur = Kassenstelle, Rechnungsbehörde = payment office

<sup>38</sup> Slag (= Schlacke) used for fertilization

done it. In the beginning, I was given 400M, later 600M for doing the calculating job.

After the inflation came the deflation, now money was missing and the bank gave out money. 3-months-bills-of-exchange were issued, later they were prolonged. Land charge certificates were submitted for security. The co-operation possessed the following machines: a grassland harrow, a sowing machine/seeder and later also a machine to steam potatoes. Most of the members bought their briquettes through the co-operative. There were some lazy customers who did not pay their interest rates, e.g. a mill- and lumbermill owner was one of those debtors and we had to sue him. There were a lot of dates and deadlines at the local court in **Guben**, however he always found new witnesses and excuses. There were 15 creditors who had open claims against him, we were the last. Finally, his mill burnt down and with luck and scarce resources we got our money – 6000M. (*Oskar Döring was the owner of the lumbermill, the bankruptcy case of his assets started on 6 February 1929*). The owner of a dairy plant also went bankrupt; in order to save our money we were forced to acquire the dairy plant during the forced sale. This was a lot of hard work for me, lots of worries and headaches as I was one of the managing directors and responsible for everything.

A lot of work and frequently going to the court was required when the revaluation law came into being. Both savings and debts were revaluated. While other people went out in the evenings doing fun things, the calculator sat with his books and diaries and did the accounting. Last but not least, our bank was also assigned to disburse the milk money which amounted to 5.000 – 6.000M per month. Some of the farmers received up to 150M milk money. I only received the credit entry from the bank and had to provide the needed small change. Usually I disbursed the money on a certain day/evening in one of the inns. The co-operative and its members subscribed war bonds as early as World War I, later on these too were revaluated, partially sold. Shortly before World War II, the savings deposits were again at the level of 250.000M. The transportation of coals from the **Wellmitz** train station was rather difficult during the war years and often when the wagons loaded with briquettes came in winter it was heavy snow and frozen ice and the supervisory board wanted me to see to the further transportation of the briquettes personally. I refused to do so as often during bad weather the horse owners would not come with their carriages – Emma can tell stories of that – and so I resigned my job as calculator. Otto Leschke (house No 20), a young man, was appointed the new calculator and therefore, after 20 years the 8Ltr heavy safe was moved to his home. This was in 1942.

Back to the farm now, almost every year we had to buy something new or replace/repair old stuff. We bought a motor after having installed electric light first. Then a malt mill, a mangle, a potatoe steamer, a beet cutter, a manure pump, a second mowing machine, a straw cutter, an electric "Heckselmaschine"<sup>39</sup>. Up to now the old Heckselmaschine had to be worked manually. The horse fodder was always made on Sunday mornings. Also we bought a milk/cream separator with pump. Of course we also had to endure losses: 2 foals, one due to colic, the other during birth. Next we bought a potatoe(wheel?)machine, wanting to participate the modern times. After that a double ploughshare. In order to make some extra money, we often went to the market in **Guben** on Mondays. The hay was weighed and bound on Sunday mornings, 10pds per bundle and so we started at 6.00 am and reached Guben at about 8.30 am. However we were not alone, there were already others from **Merzwiese** and **Neundorf**, who had left home even earlier. In times of scarcity, we got 50ch? per bundle, usually however only 30ch and it went poorly we sold it to the merchant for 2,00M per centner. Less luck even with the potatoe sale: 1,50M per centner, red and white cabbage also did not bring a lot of money.

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<sup>39</sup> Heckselmaschine = a machine cutting straw into pieces for horse fodder

**Songs<sup>40</sup> that were sung when Paul Gromm was a young man and that he wrote down from memory:**

Jung Siegfried war ein stolzer Knab  
Es zogen drei Buschen wohl über den Rhein  
Nun ade du mein lieb Heimatland  
Von der Wanderschaft zurück  
Müde kehrt ein Wandersmann zurück  
Nach der Heimat möchte ich wieder  
Hier sitz ich auf Rosen  
Wir sitze so fröhlich beisammen  
Goldne Abendsonn wie bist du so schön  
Graus war die acht und um den Giebel  
Still ertönt die Abendglocke  
Dort unten in der Mühle  
Sieh da kam ein stolzes Weib  
Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten  
Schlaf herzens Söhnchen mein Liebling bist du  
Aus der Jugendzeit aus der Jugendzeit  
An der Saale kühlen Strande  
In einem dunklen tiefen tiefen Tale  
Wir kommen vor eure Tür getreten  
Habt Dank habt Dank ihr guten Leute  
Ein dummer Esel alt und grau  
In Hamburg ist neulich ein Unglück passiert  
Mein Schatz ist ein Reiter  
Lieber Frühling komm doch wieder  
Nachtigall Nachtigall wie singst du so schön  
Ein Sträußchen am Hute den Stab in der Hand  
Schatz warum so traurig  
O Regiment mein Vaterland  
Marie Marie das ist mein Name  
Du, du liegst mir im Herzen  
Bei Sedan auf dem Felde  
Es wollt ein Mädchen wohl früh aufstehn  
Es wollt ein Jäger wohl jagen  
Vergiß nie deine Heimat

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<sup>40</sup> songs/titles are not translated, German texts on the German part of the homepage