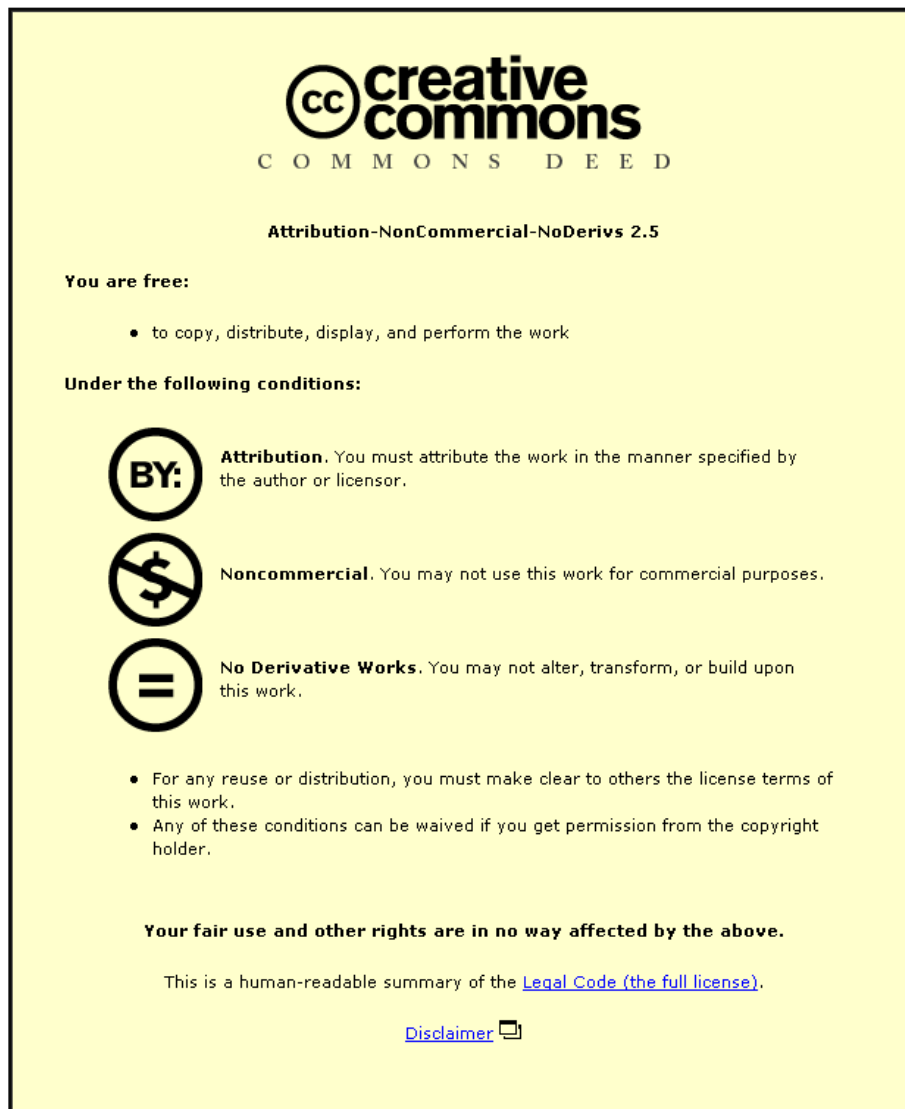




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## **‘A Sense of Heimat Opened up During the War.’ German Soldiers and Heimat Abroad**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at how German soldier saw other countries, their people and their culture from the perspective of their own Heimat during the Second World War. Its main sources are contemporary published magazines and newspapers, including *Heimatbriefe* (letters from home) and *Feldpostbriefe* (letters from the field).<sup>1</sup> Whilst there is a large and sophisticated literature about unpublished soldier letters (also called *Feldpostbriefe*),<sup>2</sup> published letters in *Heimatbriefe* or other magazines, including professional publications such as carpenter magazines and beekeeper magazines, have not attracted much, if any, attention.

*Heimatbriefe* were written and sent out by various organisations (including NSDAP regional organisations such as *Ortsgruppenleitungen* (local branch leadership), *Kreisleitungen* (district leadership) and *Gauleitungen* (Gau leadership), professional organisations, companies, and leisure clubs and organisations) to soldiers who lived in their area, worked for their company, or were members of their particular organisation or club. *Heimatbriefe* were published throughout Germany during the Second World War<sup>3</sup> – some came into being shortly after the invasion of Poland in 1939, others only appeared during the war against the Soviet Union starting in June 1941.<sup>4</sup> Like most publications, the majority ceased to be published in 1943 and 1944 due to increasing restrictions in a war that was going badly. In their own words, *Heimatbriefe* served as bridge between Heimat and Front, and as a notice board through which friends and comrades stayed in touch with each other.<sup>5</sup>

Soldiers sent contributions back to the editors and some of their greetings, stories, poems, drawings, photos, and so forth were published in the *Heimatbriefe*. This is therefore a unique source where Home and Front presented themselves and communicated with each other (one unfortunate feature of *Feldpostbriefe* is their incompleteness as mainly the soldier letters have survived whilst most letters to the Front were lost<sup>6</sup>). Depending on where the *Heimatbriefe* came from, some of the contributions were very personal and contained photocopied signatures underneath good wishes to colleagues who served at the front, photos of children and their names (**Image 6.1**), and photocopies of handwritten children letters to their fathers (**Image 6.2**).<sup>7</sup> In small towns or small- to medium sized companies many people knew each other well, which suggests that some of their content could be fairly genuine, expressing the views and opinions of those who contributed or read the publications, and less manipulated compared to publications with a much larger circulation. We know hardly anything about the production of these publications and have to assume that self-censorship applied. Private letters were subject to official censorship and officials pursued spot checks looking for sensible military information and critical comments about the *Wehrmacht* and government.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it has been argued that those writing letters also pursued an ‘inner’ censorship by considering the reaction of the recipient who one did not want to be anxious and worried.

Ultimately, publications during the war served to keep up the morale and aimed to sustain the German war effort. *Heimatbriefe* are a prime example of this and often reiterated the regimes’ aggressive nationalist and racist world views. The Nazis put much effort into keeping Heimat and Front happy and united in the war effort. Army newspapers painted an idyllic picture of Russia where German soldiers experienced quiet evenings filled with comradeship and ‘talk about wives, girls and children’;<sup>9</sup> tried to create a feeling of togetherness by pointing out that soldiers abroad were looking at the same stars as people at home;<sup>10</sup> and organised public events

at the home front which were attended by soldiers from the front.<sup>11</sup> Much of this was based on the anxiety amongst the regime's leadership not to repeat what happened during the First World War when the experience of the home front was marked by starvation, class divisions and unrest which apparently led to Germany's defeat.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary publications, however, were not uniform and one-dimensional. Nazi ideology and world views consisted of important variations, interpretations and opinions, and various publications had different emphasis and aimed at a diverse readership. There were marked distinctions between the Nazi daily newspaper *National-Zeitung* (Essen), the carpenter journal *Das Tischlergewerk*, and the women's journal *Die Hanseatin* (Hamburg). Similarly, there were differences between *Heimatbriefe* from a NSDAP Gau, such as *Münchener Feldpost*, and *Heimatbriefe* from a company, such as *Hanseaten-Feldpost* from the Hava-Company in Hamburg, or the newspapers of the various military districts in Germany.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, local and regional customs and traditions often featured heavily in these publications which meant that *Heimatbriefe* or army newspapers from Schleswig-Holstein and Eastern Prussia could differ markedly in its content.

This chapter aims to go beyond the well-known fact that the concept of Heimat was used to further the war effort or to create fanatical fighters. The *Hanseaten Feldpost* declared to its employees at the front: 'Only when the enemy is defeated are you allowed back into the homeland'; or the NSDAP district Emscher-Lippe warned its front fighters:

Nobody should doubt the terrible fate awaiting us if the enemies would gain the upper hand over us. ... The German Volk has no other choice than fighting to victory if not everything which makes life worth living should turn into rubble and ash.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, this piece analyses examples where differing experiences and opinions became evident, and highlights the complexities of identities and behavioural motivations. Deep rooted values and myths not only shaped specific perceptions and experiences but were also challenged and questioned by the latter. The chapter focuses on the varied meanings of Heimat, and the way Heimat was used by soldiers to make sense of what they experienced abroad, and to explain their actions during the war.

German soldiers re-constructed Germanness abroad wherever the war took them. Like German colonists in Africa before the First World War they recreated German identities within their units through daily routines and practices.<sup>15</sup> The popular accounts of Germans abroad that had existed since colonial times, in particular the large body of literature about so-called 'islands of Germanness' scattered throughout Eastern Europe, must have made an impact. Years of myth building and fantasies were seamlessly recreated by these soldiers and often mirrored Nazi stereotypes and ideology.<sup>16</sup> However, these men did not build communities over many years or even generations with a view to create a new and permanent Heimat, but stayed abroad for comparatively short periods and were increasingly desperate to return home. Often they did not stay in one place for long. Instead they were often on the move and constructed mobile 'islands of Germanness' wherever they stayed. As conscripted soldiers their experience abroad was largely involuntary, and their experience was intrinsically shaped by the chronology of the war, from arrogant and boastful conqueror, to digging in and barricading, and finally being hunted and chased out themselves. This chapter reflects on these experiences by focusing first on soldiers' strategies of reconnecting with their Heimat; second, it will look at professional interests and hobbies abroad; and finally, it makes a few further points when looking at the chronology of events.

### **Heimat: variety of meanings and how it has been appropriated**

It is impossible to arrive at a generally accepted definition of Heimat because each individual responds with different associations, meanings and emotions when confronted with the term. It is possible, however, to reduce the constitutive factors of Heimat into ‘territory’ and ‘community’, giving it a spatial and social meaning.<sup>17</sup> For some Heimat is the family, friends or colleagues, for others the home, the church, the village, their club or workplace, a region or landscape, a nation, or even heaven – a Catholic Youth publication stated that ‘our Heimat is above the stars’<sup>18</sup>. Publications during the Third Reich mirror these multiple meanings of Heimat and show how the term was appropriated for various purposes. A religious publication put the local church (*Heimatkirche*), a venerable building that had witnessed generations of family history and wars, at the centre of Heimat;<sup>19</sup> a publication for carpenters argued that the essence of Heimat is the home, the seat of the family where everything unfolds and where a sense of communal spirit develops;<sup>20</sup> and a Nazi publication warned that people’s homes, which were supposed to form the nucleus of Heimat and Volk, had degenerated to mere dwellings with ‘dead’ fixtures and fittings which were similar throughout the world.<sup>21</sup> Each publication appropriated the term Heimat for different purposes: the church urged contemporaries to maintain the bond with their local community and projected itself at its centre; the carpenter association used it as a sales-pitch to tell customers how such a home should be furnished; and the Nazis appropriated it for ideological purposes: they demanded a revolution in attitude and claimed that only furniture with German roots, made by German craft and of German wood, could re-establish the purity of family, Volk and Heimat.

The discourse of Heimat is often identified with anti-modernism, racism and Nazism. The Nazis exploited the strong emotional notions attached to Heimat and appropriated ‘varieties of Heimat

imagery' to create 'a powerful integrative metaphor for the nation'.<sup>22</sup> During the Second World War the Nazis contrasted an apparently peaceful and idyllic German Heimat of mothers, children and churches with the barbaric threat of Bolshevism from the East; and Heimat was appropriated to give soldiers a motivation to fight to the bitter end and to foster camaraderie. Gau Mecklenburg tried to boost the morale of its soldiers in spring 1944 by assuring them that whilst they were far away from home they themselves had created a new kind of Heimat based on their presence, customs and habits.<sup>23</sup> During the war a flood of contemporary publications produced texts and visual imagery to bolster the unity and harmony of German society, in particular between soldiers at the front and the civilian population at home. A central role in this was the production of *Heimatbriefe*, magazine-type publications – some only a few pages long and in primitive print, others much longer and far more sophisticated with quality reproduction of photos – that were sent to soldiers. Typical for this genre were proclamations such as 'The Heimat is proud of you' and the image of a picturesque and peaceful region (**Image 6.3**); images symbolising the beauty and tranquillity of Heimat in the form of mountain landscape and traditional buildings, laughing children and happy women, grandmother and granddaughter enjoying each others' company, animals and poetry about the merits of Heimat (**Image 6.4**); or the image of a soldier who was safeguarding a mother sleeping with her babies (**Image 6.5**).

Visual constructions, whether in form of photographs, drawings, cartoons, posters, or the replication of handwriting, occupied a crucial part in the *Heimatbriefe*. These images were accessible and emotionally powerful, and circulated in a society that had become extremely fond of photo-magazines and films. Of course the Nazis were keen users of visual propaganda as they thought that images, unlike text, had an immediate and lasting impact on humans and were often uncritically received.<sup>24</sup> Whilst there is no space to analyse in detail the function, impact and reception of these visual sources, it seems indispensable that this piece presents images that are

relevant to various topics discussed here. They serve to highlight certain points but, more importantly, they add an integral visual dimension to the analysis.

Heimat was endlessly celebrated and re-created during the Second World War. On the Western Front beekeepers evacuated their bees and beehives at the start of fighting action and rejoiced on their return: 'Our bees are coming home';<sup>25</sup> in late 1939 the *Feldpost* (literal translation: Mail from the Front) from Würzburg asked its soldiers to decorate their bunkers with pictures from their hometown and expressed the hope that this would also encourage other soldiers to visit the town after the war;<sup>26</sup> in the final phase of the war the NSDAP district Emscher Lippe sent a *Heimatbrief* with a picture competition to soldiers from its region fighting on the Eastern Front. The aim was to ascertain 'Who knows his Homeland?' The *Heimatbrief* claimed: 'The further a human has to be apart from his home, the stronger is the luminosity of the Heimat in the memory'.<sup>27</sup>

Heimat captures something very familiar and has strong emotional connotations. It is the opposite of the unknown; it responds to the basic desire of modern humans for certainty, safety and security in one familiar place;<sup>28</sup> and with particular relevance for this chapter, Heimat seems to contrast sharply with space abroad that appeared unfamiliar, alien and threatening. Heimat, identity and the past seem inseparably intertwined, and for many people Heimat is always present. Indeed, the way in which one confronts and deals with a new situation and how one reacts to new places seems to be connected to Heimat. Leaving one's Heimat leads to a physical separation whilst mental and spiritual connections, such as thoughts, love and longing, remain and often even grow. It is thus normal to compare the new, whether this is a landscape, a town, local people or local customs, with the familiar Heimat. Humans automatically look for similarities with and differences from what they know and are used to. And because Heimat is



not static but extremely mobile, soldiers took many aspects of their Heimat along. Whether this was in thoughts, by sending and receiving letters, by taking along photos and memorabilia, by reading newspapers and magazines from their Heimat, or by comparing their Heimat with what they saw and encountered. Committed Catholics or Protestants, whilst serving in the army abroad, were looking for churches of their denomination to pray or to attend Sunday service and in this particular environment, so they wrote, experienced moments of peace and familiarity.<sup>29</sup>

### **Scholarship and knowledge about Germans and Heimat abroad**

There is a sophisticated literature about Germans and Heimat abroad. It is essential to recap some of its key findings to help understand and analyse the relationship between German soldiers abroad and Heimat during the Second World War:

First, ‘communities of German speakers, scattered around the globe, have long believed that they could recreate their *Heimat* (homeland) wherever they moved and that their enclaves could remain truly German’.<sup>30</sup> Daniel Joseph Walter concluded in his study about Germans in Namibia:

The central feature of the settler culture was its renunciation and repression of any substantive adaption to the host environment, its avoidance of contact and interchange with the indigenous population. It was characterized above all by the effort to isolate and institutionalize white settlement within a rigid set of physical, linguistic, social, economic and political boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

Second, various groups of ethnic Germans who lived outside the German nation state were idealized by German nationalists ‘as essentialized examples of German ethnic character.’<sup>32</sup> This

view was romanticised and popularised in narratives on German colonialism, and then, after the First World War, in accounts about Germans who lived in so-called ‘islands of Germanness’ (*Sprachinseln*) in Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup> Of course this idealization was a myth. When millions of ethnic Germans came under German control during the Second World War officials on the ground realised that it was often difficult or even impossible to draw clear ethnic lines between Germans and non-Germans.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, whilst official publications celebrated the return of ethnic Germans into the territory of the Reich, secret reports documented the bitter divisions between different ethnic German groups and the tensions unleashed by resettlement.<sup>35</sup>

Third, Germans at home and abroad influenced each other. We know that ‘overseas Germans’ visions of themselves and their homeland influenced those of the metropole, where, in turn, they not only fed the national illusion of self but sometimes even reciprocated by idealizing displaced populations.’<sup>36</sup> There were intense discussions and negotiations between ethnic Germans abroad and at home about ‘the meaning of German identity through the lens of Heimat.’<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, research suggests that the development and nature of German identity is less dependent ‘on the nation-state’ but that it seems more useful to ‘trace the competing racial and cultural criteria delimiting “Germanness” within a web of many strains of nationalism in German history’. To put it differently, the tenor of German national identity is ‘complex, dynamic, and ever-changing’. ‘Gender, locality, particular interest groups, successive German nation-states, and social classes [played important roles] in enshrining and preserving the competing and overlapping versions of German identity.’<sup>38</sup>

Finally, ‘the persistent basis for the maintenance of German identity over time [can be found] in illusory symbolic constants that created bonds between private citizens: common landscape,

home [domesticity], and high culture (*Bildung*).<sup>39</sup> Popularised myths claimed that Germans abroad were simply superior to non-Germans, whether this was in agricultural practices or crafts, the design and layout of villages and fields, or industriousness and technological sophistication; or whether Germans lived in cleaner and more orderly houses. Apparently Germans were simply more dedicated, more hard-working and more orderly than their non-German counterparts.<sup>40</sup>

During the Second World War many Germans, especially soldiers, but also women working in the occupied territories, were away from their Heimat for very long periods and travelled enormous distances. Around 17 million German soldiers and 2 million women who served as military auxiliaries were constantly on the move. This was an unprecedented experience for most men and women who had previously probably travelled little or had not been away from home a lot, certainly not abroad. Many soldiers felt a need to share these new experiences with others. One soldier wrote back to his workplace in Hamburg in spring 1941 that he had been in seven different European countries and had so much to talk about; another soldier pointed out to his work colleagues in Leipzig in summer 1942 that he was 3500 km away by air from them.<sup>41</sup> Many soldiers sent back pictures, including a staged and ‘funny’ conquest of Greenland, and signs displaying the enormous distance to Berlin, Vienna and other cities from their location.<sup>42</sup> In an attempt to respond to the need of soldiers and maybe also for genuine reasons of curiosity the north German district of Plön asked soldiers from its region to send in reports of ‘what you saw and experienced, about countries, customs and traditions’ so that this could be collated in newly created village books (*Dorfbücher*).<sup>43</sup>

### **Strategies of reconnecting with Heimat: recreating Germany and German standards**

During the Second World War soldiers developed various strategies to cope being away from their Heimat and staying in often very unfamiliar places. Like Germans who had emigrated to

North America and showed ‘a special affinity for their landscape of origin’ – in particular, they yearned for woods and oak trees<sup>44</sup> – many soldiers rejoiced if the local landscape bore similarities to the landscape at home back in Germany. Landscape, architecture and street planning played an important role in the *Heimatbriefe*. A captain from the town of Lahr in the Black Forest built a camp in a forest with his company and named it ‘Schwarzwaldlager Hohengeroldseck’ with streets called ‘Lahrer Street’ (*Lahrer Straße*) and ‘Rhine Street’ (*Rheinstraße*), and a bunker called ‘To the Lahrer Hut’ (*Zur Lahrer Hütte*).<sup>45</sup> To his disappointment they had to leave this ‘pretty forest camp’ soon thereafter and build a new camp in open terrain. He named this ‘Riedlager’ and promised readers of the Lahrer *Heimatbriefe* to rejuvenate names of streets and places from his home town. Landscape, however, could also be used to express resentments and to contrast the unfamiliar new with the familiar home. One soldier compared the ‘stony and filthy’ Black Sea with his beloved North Sea which he praised as a ‘lush, youthful and spick and span gift from heaven’.<sup>46</sup>

Nazi propaganda justified German expansion in the East with a mission to civilize and to introduce cleanliness and order to an apparently underdeveloped and chaotic area.<sup>47</sup> This was far from a Nazi invention. Europeans had a long history of using cleanliness and domesticity to define their racial identity and to justify their hegemony as colonial power. Arguably, this had assumed a particular significance in Germany where bourgeois values of painstaking cleanliness and order had become strong markers ‘of ethnic identity abroad and a reminder of the homeland’.<sup>48</sup> By the same token, dirt and disorder had become associated with un-Germanness. Not surprisingly then, German army newspapers published numerous articles exploiting these myths, including the story that soldiers from Swabia cleaned up the ‘senseless destruction’ and mess of the French to establish ‘a house with German cleanliness’; or that soldiers from Schleswig-Holstein apparently showed astonished Russian women how to dust and clean

windows.<sup>49</sup> The discourse about cleanliness and order also played an important part in *Heimatbriefe*, particularly from companies. An employee of Gasolin Leipzig boasted in a letter to colleagues back home how he had taught Russians how to work properly.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, one employee from a Hamburg company described the apparent filthy state of French homes and called them ‘pigsties’.<sup>51</sup> One of his colleague sent in a short poem that contrasted filthy Russia with German efficiency and humour:

In the Russian dwelling  
The most important thing is: delousing!  
Thus lives the private bright and joyful  
With louse, mice and a flea  
In god-praised land of the Russian,  
That did not get German applause.<sup>52</sup>

Maintaining good standards of hygiene seemed essential for recreating a German Heimat abroad as it symbolised the essence of a shared national character. Practising it abroad maintained the bond with the Home Front and served as a key justification for the subjugation of non-Germans.<sup>53</sup> Unlike previous discourses about German settlements in Eastern Europe or Africa, or contemporary descriptions about energetic Reich German women who made Poland ‘spotlessly German’ with their focus on ‘the tidy home and garden and the „freshly cleaned window-panes“’,<sup>54</sup> the gender roles seemed to have become more fluid: German men, and not women, were now in charge of domesticity and they proudly send back photos showing them washing their clothes, pursuing personal hygiene, practising order and discipline even in remote areas (**Images 6.6 & 6.7**), making Jews stand to attention with spades, and making Jews work (which

was apparently a new experience for many of them) and learn German organisational skills (**Image 6.8 and 6.9**).<sup>55</sup>

In times of increasing doubts, uncertainties and contradictions the apparent stability of ‘Germanness’, of which cleanliness and domesticity played a central part, seemed to provide a rock, a normality, German soldiers could cling on to. Michaela Kipp recently argued that ‘this mission of the German soldier – to clean up the country and to put things in order – was understood on a concrete level as building roads and cleaning streets, but also transferred to a higher level of hygienic elimination of “infectious,” socially “poisonous” and “parasitic” Jews.’<sup>56</sup>

Other research has shown that comments by soldiers about hygienic standards abroad during the Second World War were far more negative, extreme and aggressive compared to similar descriptions from the First World War. Furthermore, rather than describing general conditions such as buildings and places, during the Second World War they were also used to describe humans.<sup>57</sup>

Soldiers often presented their bunker symbolically as the ‘parlour’ (*‘gute Stube’*) of a typical German home (**Image 6.10**). The cleanliness and order, but also comradeship and humour in the bunker contrasted sharply with the outside world which was alien, chaotic and dirty. One soldier even boasted about the modernity of his bunker: ‘We even have electric light’ and a radio (*Volksempfänger*). Thus they were ‘no longer dependent on the lice-ridden and filthy houses’.<sup>58</sup> It was common that soldiers named their bunker after German pubs, probably after their favourite local bars at home, or they chose names that suggested an aura of manliness and adventure, such as the bunker *‘Zum wilden Mann’* (literal translation: ‘To the Wild Man’).<sup>59</sup> The increasing focus on bunkers had other reasons too. As the war progressed the sense of adventure

and the excitement to see new places wore off, and as Germany's offensive war got unstuck stories about life inside the bunker came to prominence. The bunker served as protection from the dangerous outside world. Soldiers appear cut off and barricaded from the world around them and compensated their isolation with recreating a sense of Heimat in the bunker. Indeed, the bunker turned into a cosy and safe oasis in the middle of enemy territory (somewhat similarly, some Reich German women described their work in Poland as an 'island of happiness in the midst of the harsh, pitiless war'<sup>60</sup>). One soldier letter was headed 'The Romantic Bunker Life' (*Die Romantik des Bunker-Lebens*), and one *Heimatbriefe* even ran a humorous series called 'Bunker Fibbing' (*Bunker-Geflunker*).<sup>61</sup> However, the sense of safety was fragile and always limited in time as the enemy could attack at any moment:

Our thoughts drifted like in a dream to the Heimat ... All of a sudden the machine gun next to our bunker roared harshly through the night and woke us up. Suddenly our thoughts were in the reality.<sup>62</sup>

Bunker stories focused on the relationship between comrades who shared the bunker experience, and animals soldiers encountered in the bunker. There is a sense that soldiers had more compassion for certain animals such as mice, which they found sweet and worked out a way of living side-by-side with them, than for enemy soldiers they were fighting in the war.<sup>63</sup>

The smell, the sound, the daily routine, and much more helped to reconstruct a Heimat abroad. Whether this was the familiar sound of a Blackforest Clock in a French home,<sup>64</sup> a game of '*Mensch, ärgre Dich nicht*' (literal translation: 'Do not get angry, man');<sup>65</sup> staying in touch with news about local sport or sport friends back home;<sup>66</sup> the pursuit of one's trained professional expertise in the army that reminded soldiers of their job at home;<sup>67</sup> or visiting book exhibitions

and checking how one's own publishing company was represented.<sup>68</sup> German Heimats were recreated everywhere outside Germany during the Second World War. A Lance Corporal from Lahr boasted: 'Even people from Pomerania and Eastern Prussia like to read the *Heimatbrief* from Lahr, including Hans Bauer's poems about Lahr.'<sup>69</sup>

During the Second World War German soldiers probably learned more about the Heimat of other Germans than during any other time before: they saw pictures, read publications and heard stories in various dialects from up-and-down the country in a thriving communication exchange between front and Heimat and within the front itself. This created a powerful momentum because Heimat glued together individual emotions with national aspirations: emotionally charged positive memories and objects of fantasies about one's own village, region or people, and Heimat as synonym for 'Germany' or the 'Fatherland' standing for a large-scale political unit and becoming part of a collective memory and fantasy.<sup>70</sup> In this context Heimat became a central integrative phenomenon where an apparent peaceful and idyllic notion merged with the aggressive ambitions of a nation. In the process, loyalty became paramount and Heimat became a legitimation for war.

### **Comparing the new with the known: professional interests and hobbies abroad**

Modern human beings are marked by their professions and hobbies. This influences the way in which they perceive and assess the rest of the world and their place in it. Contemporary publications suggest that German soldiers were no exception to this. When German men were conscripted to the army at the outbreak of war, for many carpenters it was the most natural thing to stay in touch with their association at home, to continue reading their professional carpenter magazine, and to show an interest in the construction of homes and their interior abroad. At the same time most of these soldiers must have been exposed to widespread prejudices and



stereotypes prior to the war comparing German ‘superior’ homes with ‘inferior’ non-German dwellings, like German colonialists had once described African homes as ‘huts’, ‘hovels’, or ‘molehills’ without proper doors or ventilation.<sup>71</sup>

In 1941 a master craftsman from Essen wrote to his carpenter magazine and echoed typical reports that had appeared during the invasion of the Soviet Union that Russian farms, compared to quality German craftsmanship, were huts of squalor (*Elendshütten*). This was backed up with a rough pencil drawing of a primitive farm house (**Image 6.11**).<sup>72</sup> A description by another German carpenter, Lance Corporal Karl Sperling, that included a detailed drawing of a Russian farm house with ground plan and view of the house from three different perspectives (**Image 6.12**) was far more elaborate and, whilst containing the usual stereotypes, offered more differentiated views. Sperling wrote:

If one considers the tools and means with which it [the farmhouse] is built, it remains at any rate a considerable achievement. It is mostly built by the farmer himself, as there are not many craftsmen as we know them. ... Proper furniture cannot be found. ... Icons are decorated with narrow linen and often with rather pretty cross-stitch embroidery; otherwise I fail to find folklorist art. The people here are poor in every respect. With a few exceptions the dwellings are completely dirty and neglected. A progressive human could live decently with little effort in the same rooms.<sup>73</sup>

The description ended with the conclusion: ‘How pretty it is at home, at home in Germany!’ When another carpenter, Lance Corporal Walter Henz, dared to mention something positive about Russian craftsmanship – ‘Once I had the opportunity to look at one of the Czar’s castles, and this was the first time that I was able to say that skilful masters had worked here.’ – the

editors felt obliged to add in brackets: 'It is questionable whether these were Russians. The editors.'<sup>74</sup>

One group of people who were particularly interested in learning more about their hobby abroad whilst being increasingly concerned about the deteriorating conditions for their own bee colonies at home were beekeepers.<sup>75</sup> Beekeepers are a close-knit community who cultivate strong bonds with their bees and anything to do with it. An important explanation for this seems to be that beekeeping is complex, requires a lot of devotion, and comparatively few people do it. Whilst beekeepers had strong local and regional bonds, they belonged to regional organisations that published monthly magazines, they regarded themselves as part of a bigger, national and international community. After all, beekeeping has a very long global history with varied customs and traditions, and it was affected by ongoing scientific developments. In other words, there was always more to learn and interesting discussions to be had.

Beekeeper magazines served the Nazi regime and used bees and bee colonies (German: *Bienenvolk*) as examples for humans by praising qualities such as 'performance through community', by putting forward slogans such as 'you are nothing, your Volk is everything', and by commending virtues such as diligence, cleanliness, the willingness to sacrifice, and to do ones duty.<sup>76</sup> During the war beekeepers stayed in close touch with their local and regional beekeeper friends and associations at home. At the heart of this stood the regional beekeeper magazines that contained scientific articles, organisational news, beekeeper stories, poetry, and so forth. It seemed natural then that beekeepers expressed their deepest sympathies for their 'beekeeper comrades' in the Saar-Palatine whose bees and beehives suffered during the invasion of France in 1940, or for beekeepers in Lübeck who were hit by the bombing of their town two years later.<sup>77</sup>

German beekeeper magazines contain numerous letters from soldiers expressing their longing to be back with their bees at their beehives at home.<sup>78</sup> Soldiers also sent back reports about different beekeeping customs and practices in France, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and elsewhere. Lance Corporal Hugo Schwartz from Rehhorst near Lübeck explained to his fellow beekeepers that beekeepers in the Soviet Union put their bee colonies in the cellar for hibernation for seven months. Whilst he expressed doubts about this practice he admitted that the bee colonies had come out very well and had then produced a lot of honey.<sup>79</sup> German beekeeper magazines became a place where beekeeping practices abroad were discussed and compared with those at home. These men were constantly on the look-out for beehives and referred to many conversations with local beekeepers. Most of these descriptions do not differ in tone from other contemporary publications. They are extremely derogatory, racist, express colonialist ambitions, and some even openly mention plunder, beatings and killing. It is noteworthy, however, that some of these reports are more differentiated and also contain positive descriptions and even admiration for local customs. We want to focus on these.

It is not clear what impact a shared love for bees and contact with local beekeepers in Nazi occupied territory made for German soldiers on a personal level. There are few indications for a ‘special’ empathy with foreign beekeepers. However, there are some examples that suggest that the encounter of German and non-German beekeepers led to some friendly exchanges that might not have happened otherwise. E. Schalmann took several photos of beehives in Poland and contrasted what he described as ‘pretty’ and ‘messy’ examples. He was so smitten by one group of beehives that he returned several times:

I was able to visit these beehives a few times and to talk to its owner. The beautiful

colouring of the hives, in short, everything made a lovely impression, and I will certainly keep these beehives in my memory.

Picture 3 shows a group of messy beehives. The owner of the hives was in German captivity and when we entered the area of the beehives the wife looked very anxious. When I explained to her that we only wanted to look at the beehives and to take a picture, and that I myself was a beekeeper, her face lit up after all. We then talked for a longer time, indeed others joined, even the beekeeper from beehives 2 because they lived in the same village, and it was nearly as if we had a little village group meeting.<sup>80</sup>

In another article, Schalmann listed many negatives about beekeeping in Poland, including lack of training, expertise, organisation and tools (for instance, he lamented the lack of sophisticated honey extractors). However, he also emphasised positive experiences, including beautiful mobile beehives in a forest with seventeen bee colonies: ‘The beehive was alright, wasn’t it! In Germany I have often seen beehives that did not even come close to this hive.’<sup>81</sup> Schalmann mentioned other ‘pretty’ and ‘well-kept’ beehives, including those of a Catholic priest and a carpenter in the village of Lipniki in south-western Poland. To his amazement they had an average yield of 37 pound of honey (he investigated this further and came to the conclusion that this was due to the nearby heather and lime trees). Finally, he praised Polish smokers as ‘indestructible’ and took one home as a souvenir.

One Sergeant Ernst Muhlack apparently inspected more than one hundred different beehives in Poland. In one area he found large numbers of bee colonies – apparently far too many for a good yield in honey. He was puzzled about this and wrote:

I asked myself why these people keep so many bees that after all yield so little. At the

beginning of November this question was answered when I observed a bee colony whilst it romped about in the sun. The owner had quietly stepped to my side and observed with glowing eyes his bees. I read from his eyes the love for bees and from his words, which were incomprehensible to me, the enthusiasm for beekeeping. All the signs were that interest and love towards the bees existed in great abundance. It was also noticeable that the [beekeeper; CCWS] organisation covered all the land we had come through up to the jungle of Heynowka [Hajnówka; CCWS].<sup>82</sup>

At the end of his report he remarked that all his observations and experiences concerning beekeeping in Poland have made him nearly forget his own bees at home. Finally, Hugo Schwartz wrote a second article and reported back positively about beekeeping in the Soviet Union:

Contrary to our expectations of Soviet conditions there were good beehives. Whilst they were not nearly as good as those in our home, overall they are not bad at all.<sup>83</sup>

Schwartz then described rather enviously beehives that were part of a collective:

I have had a close look at such a collective farm. It consisted of 70 bee colonies ... Honeycombs and bee colonies were, however, very good, and there was also plenty of honey ... The *Trachtfelder* [natural food for bees; CCWS] were very good here. Broad fields were filled with buckwheat, cornflowers and blueweed, and in addition there were endless forests and plains. If we had these kind of honeysources we would also have full honey pots! The weather is also favourable, there is hardly any rain. Instead, there is a lot of thaw during the nights. The days are hot and long ...

Finally, his enthusiasm for beekeeping seemed to spread within his company:

Some comrades showed a lot of interest in beekeeping. I have shown and explained a lot to them already. During the advance I used examples from bee dwellings and bee colonies in the Soviet Union. Now, as we experience a quiet spell, we have an educational evening once a week. Some of the comrades have already bees whilst others want to become beekeepers after the war.

### **From self-glorification to stress and alienation**

The content of all publications was shaped by the chronology of the war. The first phase of the war was marked by reports from soldiers expressing excitement and triumphalism. Letters, particularly those coming from France, read like pleasant tourist travel accounts or adventure stories.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile photos show German soldiers enjoying themselves amongst comrades in the sun. The war in the East started in the same fashion (**Images 6.13**) but increasingly led to a darker tone. It became part and parcel for German soldiers to boast about the devastating physical and human destruction caused by the mighty *Wehrmacht*. The following description by a soldier about the invasion of Poland was published in the *Heimatbriefe* from a company in Hamburg and was not untypical:

The houses surrounded, searched, and of course nobody was found. Instead, everything went up in flames. We have come through villages and towns in smoking ruins. The towns of Rozan und Brok were, for example, totally burned down. In Siedlice whole streets were completely burned down. We have lived well. For breakfast already roasted duck, goose or turkey on the spit! Meat and poultry in abundance. The things and the

livestock were still there, only the inhabitants were gone. Pigs were running around that it was a joy. All kinds of, large and small. We only had to help ourselves ... cold goose leg for breakfast is not bad at all! We are busy hunting the Poles ... Lying around were pony carts, field kitchens, in-between dead 'Polski' [derogatory word for Pole; CCWS], dead horses, in short, the sweet smell of oven ... In any case, this was the real life, always on the move and something new every day; what one needed here one threw away there because there was enough at the next place again ... We then crossed the Narew and also the Bug. I have never dreamed that I would once experience this in my life.<sup>85</sup>

The war disrupted the daily routine, tore apart personal relationships through spatial separation, brought physical and mental strains, and questioned all certainties.<sup>86</sup> During these exceptional circumstances it was crucial for the inner stability of soldiers to maintain personal relationships and to communicate their feelings. Scholars have argued that *Feldpostbriefe*, in particular those sent to family and loved ones at home which often contained intimate communication, served to confirm and stabilise the identity of soldiers, and helped soldiers to make sense of their participation in war and to explain it to others. Part of this entailed a longing for normality beyond the war – in the private sphere. Soldiers seemed to realise that dwelling on homesickness did not help their situation but that they needed to be positive. A crucial way of building up strength was to focus on positive visions about the future. When writing about their personal hopes and visions, soldiers largely focused on aspects that were central to their identity in civil life: their professional life, but in particular their role as husband and lover.

Soldier letters, stories, poems, drawings, and photographs discussed in this piece were aimed at publication to be read by relatives, friends, work colleagues, team mates, acquaintances or even people unknown to the authors. Whilst their central motivation was similar to private letters,

their content differed partially and their audience was completely different as it was anything but private (maybe this could be compared to the form of communication practiced in today's social networks, blogs, etc.). *Heimatbriefe* did not contain intimate personal details, nor did they vent annoyance or criticism at the behaviour of superiors, measures of the military or political leadership, or newspaper reports; nor did they articulate a condemnation of the war.<sup>87</sup> They often aimed at public admiration and sympathy, and, as highlighted in this piece, frequently communicated with colleagues or friends soldiers knew from work or shared a hobby with. Comradeship (*Kameradschaft*), so important in explaining how German soldiers coped with such a brutal war and why they fought until the bitter end,<sup>88</sup> of course went beyond the immediate army unit and was ultimately rooted in pre-war relationships. Considering the importance of these networks outside family circles and army units it is surprising how little we know about this from this period. To many German soldiers this might have been equally or even more important than private communication with family or loved ones. We do know that private views and values of German soldiers and civilians, such as apparently harmless bourgeois values of order and cleanliness, were crucial in determining peoples' attitudes and behaviours. These shared views were at least as important for the cohesiveness of German society during the war than the great themes of *Führer*, Volk and Fatherland.<sup>89</sup>

Whilst many writers of private *Feldpostbriefe* felt under certain pressure to be positive in an effort not to alarm the recipient, published letters and reports seem driven by the need to appear up-beat and successful. Soldiers wanted to appear tough and smart, were keen on telling funny or heroic stories, and were seeking military promotion and military honours. The factor gender seems crucial here as many accounts centre on manliness and comradeship. The publication of soldier letters, poetry and images seemed to give men space for self-promotion. This construction and celebration of manliness and the ideal of 'martial masculinity' seem to have



helped ‘to de-humanise the person’s the soldiers were supposed to fight against’.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, as Thomas Kühne argued, it was precisely the ‘human’ side of camaraderie that made the ‘inhuman’ side of the war bearable, and indeed the group moral acted as a motor of violence.<sup>91</sup> Research has shown that it is not difficult to find crimes against Jews in private soldier letters.<sup>92</sup> The same can be said about letters in *Heimatbriefe* that also contain description of atrocities albeit usually not as detailed and vivid as in private letters (so much about the long-held myth that there was little knowledge in Germany about mass murder committed during the war). However, boasting to the Heimat was more than self-glorification and also functioned as a way of coping with stress. Published letters seemed an attractive way of creating a counter world to the *real* war that was going on. They helped to compensate for a surrounding that was alien and that was marked by threats, physical and psychological strains and the loss of personal freedom.<sup>93</sup>

From late 1941 onwards, when the war started to turn against Germany, *Heimatbriefe* became dominated by topics we associate with the female – Heimat, mothers and children – and appeals to hold out in the face of a barbaric bolshevist enemy. Hitler (or the so-called Hitler-Myth) and the Nazi Party played a rapidly diminishing role, in fact at times literally disappeared from these publications. Soldier letters now contained underlying anxieties. Aryan racial unity and superiority, whether exemplified through exclusive standards of cleanliness, physical build or mental strength and fighting spirit, were frequently contradicted by stories on the ground. Whilst Polish or Russian civilians were normally described in derogatory language, the same was not true for their soldiers. German soldiers commented about the ‘incredibly courageous and dashing’ Polish soldiers and ‘damned tough’ Siberian sharpshooters;<sup>94</sup> one soldier remarked that Germans, after failing to cut their hair and to shave for three months, looked the same as the ‘local inhabitants’ (*Ureinwohner*);<sup>95</sup> and another soldier ended his description of a swimming

party with Hungarians, Rumanians and Italians in the river Bug [Ukraine] with the observation: 'everyone looks the same naked'.<sup>96</sup>

To be true, most published reports from soldiers contained stereotypes and racist language. There is no doubt that many German men had already either internalised many aspects of Nazi ideology before going to war, or their prejudices and stereotypes about other ethnic groups coincided with Nazi racial world views. Past research argued that the view amongst soldiers remained overtly influenced by Nazi stereotypes of Russian 'sub-humans', or, indeed, that there was a convergence of personal experience with Nazi world views (all of which led to a dynamic process of de-inhibition and de-humanisation and helped to explain the indifference towards violence against the 'other').<sup>97</sup> One might argue, however, that the views of some soldiers were more complex. Over time some soldiers tried to make sense of their experiences during the war on their own terms by reflecting on their personal experiences on the ground.<sup>98</sup> Published reports contained examples where soldiers openly admired local buildings, customs and other things.<sup>99</sup> This included openly acknowledging positive attributes amongst non-Germans, including Poles and Russians, and on rare occasions even praising their achievements on par as those by Germans. Soldiers made an effort to visit the former house of Fyodor Dostoyevsky;<sup>100</sup> seemed aghast at the total destruction of 'massive buildings, villas and excellent residential buildings';<sup>101</sup> sent in romantic drawing of farm houses in Russia;<sup>102</sup> and stated that houses in the Ukraine looked like their counterparts in Pomerania or Mecklenburg.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the largely traditional and anti-modern layout and content of the *Heimatbriefe* and other publications sat uneasy with the stereotyping of a backward (and anti-modern) East.

The longer the war lasted the more signs of stress amongst soldiers and a growing schism between Front and Heimat became evident. The *Heimatbriefe* from a company in Leipzig serve

to highlight this. In June 1942 one soldier complained that whilst they experienced ‘true hell’ at the front apparently officers back in the Heimat enjoyed sparkling wine.<sup>104</sup> Two months later an editorial apologized that the Heimat did not always know how to react towards what is going on at the front;<sup>105</sup> and in September various soldier letters were printed explicitly emphasising that ‘violence is never used during interrogations’ and insisting: ‘Bolshevist prisoners are well looked after by us. Food is good and plenty.’<sup>106</sup> An unbridgeable gulf had opened up between Front and Heimat. In one edition of the *Heimatbriefe* from a Hamburg company soldiers wrote in early 1942 that ‘reality was much, much worse than reports and *Wochenschau* can depict’. One soldier described the vastness of the land, the ‘burning houses and towns’, and ended on a surreal note:

Somewhere in infinite distance lies Germany. Nearly inaccessible, like in another world. The hope of an early reunion remains. One day the time for a return must come after all, and our thoughts are constantly fixed on this time.<sup>107</sup>

Whilst the Nazis asked Germans to be tough and to think in racial terms, and *not* to show softness (*Gefühlsduselei*), humanitarianism or Christian brotherly love,<sup>108</sup> soldier letters increasingly expressed anxieties and doubts, as one put it:

I am happy to admit that one has a little more inhibitions and anxieties than 25 years ago. Father and mother were alive then. Now, however, it is the family, wife and children! I have also seen that the war, next to injury and death, also brings much misery, hunger and pain.<sup>109</sup>

Claims amongst soldiers of incredible toughness, including an ability to survive in swamps infested with mosquitos or hardly requiring any sleep,<sup>110</sup> were suddenly rare and contrasted with rather different stories. In late 1940 one soldier expressed a desire to return to his traditional work at home and to experience peace in Germany and Europe;<sup>111</sup> in the second half of 1942 soldiers admitted that they suffered from nervous tensions due to constant detonations and the stresses of war;<sup>112</sup> and in 1943 one soldier was taken aback by the long treks of (presumably German) refugees: ‘Again and again I had to think of my family and I was grateful that they did not have to go through this.’<sup>113</sup> In short, everyone could read that German soldiers were not emotionless fighting machines who did not fear death and who submitted themselves and their families unconditionally to the well-being of the German fatherland.<sup>114</sup>

Whilst the *Heimatbriefe* increasingly pushed the notion of an idyllic, safe and innocent Heimat that needed defending,<sup>115</sup> it became clear that these claims were a farce. Messages for Christmas such as ‘Next Christmas we will be home’ led to repeated disappointment; bombing led to widespread destruction of the Heimat, especially towns, where children were sent into rural areas. These developments sparked off specific regional responses. In northern Germany that was exposed to some of the heaviest bombing raids, *Heimatbriefe* quickly switched their usual coverage about buildings (which had been destroyed) to stories of recreation and past wars and struggles in which enemies were defeated and obstacles were overcome.<sup>116</sup> Nazi officials complained in mid-1943 that Germans in the Catholic Weser-Ems region liked to employ French and Polish Catholic workers and then treated them ‘lovingly’.<sup>117</sup> Finally, the Gau leadership of the Lower Danube reported in October 1944 that whilst citizens of Neukirchen were desperate to keep the camp with Hungarian Jews as they felt that this would protect them against air raids, inhabitants of a small and remote village feared that the presence of a small SS unit would make them a target for bombing attacks.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile soldiers started to boast about their adventures

with women abroad ('fantastic ... seductively pretty' French women<sup>119</sup>), and reports about 'whoring and boozing troops' spread within Germany.<sup>120</sup> By now only die-hard Nazi publications such as the *Heimatbrief* from the NSDAP district Emscher-Lippe were maintaining the claim that Germany, of all nations, was the least destructive but most creative power which was driven by the power of goodness (**Image 6.14**).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These publications had various names but can be regarded as belonging to one genre.

Henceforth I will refer to them as *Heimatbriefe* whilst I refer to private unpublished letters as *Feldpostbriefe*. For an illuminating study of Reich German women in the East see Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East. Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (London, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Excellent introductions are Katrin A. Kilian, 'Kriegsstimmungen. Emotionen einfacher Soldaten in Feldpostbriefen', in Jörg Echternkamp, *Die Deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945. Zweiter Halbband. Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzungen* (Munich, 2005), 251-88; Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945* (Paderborn, 1998). For a comprehensive overview see <<http://www.feldpost-archiv.de/>>. Recently also see Veit Didczuneit et al. (eds.), *Schreiben im Krieg. Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Essen, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Apparently these publications did not exist during the First World War. See *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 14, 1. November 1940, 17; *Heimatbrief der Stadt Lahr, Schwarzwald*, Nr. 2, July 1943, 2f. Anne Lipp emphasised the prominent role of German army battle magazines during the First World War and argued that its bourgeois-militaristic discourse was the only public linguistic and

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visual form to communicate the experience of soldiers. See Anne Lipp, *Meinungslenkung im Krieg: Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914-1918* (Göttingen, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> For a Rhenish Heimatbrief send to Rhinelanders scattered throughout the world in 1936 see Thomas Lekan, 'German Landscape. Local Promotion of the Heimat Abroad', in Krista O'Donnell et al (eds.), *The Heimat Abroad. The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 141-66, here 158f.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., see 'Wo steckt wer?', *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 2, 15.11.39, 20; 'Kameraden berichten', *ibid.*, Nr. 3, 15.12.1939, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Kilian, 'Kriegsstimmungen', 251f.

<sup>7</sup> *Feldpost-Zeitung: für die Frontkameraden des Sächsischen Sparkassen- und Giroverbandes, der Giro-Zentrale*, Nr. 4, March 1940, 14, 38, 49.

<sup>8</sup> For this see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 25-31.

<sup>9</sup> *Furchtlos und treu: d. Soldat aus d. Wehrkreis V*, June 1942.

<sup>10</sup> *Soldaten, Kameraden vom Rhein bis zur Weser: Nachrichten aus dem VI A. K. (Wehrkreis VI)*, April 1943, 50.

<sup>11</sup> 'Die Front spricht zur Heimat', *ibid.*, January 1943, 20f.

<sup>12</sup> 'Front und Heimat', *ibid.*, October 1943, 122.

<sup>13</sup> For example, compare *Soldat im Ordensland Preußen: Nachrichten aus Heer, Kriegsmarine und Luftwaffe im Wehrkreis I*; *Furchtlos und treu: d. Soldat aus d. Wehrkreis V*; *Soldaten, Kameraden vom Rhein bis zur Weser: Nachrichten aus dem VI. A. K. (Wehrkreis VI)*; *Soldaten zwischen Meer und Heide / hrsg. unter Mitwirkung des Wehrkreiskommandos X*. For a similar emphasis on the variety of the press during the Third Reich see Norbert Frei, *Journalismus im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1999), 7f.

<sup>14</sup> *Hanseaten Feldpost*, Nr. 4, 15.1.1940, 15f.; *Arbeit und Kampf: Heimatbrief aus d. Kreis Emscher-Lippe*, Nr. 4, April 1943, titel.

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- <sup>15</sup> Krista O'Donnell: 'Home, Nation, Empire. Domestic Germanness and Colonial Citizenship', in O'Donnell, *Heimat Abroad*, 40-57, here 54.
- <sup>16</sup> Lekan, 'German Landscape', 156.
- <sup>17</sup> Andreas Bastian, *Der Heimat-Begriff. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung in verschiedenen Funktionsbereichen der deutschen Sprache* (Tübingen, 1995), 24f, 72, 218. Also see Gunther Gebhard et al (eds.), *Heimat: Konturen und Konjunkturen eines umstrittenen Konzepts* (Bielefeld, 2007); Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A critical theory of the German idea of Homeland* (Rochester, 2002); Will Cremer and Ansgar Klein (eds.), *Heimat: Analysen, Themen, Perspektiven* (Bielefeld, 1990).
- <sup>18</sup> *Jugendhort. Katholisches Familienblatt für die Diözese Münster*, Jg. 37, Nr. 43, 22.10.1933, 169.
- <sup>19</sup> *Pflugschar und Meißel*, Nr 13, 26.3.39, 3.
- <sup>20</sup> *Das Tischlergewerk*, Jg. 34, Nr. 2, 17.1.1941, 25-28.
- <sup>21</sup> *Niederdeutsche Warte*, Nr. 2, February 1939, 1f.
- <sup>22</sup> Rudy Koshar, 'The Antinomies of *Heimat*: Homeland, History, Nazism', in Jost Hermand and James Steakley (eds.), *Heimat, Nation, Fatherland. The German Sense of Belonging* (New York, 1996), 113-136, here 113. Other important literature about *Heimat* in modern German history include Jan Palmoski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge, 2009); Johannes von Moltke, *No Place Like Home. Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley, 2005); O'Donnell, *Heimat Abroad*; Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman (eds.), *Heimat – A German Dream. Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890-1990* (Oxford, 2000); Celia Applegate, 'Heimat and the Varieties of Regional History', *Central European History*, 33 (1) (2000), 109-17; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997); William Rollins, 'Heimat, Modernity, and Nation in the early Heimatschutz

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Movement', in Jost Hermand and James Steakley (eds.), *Heimat, nation, fatherland: the German sense of Belonging* (New York, 1996), 87-112; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> *Die Heimat schreibt der Front: Feldpostbriefe des Gauess Mecklenburg der NSDAP*, Nr. 2/April/June 1944, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Gerhard Paul, Aufstand der Bilder. Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933* (Bonn, 1990), 143ff. Also see Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge/Massachusetts, 2006); Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Visual History. Ein Studienbuch* (Göttingen, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> 'Aus der Westmark: Unsere Bienen kehren heim', *Die Biene und ihre Zucht: Fachblatt der Landesfachgruppen Baden, Saarpfalz, Elsaß und Lothringen*, Nr 1, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> *Unsere Feldpost* (Würzburg), Nr. 1, November 1939.

<sup>27</sup> *Arbeit und Kampf: Heimatbrief aus d. Kreis Emscher-Lippe*, Folge 5/6, May/June 1944, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 49, 85.

<sup>29</sup> *Kirchenzeitung für das Erzbistum Köln*, Jg. 16, Nr. 35, 1.9.1940, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Krista O'Donnell et al, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, *Heimat Abroad*, 1-14, here 1. 'According to German experts in the 1930s, about thirty million Volksdeutsche lived outside the Reich, at least ten million of them in Eastern Europe: Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Hungary, and Rumania.' See Doris L. Bergen, 'Tenuousness and Tenacity. The Volksdeutschen of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust', in O'Donnell, *Heimat Abroad*, 267-86, here 267.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Joseph Walther, *Creating German Abroad. Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens/Ohio, 2002), 186.

<sup>32</sup> O'Donnell, 'Introduction', 4.



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<sup>33</sup> Nancy R. Reagin, 'German Brigadoon? Domesticity and Metropolitan Perceptions of Auslandsdeutschen in Southwest Africa and Eastern Europe', in O'Donnell, *Heimat Abroad*, 248-66, here 253.

<sup>34</sup> Krista O'Donnell et al, 'Islands of Germanness', in O'Donnell, *Heimat Abroad*, 185f; Reagin, 'German Brigadoon?', esp. 258ff; Bergen, 'Tenuousness'; Birthe Kundrus, 'Regime der Differenz. Volkstumspolitische Inklusionen and Exklusionen im Warthegau und im Generalgouvernement 1939-1944', in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds.), *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 2009), 105-23.

<sup>35</sup> Compare 'Die Littauer Deutschen kehren heim!', *Deutsche Hauswirtschaft: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Frauenwerks*, Nr. 3, March 1941, 3, with 'Gaubericht Wartheland, Mai 1941', Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), NS15/420.

<sup>36</sup> O'Donnell, 'Introduction', 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Reagin, 'German Brigadoon?', 255. Also see Harvey, *Women*, 141ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 19, 1.4.1941, 14; *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Dt. Gasolin Aktienges.], Verkaufsbüro Leipzig, 7.8.1942.

<sup>42</sup> 'Deutsche Seeleute besetzen Grönland!', *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 7/8, 1 May 1940, 18; 'Lieber ohne Worte im nördlichen Polarkreis', *ibid.*, Nr. 18, 1.3.1941, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Heimatbrief des Kreises Plön: Für unsere Frontsoldaten*, Nr. 1, 1943, 6. Also see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 140f.

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Grüsse von Front zu Front: „Lahrer Hütte“ im Osten’, *Heimatbrief der Stadt Lahr, Schwarzwald*, Nr. 9, August 1944, 3-6, here 4.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Aus der Kaspischen Steppe’, *Preussische Bienen-Zeitung*, November 1942. Also see Harvey, *Women*, 137ff.

<sup>47</sup> See National Socialist newspaper reports after the invasion of Poland in 1939 and then after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.

<sup>48</sup> Reagin, ‘German Brigadoon?’, 250ff.

<sup>49</sup> *Furchtlos und treu: d. Soldat aus d. Wehrkreis V*, September 1940, 57; ‘Quartiermacherei im SU’, *Soldaten zwischen Meer und Heide/hrsg. unter Mitwirkung des Wehrkreiskommandos X*, April 1942, 39f.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Lieber Herr Coenen!’, *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 23.6.1942, 7-9.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Der Soldat sieht den Westen’, *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 18, 1.3.1941, 10-16, here 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 33/34, June/July 1942, 7.

<sup>53</sup> One rare exception is the mentioning of nursing assistants from Hamburg who made sure that German soldier felt at home in their home in Norway. See ‘Das Zuhause unserer Soldaten’, *Die Hanseatin*; Nr. 6, June 1941, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Harvey, *Women*, 142.

<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Harvey makes the point that Reich German women not only performed traditional female but also male roles in the East. *Ibid.*, 297ff.

<sup>56</sup> Michaela Kipp, ‘The Holocaust in letters of German soldiers on the Eastern front (1939-44)’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 9 (4) (2007), 601-615, here 608.

<sup>57</sup> Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 177-79.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Bunker „Zum wilden Mann“’, *Hanseaten Feldpost*, Nr. 40/41/42/43, January/February/March/April 1943, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>60</sup> Harvey, *Women*, 298.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Die Romantik des Bunker-Lebens’, *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 3, 15.12.1939, 9-13;

‘Bunker-Geflunker’, *ibid.*, Nr. 6, 15.3.1940, 11-16.

<sup>62</sup> *Hanseaten Feldpost*, Nr. 40/41/42/43, January/February/March/April 1943, 6

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Furchtlos und treu: d. Soldat aus d. Wehrkreis V*, October 1940, 68.

<sup>65</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 12.7.1942.

<sup>66</sup> *Heimatbrief der Stadt Lahr, Schwarzwald*, Nr. 9, August 1944, 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig]: 29.10.1942.

<sup>68</sup> *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 16, 1.1.41, 14.

<sup>69</sup> *Heimatbrief der Stadt Lahr, Schwarzwald*, Nr. 9, August 1944, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 304f.; Bastian, *Heimat-Begriff*, 124, 130, 136.

<sup>71</sup> Reagin, ‘German Brigadoon?’, 251.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Ein Meister schreibt uns aus Russland. Tischlergewerk Essen’, *Das Tischlergewerk: alleiniges Organ d. Innungsverbände Nordrhein, Westfalen u. Niedersachsen. Mitteilungsblatt für Hamburg u. Schleswig-Holstein*, Jg. 34, Nr. 18, 1941.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Briefe aus Russland’, *ibid.*, 35 (11), 15.5.1942, 126.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> ‘Die Aufgaben und Pflichten’, *Die Biene und ihre Zucht: Fachblatt der Landesfachgruppen Baden, Saarpfalz, Elsaß und Lothringen*, Nr. 6, 1942.

<sup>76</sup> For example see ‘Als dienendes Glied schließ an ein Ganzes dich an!’, *Leipziger Bienenzeitung*, 1942, 99f. The following poem was typical: ‘Fritz, Du weiss wie unsre Bienen Einzig ihrem Volke dienen. Du denkst nur an Dich und Euch, Aber nie an Volk und Reich. Andre lässt Du für Dich ringen, Um die Wirtschaftsnot zu zwingen. Meide jeglichen Verdacht,

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Hilf bei der Erzeugungsschlacht!', *Schleswig-Holsteinische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 11, February 1939.

<sup>77</sup> *Schleswig-Holsteinische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 3, June 1940, 32; *ibid.*, Nr. 2, May 1942, 12.

<sup>78</sup> See for example 'Soldatenbrief', *Die Biene und ihre Zucht*, Nr. 12, 1942.

<sup>79</sup> 'Imkerei in der Sowjetunion', *Schleswig-Holsteinische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 6, September 1942, 54f.

<sup>80</sup> 'Ein kleiner Nachtrag über polnische Bienenzucht und Wohnungen', *Preußische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 8, November 1940, 120-123, here 121.

<sup>81</sup> For this and the following see 'Bilder von der Bienenzucht in Polen', *Preußische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 11, February 1940, 234ff.

<sup>82</sup> 'Bilder von der Bienenzucht in Polen', *Preußische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 11, February 1940, 235f.

<sup>83</sup> For this and the following see 'Über die Imkerei in der Sowjetunion', *Schleswig-Holsteinische Bienenzeitung*, Nr. 4, July 1942, 36.

<sup>84</sup> Kerstin Wölki recently argued that the description of the war as a holiday and leisure trip by German soldiers was particularly evident in France and serves as a counter experience to the campaign in Eastern Europe. Julia Paulus argued how letters by Red Cross Nurses read like an act of liberation and appeared as being on an adventure. See AHF-Information. 2010, Nr.203, at <<http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2010/203-10.pdf>>. Also see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 134f, 140.

<sup>85</sup> *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 2, 15.11.1939, 8.

<sup>86</sup> For this and the following see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 31f, 286, 329, 334, 368.

<sup>87</sup> These were common topics in private *Feldpostbriefe*. See *ibid.*, 355ff. However, Latzel seemed to dismiss the overall impact of censorship on the content of *Feldpostbriefe* when arguing that

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there was little potential for fundamental criticism and rejection of the Nazi regime and the war effort amongst soldiers. See *ibid*, 372

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten Des Nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2006). Neitzel and Welzer recently analysed secretly recorded conversations between imprisoned German soldiers by the Allies and concluded that military value system and immediate social relationships (*Nahwelt*) were central for the orientation of Wehrmacht soldiers whilst ideology, background, education, age, rank and arm of the service (and other aspects) hardly made a difference. This analysis appears to be a little one-sided. See Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten. Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* (Frankfurt/Main, 2011), 391ff, 413ff.

<sup>89</sup> Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 372.

<sup>90</sup> Kipp, 'Holocaust in letters', 607.

<sup>91</sup> Kühne, *Kameradschaft*, 272ff.

<sup>92</sup> Kipp, 'Holocaust in letters', 601-615.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Humburg in AHF-Information. 2010, Nr. 203.

<sup>94</sup> *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 1, 15.10.1939, 11. Also see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 371.

<sup>95</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 17.10.1941, 14f.

<sup>96</sup> 'Nackt sehen alle gleich aus', *Preußische Bienen-Zeitung*, November 1941.

<sup>97</sup> Latzel concluded that Nazi racism overlapped with existing stereotypes, and that there was a great correlation between the way how the Nazis legitimised the war and the views expressed in soldier letters. See Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 181f, 368, 371. Stenzel's analysis of around 200 soldier letters from the campaign against Russia concluded similarly: 'Die Vorprägung durch Propaganda wirkte sich zu Kriegsbeginn bei einem großen Teil der Soldaten in einem mehr oder weniger festen und unreflektierten Bild von der Sowjetunion aus, das alle militärischen und zivilen Lebensbereiche in seinen Bann schlug.' See Thilo Stenzel, *Das Rußlandbild des 'kleinen*

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Mannes'. *Gesellschaftliche Prägung und Fremdwahrnehmung in Feldpostbriefen aus dem Ostfeldzug (1941-1944/45)*, Osteuropa-Institut München, Mitteilungen, Nr. 27 Juni 1998, at 125f. Available at <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:21-opus-41713>>.

<sup>98</sup> Also see Michaela Kipps. AHF-Information. 2010, Nr. 203.

<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Koenen argued that the the relationship between Germans and Russians was ambivalent and that there was a tension between anxiety and admiration. See Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex. Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945* (Munich, 2005), 9, 14.

<sup>100</sup> 'Besuch von Dostojewskis Wohnhaus', *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 40/41/42/43, January/February/March/April 1943.

<sup>101</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 23.11.1942.

<sup>102</sup> 'Russisches Bauernhaus am Kuban', *Heimatbrief der Stadt Lahr*, Nr. 5, Weihnachten 1943.

<sup>103</sup> 'Ein Bild aus der Ukraine', *Preußische Bienen-Zeitung*, November 1941. Private *Feldpostbriefe* also distinguished between clean Belgians, Serbs and Ukrainians and filthy Poles and Russians. See Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, chapter 8, at 139, 146f, 150, 171-82.

<sup>104</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 23.6.1942.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.8.1942.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.9.1942.

<sup>107</sup> *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 27/28, December 1941/January 1942, 7f.

<sup>108</sup> 'Monatsberichte der Gauvertreter', BAB, NS15/633, 5-7.

<sup>109</sup> *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 6, 15.3.1940, 12.

<sup>110</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig]; 23.6.1942; *ibid.*, 23.7.1943.

<sup>111</sup> *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 16, 1.1.1941, 12; *ibid.*, Nr. 27/28, December 1941/January 1942; *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 12.7.1942.

<sup>112</sup> *Feldpostbriefe, die uns erreichten* [Gasolin Leipzig], 7.8.1942; *ibid.*, 15.11.1942.

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<sup>113</sup> *Feldpost-Zeitung: für die Frontkameraden des Sächsischen Sparkassen- und Giroverbandes, der Giro-Zentrale Sachsen*, Nr. 42, May 1943, 1728.

<sup>114</sup> Similar in private Feldpostbriefe, Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten*, 374.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Wir sind alle gesund und munter und grüßen unsern Vati!’, *Hanseaten-Feldpost*, Nr. 14, 1. November 1940, 7; ‘Kinderbriefe’, *ibid.*, Nr. 15, 1.12.1940, 8.

<sup>116</sup> *Die Hanseatin*, Nr. 5, May 1942, 2, ‘Der Hamburger Brand vor 100 Jahren’; *ibid.*, Nr. 6, June 1942, 2, 10, ‘Neues Leben auf Ruinen. Hamburgs Wiederaufbau nach dem Grossen Brande’; *ibid.*, Nr. 7, July 1942, 2f, ‘Hamburgs stolze Türme’; *ibid.*, Nr. 10, October 1942, 2f, ‘Die Hanse’; *ibid.*, Nr. 1, January 1943, 12, ‘Heitere Filme zum Jahresbeginn’; *ibid.*, Nr. 3, March 1943, 8f, ‘Unter Napoleon im Russlandfeldzug’.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Weser-Ems, 16.8.1943’, 284, BAB, NS15/390.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Gauleitung Niederdonau, Oktober 1944’, 23 back, BAB, NS15/633.

<sup>119</sup> *Hanseaten-Post*, Nr. 18, 1.3.1941, 14.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Sachsen, 2. Vierteljahr 1943’, BAB, NS15/390.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Deutschland verdient es, frei zu sein’, *Arbeit und Kampf: Heimatbrief aus d. Kreis Emscher-Lippe*, Nr. 5/6, May/June 1944, 29.