

Bank and History

Historical Review

Historical Association
of Deutsche Bank



No. 30

May 2014

Nachrichtenblatt



der
Deutschen Bank

ihren zum Kriegsdienst einberufenen Beamten gewidmet.

Nr. 1.

Berlin, 15. Oktober 1914.

Es ist uns ein Herzensbedürfnis, dazu beizutragen, daß für die zahlreichen zu den Fahnen einberufenen Mitarbeiter unserer Bank die Zühlung mit der Heimat und ihrem Berufskreise nach bester Möglichkeit aufrecht erhalten wird. Diesem Zwecke dient das Nachrichtenblatt, das von solchen Vorgängen Kenntnis geben wird, die im Hinblick auf ihre Zugehörigkeit zur Bank für unsere Beamten Interesse haben können.

Das Nachrichtenblatt soll ferner der Vermittlung solcher Nachrichten dienen, die zur Weitergabe an die Kameraden auf den Kriegsschauplätzen, sowie auch an die zu Hause zurückgebliebenen Beamten geeignet sind.

Die Aufgabe, die das Nachrichtenblatt sich stellt, wird wesentlich dadurch gefördert werden, daß uns die im Felde stehenden Beamten aus ihren Erlebnissen besonders Deutliches berichten und der Verwaltungs-Abteilung ihre jeweilige Adresse möglichst genau mitteilen. Dabei möchten wir bitten, solche Stellen, die aus militärischen Gründen nicht weiter verbreitet werden dürfen, näher — am besten durch eine Klammer — zu bezeichnen. Soweit diese Berichte ein allgemeineres Interesse haben, und gegen ihre Veröffentlichung kein Bedenken vorhanden ist, sollen sie in dem Nachrichtenblatt abgedruckt werden.

Fudem wir die erste Nummer versenden, tun wir es mit dem Wunsche, daß allen denen aus unsern Reihen, die zum Kampfe für das Vaterland hinausgezogen sind und für dessen Ehre und Ruhm ihre ganze Kraft einsetzen, das beste Wohlergehen und nach siegreichem Kampfe eine glückliche Heimkehr in ihre Heimat beschieden sein möge.

Direktion der Deutschen Bank.

Founded in October 1914, the "Bulletin" for their "employees conscripted to military service" — and the first Deutsche Bank staff magazine was destined to help staff keep in touch with home and their professions.

»My work seems so remote.«

Deutsche Bank employees in World War I

The start of World War I in the first days of August 1914 numbers amongst the most serious breaks in the history of Deutsche Bank. Many of the international connections it had cultivated since its foundation in 1870 were severed in a very short period. Moreover, a considerable portion of its employees was immediately mobilized, leaving positions vacant for an unforeseeable period. Of the 8,475 people the bank had on its payroll in 1914, some 2,500 were conscripted by the end of that same year. More than half of Deutsche Bank staff doing military service had worked at the Berlin head office and branch offices in Berlin. The other conscripts stemmed from the roughly 50 domestic branches. Though there is no information on how many Bank employees were conscripted during the entire War, the total number of those who died in action is known. 1,023 Deutsche Bank employees lost their lives, equivalent to 7.5 percent of those on its payroll at the end of the War. In World War II, by contrast, 5.3 percent of Deutsche Bank staff perished, although this war lasted 18 months longer.

Deutsche Bank employees in Cologne assemble in August 1915 in front of the “Kölsche Bauer in Eisen” monument. Having paid a patriotic donation, employees could hit a nail into the wooden figure.



Albert Reichert, who had been working in the Frankfurt branch since 1911, was conscripted during mobilization and one of the first Deutsche Bank employees to die in Northern France on August 18, 1914. (HADB, P3/R38)



The Deutsche Bank Historical Archive comprises several hundred personal files of employees who participated in World War I. Many files have been analyzed for this article. They contain forces' letters, photographs and lists detailing money from the Bank to its employees during the War. The following passages were compiled from letters written by conscripted employees. Though there is no doubt that the writers were often overly optimistic in describing the prevailing mood, there is scant evidence of enthusiasm for the War. Conscripts repeatedly wrote that they hoped the War would soon be over, and that they would be able to return to their duty unharmed. Jingoism was evident in only one employee, who spent the first months of the War in the safety of the German embassy in the Netherlands and longed to perform heroic acts at the front. The following reports paint an emphatic picture of everyday life in the trenches. As evident in the letters, aside from the Deutsche Bank bulletin, the only comforts were the gifts the Bank sent to maintain a connection to its staff, such as small packages containing chocolate, peppermint-cola lozenges, and cigars or cigarettes.



“It is high time I sent word from here. However, given the manner in which the reserve regiment has been spending its days it was impossible to think of writing letters, quite apart from the fact that the postal services are severely disrupted. So far nobody here has received any letters. The day after our arrival the reserve regiment [was] assigned to the province of Graudenz, which was being thoroughly fortified against the enemy. Having done several days of service in the company, I was appointed to the fortifications building office.”

Carl Schnuchel (Graudenz/West Prussia) to Berlin head office, Aug. 12, 1914 (HADB, S608)

“I would like to send you and all our acquaintances kind greetings from Namur, which our brigade invaded the night before last. Thanks to the horrendous impact of our artillery and that of the Austrians, its strong, modern forts, with the exception of two, had to surrender or fell after a short bombardment (3 - 4 days). The hardships are very great, but they are being endured. [...]. We have just been informed that Belfort has fallen, and 45,000 prisoners have been taken. Several thousand, Belgians and French, are also



Aged 21 when the War started, Ernst Raab was an accountant at the London branch. He returned to Germany before the branch closed and took part in the entire War, finally as a lieutenant. In 1918 he was honored with a First Class Iron Cross. (HADB, P2/R281)

imprisoned here. [...]. Otherwise, thank God, I am not too bad apart from my stiff legs and the rheumatism I have developed from the chilly nights spent outside, and a cold. You learn to bear a great deal and to do without almost everything."

Hörnische (Namur/Belgium) to Ewald, Berlin head office, Aug. 26, 1914 (HADB, S608)

"I have now been installed in the embassy some three weeks and have plenty to do, mostly at night. Yet I would much rather be active on the battlefield, or at least be in Berlin, because you cannot experience such times when you are abroad and can scarcely appreciate our magnificent success. Even though people here are 'neutral', they wish our enemies all the best and are delighted to print all the lies of the French and Belgian press. I imagine that you are still getting English newspapers there. If not, you just cannot imagine the vile and wild coverage not only by smearsheets like 'The Times', but also newspapers that are normally sensible, such as the 'Westminster Gazette'. Such stupid carrying on and powerless rage is simply beyond German imagination, especially following the beating the English took in Northern France. And pathetically the English are expecting salvation from the Russians, who are to march on Berlin, though we have just taken 70,000 of them prisoner."

U. Bergmann (The Hague/Netherlands) to Alfred Blinzig, Berlin head office, Sept. 1, 1914 (HADB, S608)

"To be quite honest we are having a miserable time of it in Russia. There is a shortage of supplies because of the incredibly poor roads. You quite literally sink to the top of your boots in mud here. There are no roads to speak of, apart from a single main road, and naturally not all the corps can march on it at the same time, meaning the heavy guns and carts have to make their way along muddy tracks and already our horses can hardly go any further. Added to that the Russians are only conducting a defensive campaign, i.e., they withdraw as soon as we get close, only holding us off with cavalry skirmishes."

G. Quittschau (Gut Danieszow) to Berlin head office, Oct. 7, 1914 (HADB, S608)

"Though I do not have to endure any sacrifices here in the garrison, I find service tiring. Every time I ask about post at the company orderly room I am thrilled to receive another one of the now well-known packages, and it gives me great pleasure when my astonished comrades call out 'Is that yet another gift?' to hold the addresser's stamp 'Deutsche Bank, secretary's office' under their noses. Their envy is quickly alleviated with a cigarette or a piece of chocolate, yet it fills them with enormous respect how Deutsche Bank looks after its employees doing military service. However, it is in fact the bulletin that arouses such general admiration, its publication really was an excellent idea. [...]. Incidentally, it is hardly surprising that our arsenal does such an excellent lie as the Sergeant of the Reserves, E. Müller, heads the regiment's wing to the right – in peacetimes he is Deutsche Bank's representative on the stock exchange, while the wing on the left is under my command. And with Deutsche Bank represented on both wings, it would be rather peculiar if our performance were anything other than excellent."

F. Kehse (Königsberg) to Berlin head office, Nov. 16, 1914 (HADB, S608)

Sergeant William Gäbel (4th f. r.)
with comrades behind the front.
An employee at the Berlin head
office, he was killed in 1915.
(HADB, P2/G32)



"Today, I received your wonderful Christmas package for which I would like to express my grateful thanks. For two months our regiment has been at an outpost. We have accommodation in a very large and interesting cave. You can only venture into this labyrinth equipped with a compass & torch. [...]. We have built the most beautiful, strongest fortifications. And we feel [...] safe as if we were in the strongest fort. Every attack by the enemy is warded off without any great losses on our side. There is absolutely no chance of the French making a breakthrough. Thanks to the long ongoing siege, you might say our relationship has become almost friendly. In the end, for quite a while every morning at 11 we exchanged the latest news and the papers. The French were just 100-120 meters away from our guard, on the other side of the forest. Every morning, midway between the edge of the forest and our guard, two Germans and two Frenchmen met, greeted each other, even offered each other cigarettes and then after talking for 15 minutes each side returned to their comrades. Witnessing these brief encounters was a unique experience. It was easy to hear how the French were deceived by their own country about the real war situation. Last week these communications were suspended. [...]. Hopefully, things will be quickly resolved in our favor."

Johannes Russel (Chiry/France) to the Hamburg branch, Dec. 13, 1914 (HADB, P21/R418)

"I am very grateful to you for sending the Deutsche Bank news bulletin, especially for us from the London branch this is the only way we can hear from all our colleagues who are scattered to the four corners of the earth."

Ernst Raab (Ingolstadt) to Berlin head office, Dec. 18, 1914 (HADB, S608)

"Keeping guard on the coast" -
forces' postcard from 1915





Lieutenant Maternus Mangold from the Frankfurt branch died on May 14, 1915 during an assault in Bois d'Ailly (40 km south of Verdun). He was buried in a cemetery of the neighboring village St. Mihiel. (HADB, P3/M10)

"We soon became all too familiar with the famous 'trenches,' and very quickly went through our baptism of fire – and what a baptism it was. After just two days we were ordered to assemble at 3.30 a.m. in the morning. Then assigned to the trenches, which were about 5 km ahead of us, at some points hardly more than 80 m away from the English trenches. After all the poetic descriptions and images in the 'Woche' newspaper and other Berlin journals had painted a rosy picture of the comforts that awaited us. But the harsh reality was very different indeed. The night-time march through the ravaged, deserted Messines Ridge, with a strong burning smell was enough to make you think very serious thoughts. And now this leap into the trenches. Well, it is far from pleasant. Only recently it rained heavily. The trenches are so blessed with water and sludge that sometimes the mud (there is no more decorous term for it) runs into the top of your boots. Rapidly, the designated lines are occupied so that the teams to be relieved can get out of the firing range before dusk. I had hardly got my group into the shelters and set up an observation post when the gunfire started to rattle out again. [...] It was like that for three days and three nights, then three days of peace and another three days of trenches, and so on. There may be a certain peace and coziness in the trenches at some places on the front. But here every second is deadly serious. We are across from the English – and the battle is conducted both fiercely and ruthlessly. We just had Christmas service in the church, which also presents a true war image. For ecclesiastical matters there is only the space in front of the altar left. The rest of the church proper now serves as a stable. When the hastily formed choir of men from the Territorial Army with a talent for singing began 'Silent Night, Holy Night' it was really quite heart-wrenching."

Kloppe (Warneton/Belgium) to Berlin head office, Dec. 24, 1914 (HADB, S608)



Max Baars (left) from the Hamburg branch in trenches in Flanders in August 1915 (HADB, P21/B9)

"So far I have weathered all the unpleasantness the war brings and hope that I will continue to come through well. The Germans have now been in this position just outside Toul opposite the French for almost five months, and who knows how long things will go on for. This positional warfare is a little trying, you would much prefer to tackle the French in open battles. Our stay here is much relieved by the gifts we receive from home; for example, the Bank takes excellent care of its employees."

Friedrich Hagen (Toul/France) to the Hamburg branch, Feb. 25, 1915 (HADB, P21/H60)

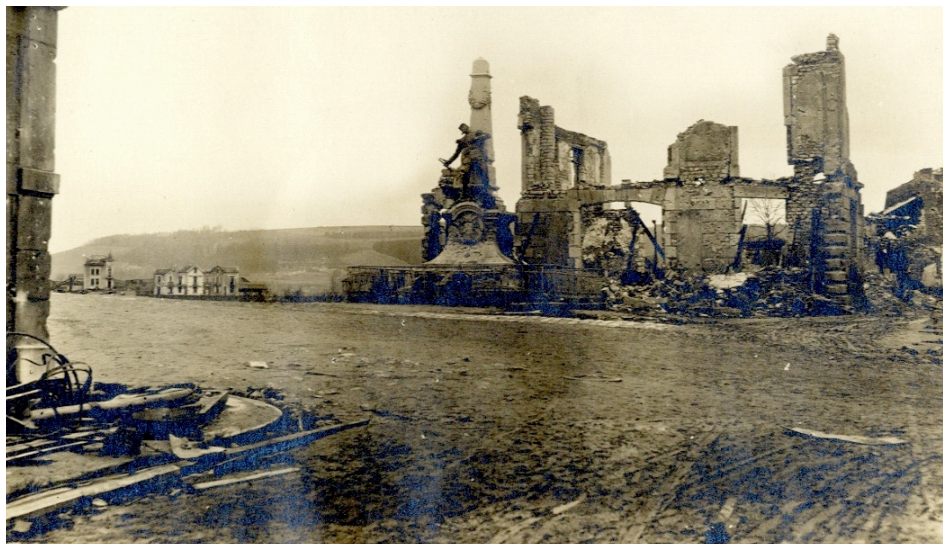
"How long will this war go on? Can you not give me an answer! Every day we take prisoners, but the enemy then deploys new men."

Hermann Stulz (Praszysz/Poland) to Berlin head office, Mar. 24, 1915 (HADB, S608)

"I am back at the front again, in the area of Ypres, [...]. At the moment, things are relatively quiet here, mostly artillery warfare on both sides or the infantry positions coming under artillery fire. For 12 days we are in the front row on active duty & then for 12 days we move back and rest. The flies are a real nuisance now in the pleasant weather and often attract the artillery fire to us. Hopefully, one day the long-awaited offensive will come to the Western front and finally put an end to this monotonous trench warfare."

Hermann Rehm (Ypres/Belgium) to the Hamburg branch, Aug 28, 1915 (HADB, P21/R89)

Destroyed village in Northern France
early 1916 (HADB, P21/S488)



"Last night my big Christmas package arrived from Hamburg. I was ever so pleased and would like to thank Deutsche Bank for its kindness. I have now been away from Hamburg for over 14 months, my work seems so remote, I sometimes think it will never be as wonderful again as it was before the war. On the whole our position is quiet, however, the weather is hard to bear. [...] Hopefully, spring will also bring us peace."

Karl Günther (Baranovich/Belarus) to the Hamburg branch, Jan. 15, 1916, HADB, P21/G318)

"Thank you for your kind news and please forgive me for not writing earlier. As you have perhaps heard from my friend Mr. Taube, I got frostbite on both of my feet in Suwalki & in the Stettin hospital I lost part of several toes. [...] The physical strains, even in winter, are few compared with those in Russia & those in good physical shape are best able to withstand the 'bad air'. The Belgians opposite us often take us by surprise [...] with their attacks. The worst are the mines and gas attacks, but nonetheless our losses are very low. Have been lucky so far and hope, thanks to my good health, to soon experience peace. The present prospects of that happening are looking better than ever."

Bernhard Kastner (West Flanders/Belgium) to the Hamburg branch, June 4, 1916
(HADB, P21/K79)

"For almost two months we were on the Somme and there was never any time at all to write. But you can be sure that I have often remembered the time I spent at Deutsche Bank with fondness. Out here it is not as pleasant. But we will bear it."

Arthur Wulkow (on the Somme/France) to the Hamburg branch, Nov. 22, 1916
(HADB, P21/W522)

"Time and again out here you are reminded that there are people whose hearts beat for the sons of the Deutsche Bank, who have gone to war, and the kindness we experience makes it easier for us to fulfil our task and do our duty. This is the first thanks I am sending; the second will be that after a glorious peace we once again will be as devoted in serving Deutsche Bank as we were before the war. Hopefully, we can celebrate a happy reunion in our home country in the not too distant future."

Fellenberg to Adolf Brackebusch, Berlin head office, Jan. 2, 1917 (HADB, S608)

This letter to the forces from Deutsche Bank dated April 4, 1916 no longer reached Territorial Army Lieutenant Curt Vorberg, who was killed in Verdun five days previously. The letter was returned unopened to the Bank. Vorberg had worked for the Berlin head office since 1908. (HADB, P2/V90)





Hospital in Gengenbach near
Offenburg, April 1917 (HADB, P26/E6)

"We have hardly got a little settled in the trenches when the so welcome parcel arrived from the Bank. I would like to express my grateful thanks for the jam, newspaper and bulletin. What an enormous difference between West and East! Everything is new and interesting for me. It is my first journey to the Russian trenches. While in France you have to march a kilometer through approach trenches to get to the very front position, here in the East you travel in comfort on a sledge to the first trench. The area is very much to my liking; it reminds me of where I come from; large forests, hills and lots of snow. The cold has been very severe recently, down to minus 22 degrees Celsius. Nonetheless, the mood of the men could not be better. Our motto is: 'Roar and charge at them!'"

Johannes Russel (Russia) to the Hamburg branch, Jan. 24, 1917 (HADB, P21/R418)

"We have been at the Arras front since April and I have had to endure some days of real hardship. In the Easter campaigns we were just outside Monchy. Today, we faced tanks for the very first time. They are truly awful things, a foot soldier is completely powerless, and the tanks can only be put out of action by artillery. We have sustained heavy losses because of the tanks, including our Lieutenant Mr. Stolcke, who was first wounded and then run over by a tank [...]. On April 16 we had a peaceful journey to Valenciennes. I was promoted to sergeant here. On May 1 we were deployed at the Arras front again. Now we are between Monchy and Ch  risy, the English have launched various attacks again here, but once again without any success. The trench position so nicely described in the newspapers is nowhere to be seen. We are lying in shell holes and keep the Tommies covered from here. [...] On April 26, having been at the front in the shell holes for 21 days, we were moved back for four days to rest. [...] We have also been promised a longer rest soon, there is talk that our corps is to be moved to Russia to a quieter position, hopefully there is some truth in that. Our wish here on the front is that the war will soon come to an end, as we are all missing home and our familiar offices."

Arthur Sievers (Arras/France) to the Hamburg branch, May 27, 1917 (HADB, P21/S149)

Call by the Frankfurt branch of
Deutsche Bank to draw the eighth
war bond in 1918



"I am sending you a picture of the promotion efforts made for the 6th war bonds in France, in the assumption it might be of interest to you. The promotion work was once again as important as for the last war bond. There was extraordinary diversity in the manner of advertising means. Some methods were tasteful, but some were not very appropriate and quite senseless. Taking into account the number of men in our team, according to the order of the day our regiment has achieved a really good result."

Richard Guthmann (Narocz Lake/Belarus) to Berlin head office, July 14, 1917 (HADB, S608)

"If I am to report how I like conditions here, and how I am personally, then I consider myself lucky to answer both questions with the word 'fine'. Warsaw is a charming girl, whose population (i.e., the propertied classes) after three years of war still know nothing of hardship and troubles. [...]. Some two weeks ago an employee from the Deutsche Bank overseas division, Friedrich Krieg, joined our staff. Knowing him from before, I would have liked to spend my days with him in Warsaw. Sadly, after spending several days here he was sent to another of our offices. [...]. As the news-papers recently reported, in the next few days important

announcements are going to be made by the Germans and Austrians in the question of the Polish constitution. It will depend on the nature of these announcements what field of activity will remain for the German officials in Poland. It is not impossible that our shipping group will get its wings clipped.”
Schwenke (Warsaw/Poland) to Berlin head office, Sept. 8, 1917, (HADB, S608)

“This time our division has to endure a lot – since February we have been in position constantly. Until the end of April we were outside Reims, and are now being deployed here. [...]. We have no fortifications at all, there is no ditch, no barbed wire, just the shell holes covered with strips of canvas to offer some protection against wind and weather and the mostly lively shelling, which serve to mark our position. Contrary to his usual custom, the enemy is also besieging the position with the heaviest of ammunition. The entire rear terrain is under constant attack from enemy fire. Communication with our front line is only possible at night and even then calls for the greatest care. When the weather is fine the enemy air forces are also highly active. You have to admit the English and French pilots have great guts and daring, and the one or other has to pay for his audacity with a crash.

Richard Guthmann (France) to Berlin head office, July 10, 1918 (HADB, S608)

“Today, it is Christmas Eve. The year 1918, which has brought dark hours for the German people, is coming to an end. [...] May the year 1919 bring the gift of peace to the German nation, so that it will be able to rebuild its economic power which has been smashed by the relentless enemy. But I worry about my loved fatherland when I read in the newspapers everything the enemy will demand from an exhausted Germany. 1919 will reveal whether justice of power is sitting in judgment over Germany.”

Paul Herrmann (Bern/Switzerland) an Adolf Brackebusch, Berlin head office, 24.12.1918 (HADB, S608)

War memorial in the Frankfurt branch in 1930

