

Battle for Aachen
The time period from Sept. 10 to Oct. 10 1944
Diarist G. Muellenmeister

[comments by the translator are in [...] brackets]

[dates in UK order, i.e., day.month.year. Mostly USA spelling]

[Note: str. is a contraction of Strasse which means street and is appended to most of the street names]

[Most german place names are not translated, e.g. Drimbörner Waeldchen would be Drimbörn Copse in English]

[Erzbergerallee 46, where the diarist was holed up, still exists]

[Helfferrichstr. no longer exists; it's probably now Adenauerallee, which runs approx. from southwest to northeast. Erzbergerallee comes from the north and ends there]

[Beverau is a part of Aachen, sort of like the Bronx or Manhattan in New York City, and lies both to the north and to the south of what was then Helfferrichstr. Erzbergerallee is located there]

[Burtscheid is also a part of Aachen and lies to the west of Beverau]

10.09.44

Even before 10.09.44 rumors were circulating in Aachen about an impending evacuation of the city, which caused a giant uproar among its residents.

These plans were temporarily revoked only to pop up again, causing an extreme level of fear and uncertainty among the population. Many were plagued by doubt: what to do? Evacuate? Or stay in the city?

In either case danger was in the offing, an uncertain future which had us shaking in our boots.

Fantastical rumors about what could come to pass in either case flitted like poisonous insects through the city.

Carpet bombing of the Siegfried Line, the city, the bunkers, exactly as happened at the Atlantic Wall, then firing by our soldiers at the enemy troops moving through the city - a city without lights, gas and water, with no food deliveries, were

prophesied for those who remained. For the evacuees attacks on trains, the misery as refugees, loss of all goods, of their livelihoods. Many thought that the Siegfried Line could hold out for months, but Aachen would then be under attack from both sides.

At the behest of the Fuehrer Himmler inspected the defenses today.

Late in the evening I enter our bunker area and find persons there who have fallen prey to helplessness and inner conflict as a result of their fear and uncertainty.

Suddenly we sit up and take notice. A leading personality, who is in contact with the Mayor, makes a consoling speech. The Mayor informs the citizens of Aachen that for the time being an evacuation is not being considered. Himmler was here and asserted that the rescue of the German troops from the pocket near Antwerp was grounds for new hope.

The graveyard humor disappeared as if blown away by a wind storm and was replaced by good humor [Fidelitas]. The mood was improved by a cup of [real] coffee and the bread and butter was once again eaten with good appetite.

11.09.44

Nevertheless, on 11.9. the city was again in a state of panic.

Panic buying, particularly of food stuffs, increased. In the course of the day it was announced that mothers with their children and old people would be able to leave until 7 [number hard to read and not clear whether AM or PM] o'clock.

In recent days many had already left Aachen to visit distant relatives. But a special police pass had been required.

Nonetheless, 98,000 food ration cards had been distributed to residents in Aachen on 9.9.

12.09.44

In the late afternoon of 12.09. the evacuation order was brought to our house (Peterstr.). Appointed time 8:30AM on 13.9., destination Beeckstr. The explanation: it is forbidden to stay in this part of Aachen. Previously it was discretionary. The Grevensteins, who planned to bed down in the underground shelter, come back. All underground shelters and bunkers are being closed.

Martin picks me up in the evening so we can move to Conrads' house in the Helfferichstrasse, where the family Corsten is also living. The getaway luggage is tied onto a bicycle which Martin bought on the way over for 50 Reichsmark and some cigarettes.

We move through practically abandoned streets. Now and then a group of refugees on their way to the train station appears.

Small handcarts, prams of various provenance, suit cases, amazing back packs quickly fashioned from all kinds of curious material, characterize the emigrants.

In the Helfferichstrasse I had expected to find a group of people determined to remain in Aachen, as imagined by Martin C. Instead: the highest level of fear induced panic, flowing tears, mindless packing resulting from a need to be ready at shortest notice to flee. Some of the pickled eggs are given away, some are choked down as quickly as possible so that no stranger can eat them.

Not just food, clothes and underware, but a spinning wheel packed in a sack, are to be taken along on the flight.

Martin had to pull all the stops of his leadership talents to get the excited minds onto a path of reasonable action.

Brainless neighbors who rushed over in a state of the highest hopelessness also had to be made to see reason and finally went, determined and thankful, back home. People acquiesced to Martin's strict orders to stay while maintaining their composure and confidence.

But they kept packing anyway, just in case they might still have to take off.

In the evening we ate at the round table in the dining room. A good, warm meal!

Afterwards: a new uproar about where to spend the night. Bunker, underground shelter or cellar?

Against the desires of the fearful minds a decision is reached: either in the house itself or in its cellar.

I sleep on the couch in the living room. Sustained flak fire near and far.

13.09.44

The flak position behind our house is disbanded. We hear the demolitions, see the fires. Withdrawal of the flak unit.

Many residents in the Beverau were determined not to leave. They remained at home, some in two underground shelters, about 200 people.

Supposedly there are still thousands of people in the Frankenberger bunker, determined not to leave Aachen.

A representative of Graf Schwerin, whose tank division is tasked with defending the city, addressed the people in the bunker during the night: never before has such a disgraceful abandonment of a city taken place as in Aachen. The Party [NSDAP] functionaries and the police ran away before the civilians were evacuated. It is impossible to evacuate those who remain. The citizens should stay put and support the army [Wehrmacht].

And indeed, those who went to the train station yesterday returned today. Among them the Pfannschmidts; having eaten all their provisions and broken their butter crock along the way, they now had to stay here.

Many evacuees are near Dueren. Many were dropped off a mere 15 kilometers from Aachen. Hardly anyone answers the phone. Apparently already all gone. Only the Franciscan nuns (Kleinmarschierstr.) answered, determined to remain here.

I heard from them that the people from the block of houses in the Peterstr. hadn't gone along to the train station and had remained in Aachen.

We don't hear any more flak, but rather the thunder of the artillery in the Siegfried Line, which becomes louder and louder.

I stand at the window with Martin and observe the shell hits in the German positions in the woods, all along the ridge, which was jam-packed with German troops, as fleeing soldiers reported. In the evening a car full of Waffen SS drives past. The officer says that they're looking for lodgings for the staff.

He thinks it will be impossible for civilians to get out

of the city if they wait until morning.

Now that the flak soldiers have abandoned their command post Franz Conrads and Edgar Pfannschmidt start to get things organised. The following items are quickly brought into the house: 1 sack of C(ombat)-rations, 1 box of hard tack, 5 rabbits, 1 radio, 90 liters of petrol/gasoline, milk from the cows which are wandering around.

All meals are eaten above ground.

Because the enemy is getting closer the fearful souls demand that we go to the bunker or the underground shelter. We stay in the house, as Martin orders.

Good spirits prevail in the expectation that all difficulties will soon end.

We move our sleeping quarters into the cellar in the evening. The couch, reclining chairs and a mattress on the floor serve as beds for the eight members of the household: Conrads, Corsten, Franzen, Muellenmeister.

14.09.44

Thursday. This morning things are getting serious. The artillery bombardment becomes an artillery duel early on. The enemy fires from the woods and our forces reply from the east and the north (Soers) of the city (Lousberg).

We hear that the enemy is in Wahnbruch.

The roads leading out of the woods are under continuous fire. Towards Ponttor, Ludwigsallee one sees lots of shell hits, also in the inner city. The artillery duel goes on for hours.

Long distance calls to Franz in Gelsenkirchen and Hanne in Dortmund this morning. We're on pins and needles and hope that the worst will be over in two hours.

We talk to some soldiers who, coming from Eupen, are glad that they could get out of the Aachen woods. They are flabbergasted to hear that they're in front of Aachen. They're weary and listless and can only think about being taken prisoner. They tell us that the enemy has more troops and is better equipped than we are. Their answer to our question, whether it's dangerous out there,

is that it's dangerous everywhere here.

We'd written a lot of letters and wanted to give them to them to forward. They refused because they didn't expect that they'd be able to get out of Aachen.

A short time later another two soldiers came running by, breathless and shaking. They were running fast, hoping that they could get away to the east. They readily took our letters along.

The firing from the artillery/tanks gets heavier and heavier. The shell hits get closer to our street.

We sit close together in the cellar. The shell hits on the side where the garden lies shake the house. Greetings from the Americans in the nearby Aachen woods.

Hardly a pause! Hardly a dwindling. A hard impact - the lights go out and the entire house remains dark!

We dare to go upstairs once the rain of iron ends and see the destruction at the rear of the house.

The window panes in the dining room and the kitchen are shattered as if from a bombardment. Shrapnel went through the cabinet and bored holes in the wall. Floors, furniture, all covered with dust, dirt, chips and shrapnel!

In the evening we stand on the side of the road and talk to two soldiers who are passing by.

One soldier cries "Watch out! Shrapnel!" We race to the side of the house and lie flat on the ground. Shrapnel rains down around us for several seconds. Fearful seconds!

Another night, another round of discussions and doubts about where to spend the night. Martin's order "we remain in the cellar" wins out.

The consecrated candle burns in the cellar while we say the rosary together in our great peril.

From today onward no more lights or drinking water. No radio, no newspapers; cut off from the outside world.

Friday. The night in the cellar was pretty quiet. The fire [in the oven] is brought back to life this morning. Milking the cows - cooking. Impossible!

Yesterday we ate a posh rabbit stew with pudding - today a simple milksop [from Old English milk soppe, which is pretty much the same as the word Milchsuppe used in the text]. We spend most of our time in the cellar, see the Waffen SS go past, hear their tanks.

At around 10 o'clock intense roar of artillery around us. The house shakes and trembles to its foundations.

We huddle close together in the most distant corner of the cellar, near the consecrated candle. We don't have enough breath to pray aloud. Anni cries bitterly.

In the afternoon low-flying enemy planes appear. They fire their machine guns! The artillery duel resumes as soon as the planes leave. This happens by turns the whole day. Without let up!

We stay in the cellar because it pings and whizzes around us incessantly.

During the day soldiers cross the street. They throw open the garden gates, ours too, as possible cover.

The Nicolins tell us that the Waffen SS is supposed to relieve the Gallwitz-Kaserne, which is in the hands of the Americans. All this reduces our courage. How much longer must we remain captives in our cellar?

We begin to reckon how long our available provisions will last for eight people.

The bombardment lasts until 9PM.

Late in the evening Martin returns in a good mood from Dr. Schul.

The people living in the underground shelter always wear a white armband when they go outside because the Americans can be seen in the Drimbörner Waeldchen.

The copse opposite our position! Two wounded soldiers are brought into the underground shelter. They asked right away "Are any of those louts from the SA or SS here?" "No!"

"Otherwise we would have done for them too!"

Communal evening prayers in the cellar. The enemy's heavy artillery in the woods fires over, and sometimes into, the city for a little more than half of the night. The brave want to sleep upstairs, but soon return. Only Martin and Franz stay upstairs.

16.09.44

Saturday. Heavy morning fog. The fighting resumes as it gets brighter, mostly mortar fire. Shell hits nearby. In the distance one hears the rhythms of a moving tank.

Rushed coffee brewing! Breakfast together underground.

Chaplain Hugo Baurmann comes to pick up Franz to go milking. We wait in the house until the shell hits move away from us.

Chaplain Baurmann tells us that there is still a way out of the city. Juelicherstr. is still open.

The Party turned up yesterday at Bluecherplatz with 24 vehicles for evacuating the city dwellers, 23 went away empty. The Party tears down the white flag which the populace had raised. The flag appeared again after the Party had disappeared into the distance. Plain clothes SS were disarmed by civilians.

The Waffen SS pushes the enemies back to the edge of the woods. America is again a little further away from us. But the Americans still control the Gallwitz-Kaserne and Nellessen Park.

Shops in the city were plundered, lots of alcoholic beverages found a new home.

After midday extreme artillery fire on both sides of us. Shell hits nearby, heavy smoke rises from the gable end of the neighboring house. We again huddle close together in the cellar, near the consecrated candle.

This drama is replaced by climbing planes: 4 german and 8 enemy. An air battle ensues and an american plane is hit. The pilot can parachute out. Near Forster Kirche. The Pfannschmidts leave the city at the last minute, after having slaughtered a pig beforehand. Around Wuerselen fires can be seen.

Juelicherstr. is supposedly still open.

Franz goes to the bunker in the evening to get Uliana, who was earlier the Conrads' housemaid, and is hiding there. He comes back heart stricken, without Uliana. Along the way he heard from a soldier that Aachen would be defended and all civilians forcibly evacuated.

All nerves in the house are totally frayed. Martin has to use force to make reason prevail. Around 5:30PM the onset of a total smoke screen in the woods and city. American planes drop smoke bombs/grenades.

More and more plane formations are coming from the enemy side.

Phillip dictates "Between 7 and 8PM a total eclipse of the souls."

On the heels of the smoke screen comes the twilight. The Americans probably plan to use this protection to get closer to the city.

We'd planned to slaughter a calf in the afternoon, but were unable to do it. Our enemies always have a say when we plan something.

We no longer hope from hour to hour, but rather from day to day, that we will be liberated from our underground prison. Franz and Martin go to the underground shelter and also hear there that Aachen is supposed to be forcibly evacuated.

Schmeer (district administrator) was in the city. Vehicles are standing by. What would become of us if the underground shelters and the bunkers were forcibly evacuated? Or should we evacuate too? - This thought leads to an unhappy and doubt filled mood. - Renewed packing with great anxiety and the unanswered question: what will become of us?

We eat our evening meal in the cellar in silence. Around 10:30 PM Martin and Dr. Schleicher head out to the bunker and Chaplain Baurmann respectively, but are stopped along the way by a patrol (Dr. Dreising).

Communal evening prayers. Around 12AM Martin appears with the same news about a forcible evacuation.

Tomorrow, Sunday, is Martin's last day of leave. He plans to do his duty and leave then, come Hell or high water. What would happen to us without him? Wouldn't it be better for us to leave at the same time?

Martin and I stand for quite some time at the open mansard window, look out into the night and confer with one another. We hear the enemy artillery from the direction of Triererstr. The artillery is located on/near the last two open streets out of the city. Fire shine in Wuerselen. I go to bed at about 2 AM and fall asleep around 5AM.

17.09.44

I get up around 6:30AM. Martin is already here, wearing his uniform, and gets ready to go, since today is the last day of his leave.

In the cellar kitchen I prepare some breakfast for him and also some food to take along on his journey. While I hastily cut some bread some excited souls tumble down the stairs, crying: Americans around our house!

Now no-one dares to go outside. Martin also has to stay to avoid being captured by the Americans while unarmed.

Around 10AM Chaplain Baurmann tiptoes by on his way to the underground shelter, with the articles for Mass in a case. He ducks behind a garden gate whenever the artillery roars. One can only walk on the pavement/sidewalk along the houses, and even then only with the greatest care, because the entire street has been turned into a minefield.

All day the heavy american cannons thunder from the south-east towards the north-eastern areas of the city. A neighbor turns up around 12 and tells us about a Major who wants to search every house for Germans fit for military service.

We heard from the underground shelter that the enemy made an offer in a letter to Graf Schwerin, the division commander, to initiate negotiations for the surrender of the city. Graf Schwerin passed the buck to the heads of the civilian government. They passed the buck in turn to the Fuehrer in Berlin. Graf Schwerin was ordered to immediately report to the Fuehrer. He was to be court-martialed. He reacted with the request to be allowed to continue to defend Aachen, before appearing before the court. [In reality, he was relieved of his command on 14.09.44 for allegedly preventing the evacuation of

civilians. He was placed in the officer reserves and charges against him were dropped in November, 1944. He then commanded troops in Italy and was captured there in 1945. He died in 1980]

At the moment low-flying planes are attacking the german position. We hear from some SS soldiers that the ring of fire around Aachen has been closed. None of us has a choice [but to remain].

The sergeant who's nearby wants to surrender himself and his 30 men. But his people don't want to, they hope that they can still escape. Many of them are wearing civilian clothes under their uniforms.

From the third floor we can see that the Guelicherstr. is under fire, close to Haaren. Martin wonders whether he may be able to leave after all. Since lunch time continuous action by the enemy planes with the usual bombardment.

The aerial attacks end at about 3PM. We hear an american loud speaker from the direction of the Drimbörner Waeldchen. We keep the blinds closed all day so that no Major or soldier gets the idea that there are men fit for military service here.

Martin and Franz C., who's been drafted into the labour service, sneak through a hole in the hedge to Schleicher's house. They plan to return in the evening, after the Major has inspected all the houses. We sit in the cellar and say the rosary after the young men have gone.

Rifle fire, hand grenade explosions around us! We go to bed early since we don't have any candles for light. Some on the ground floor, some in the cellar. On the ground floor in protected corners Anni, Lilli and Fine. Marianne, Phillip and I in the cellar. Reconnaissance patrols still fighting around us in the night. Explosions from shells startle us at around 1:30AM. We hear the glass rattle and can smell the cordite. Those upstairs come down into the cellar and we close ranks. I fall asleep around 5AM.

18.09.44

The german and american patrols are still going at it in the morning. Fighting drops off at dawn. Heavy fog. A neighbor [Frau G.] tells me that a german soldier was buried yesterday in the beet field behind Pfannschmidt's place. I consider going with her to the underground shelter at Beverau to pick up some food.

Deliveries are made for the 200 people there every now and then and there's enough for the rest of the neighborhood too. But Frau G. is too scared to go with me. The reason being that her husband was held up by an American soldier with a pistol who suddenly appeared out of nowhere. "Soldat? [soldier?]" he cried. Only after turning out all his pockets did the soldier believe his denial. We thoroughly clean all the rooms facing the garden in the course of the morning.

The explosions during the night have left noticeable traces. Two rabbits are dead and the third one, seriously injured, cowers before the door and asks to be let in. The peach tree was hit in the middle of its crown. A good 3/4 of the peaches are on the ground. One can easily see how the shrapnel from the crown hit the house wall and also entered the house, tearing the floors and windows apart. Lilli's bedroom (2nd floor) has the most damage with 19 strikes.

It's a Herculean task to clear the rooms of dust, rubble and glass shards. During the clean up I sneak into the cellar and sit in front of my spy hole to see what's happening outside.

Suddenly people appear. A family rushes past, loaded down with their belongings. It's the family H. from the Viktoriaallee, who now stand in front of our door and ask to be let in. The family H. is fleeing because the Frankenburg bunker is being forcibly cleared out by the SA and SS. With brutality and cruelty they force the occupants to evacuate to the Reich [east of Aachen] and tell them: "You lazy people hang around here while we need every available worker on the other side of the Rhein [rechtsrheinisch] to manufacture ammunition."

The occupants defend themselves and tell the well groomed power mongers that they have a more important role to fill at the front. In spite of the pleas and threats of the crowd they [the SA/SS] yell: "Just dare to touch us!" The braver crowd members step forward and remind them with raised index finger that "others will take care of that for us." (they mean the Americans).

I heard father H. say to his three daughters: "Children, don't forget that in this hour the Deutschtum [Germanness] has been driven out of you."

Several thousand were supposed to be removed from the bunker. Where to? Those already evacuated had waited in vain at the

train station, were dropped off a mere 15km from Aachen, only to be forced to camp in the surrounding fields with no certain future.

German soldiers who had seen the misery of the refugees at the train station told father H.: "We're hard men, but when we saw the misery of the refugees we couldn't shoot at an American any more."

No artillery fire or tank actions during the whole morning, just skirmishes between raiding parties, apparently from Kirschenbueschchen [little cherry bushes] to the bridge. But still dangerous for us. At the same time lucky for us, because neither the SA nor the SS dares to come here.

We turn our house into a sort of fortress, keep the doors and windows tightly closed, blinds down, move as quietly as possible and talk only in whispers.

We're also determined not to eat any more warm meals so that the smoke from the chimney won't betray our presence. After eating we move the bedding into the furnace room, add two beds and a sofa to the already present couch. Room for six people.

Martin and Franz disappear through the hedge to Schleicher's place to continue their hidden life.

Heavy fighting nearby all day long. The Germans drove the Americans out of Kirschenbueschchen. The Americans counter attack. It's only safe in the cellar. The married couple Schlitz was killed in their cellar during the heavy shelling.

We also had three shell hits in the garden.

Martin and Franz return, unseen in the dark, for dinner.

The Family H. also wants to relocate to the neighboring house, in order to share their hidden existence with Martin and Franz, because Mr. H. is also fit for military duty and doesn't want to be sniffed out by any Germans. H. disappears silently through the hedge, followed later by Martin and Franz.

We're all burdened by the fear of the enemy projectiles, but even more so by the fear of being discovered by our "german friends."

As he departs Martin says: "Pray children, everything depends

on that!" After they're gone we hold communal evening prayers, long and imploringly.

19.09.44

A fairly quiet night. At about 1:30AM we're woken up by a shell hit nearby, along with the usual rattles and clicking noises. In the morning we see that Ebert's house across the street was hit hard. The shrapnel also hit our house and the window panes in the front. The windows on the gable side are also damaged.

The heavy american artillery gets back to work after nine. The impacts are in Kirschenbueschchen, which is again occupied by the Germans.

Breakfast at eleven. We hole up in a corner of the cellar due to the heavy shelling and cower there until midday.

Franz shows up with an american weekly newspaper. Masses of them were dropped on a nearby field. The american report states that Aachen is surrounded and that there's only a gap between Merkstein and Weisweiler. Only the Krefelderstr. offers a way out. Eilendorf, Eschweiler, Stolberg and Roethgen are in the hands of the Americans.

Franz requisitions an abandoned Tempo-Wagen [a transporter with three wheels] and brings bread for us and the underground shelter. Also Maggi [bouillon cubes and/or bottles of food flavoring for soups etc.], paper and an oil lamp.

Heavy shelling until evening. Lots of explosions, but far away.

Around 11PM heavy explosions behind the house, like bombs. That lasts until 2AM.

20.09.44

German soldiers are hiding in abandoned houses in the Beverau and are firing from them. The Americans fire back. Just about every house has bullet holes. The Vondenbusch farm is also a defensive position.

Since it's impossible to stay upstairs we move the oven into the cellar, which is slowly being turned into a complete kitchen, and is being used to cook and bake for 13 persons (including family H.).

21.09.44

The night was much quieter than we're used to. Only moderate artillery fire.

Anni and I go in the early morning to the field to collect potatoes. Absolutely necessary for the kitchen.

Two soldiers on leave pass by at around 10AM. They want to visit relatives at Beverau, after having fruitlessly tried to get to Brand, which is now in American hands.

Artillery fire from both sides during the day. Apparently in connection with the railway bridge (railway embankment), which lies in the German line of fire.

22.09.44

The night was nice and quiet, only distant artillery hits. Early in the morning to Opitz to pick up necessities for the kitchen, while the American artillery shells whiz by above us.

The houses in the Beverau which our soldiers have occupied are under continuous artillery fire. Several houses have burned down. The Beverau is being turned into a field of rubble. Many houses are badly damaged.

That soldiers enter, exit and stand around outside the underground shelter also increases the danger to the civilians sheltering there.

The Americans now control Kirschenbueschchen, Drimborner Waeldchen and Nellessen-Wald, along with the left side of our street. The Germans are on the other side.

A German tank drives up at noon and stops a few houses below us in the Helfferichstrasse. It's supposed to fire 200 rounds at the Americans. The second round is a dud. The tank must pull back. A second tank shows up and has to pull back after the same thing happens to it.

Chaplain Baurmann is tireless in his zeal to support the spiritual and physical well being of his flock. Frequent masses at the underground shelter or in the cellar of one of the houses. After setting up the altar with the few remaining flowers and candles he held a mass at 7PM in our cellar.

A large number of neighbors is present. Chaplain Baurmann

absolves all those present of their sins, everyone receives the Holy Communion.

We get a chance to hand a passing soldier some letters in the evening.

23.09.44

Artillery and tank fire, as usual. Particularly heavy around midday.

At 7PM a mass in our cellar, 26 participants.

A raging fire visible on the eastern horizon.

24.09.44

An unpleasant night! An armored car drives around behind our house the whole night, firing off booming shots, sometimes nearby, sometimes further away, until 5AM.

German soldiers blow up the railway bridge to Helfferichstr. early in the morning. German soldiers invade Prang's house, paw through the cabinets and steal stuff.

At 5PM mass in our cellar, 25 people present. We hear that a man and a woman from the underground shelter secretly went to the Americans in the Drimbörner Waeldchen and asked them to end the misery of the 180 persons (civilians) there by pushing their lines beyond it.

25.09.44

A quiet night!

The row of houses closest to the enemy in Beverau burns down in the morning. The Americans threw incendiaries into them. A group of 20 [american] soldiers enters another house. Of the [german] soldiers hiding there one is captured and the other killed. Then the Americans enter the underground shelter and search for soldiers and weapons, but find nothing.

Big preparations in our cellar kitchen! The people in the underground shelter slaughtered a pig and an ample amount of it is earmarked for our group of 13 hungry mouths.

26.09.44

The police turn up at the underground shelter at 2AM. Orders: the shelter must be evacuated immediately. Its inhabitants prepare themselves for transportation to the Reich! Some go

along during the night, others wait until the morning, a slew of them fools the police and hides in empty houses, 20 of them in a single house.

Franz tells us this even before we've gotten out of bed. The result is maximum fear and uproar. We fear that the police will search and evacuate the houses too. What will become of us then? We fear for Franz and Martin. Martin comes to us without being seen [on the way over]. He manages with great difficulty to calm us down and make us keep quiet, so that the house will appear to be uninhabited [loose translation].

It rains cats and dogs from early morning until late afternoon. We're happy to have the rain water for cooking and cleaning. But, oh no! A multitude of holes in the roof allow the precious fluid to flow in streams and trickles into the house, through the ceilings, even reaching the ground floor. There aren't enough pots and tubs to hold back the floods in the attic and the second and third floors.

Family Braunsdorf knocks at the door in the afternoon. They want to take their leave before heading out to the other side of the Rhein [rechtsrheinisches Land]. Their nerves are jangling from all the packing and toting and having to leave so many possessions behind. They believe the horror stories which have been dished up to the undecided migrants: executions of civilians, undermining of their houses, destruction by flame throwers!

The fantastical description of what may happen inflames the already so often afflicted nerves of our household. New doubts and fearful wavering between staying and leaving prevails yet again.

Martin must take stern action to convince us to remain.

27.09.44

We remain shuttered in the house and only sneak over to family H. to bring them their three meals. The H. daughters often come over to fetch the food.

Artillery duel from far and near. The Germans fire out of the city from Lousberg at the american positions in the woods.

We start eating the last of the bread.

28.09.44

Artillery barrage!

German soldiers are present in the Helfferichstr. less often. In our neighborhood only patrols and outposts. The command post is in Rinkens' house, six houses above ours. German battle line, the american artillery targets the railway embankment, about 50 meters behind us!

Many shell hits in Burtscheid today.

We hope to be relieved from week to week. A calf was slaughtered at Cohnen's place [lots of people named Cohnen in Aachen]. For us and Horbach also a goodly portion.

29.09.44

Low flying planes circle for hours after noon, firing their machine guns and dropping bombs.

Artillery in the evening. Shell hits from Preusweg to Vaelser-Quartier along the woods.

30.09.44

A quiet night! A quiet morning! Foggy outside!

Franz informs us what was in the radio report of the german army. He got it from our neighbor Hanrads, who has a listening device. The Schwerin Division is supposed to be relieved by a new one, which is allegedly tasked with arresting all civilians.

Martin must repeat his emphatic admonition to remain unnoticed in the house over and over.

German soldiers move up from the railway embankment to the former flak position in the afternoon. An american soldier in an outpost is wounded. He pins a bit of white cloth to his uniform and crawls on his knees with great effort to the enemy position, from which he is taken to the command post in Rinkens' house.

Six german soldiers search the flak position and then take cover in a hedge where some one-man foxholes had been previously dug. It's the hedge which runs at a right angle to our house on the adjacent field [the diarist later calls it the Querhecke. which literally means the hedge at a right angle. Since Querhecke is easier to write it will be used in the rest of this translation].

Now the Americans fire at the bushes behind the flak position.

Their fire hits the flak position, the Querhecke, the gardens of our row of houses and the railway embankment. A flak shack catches fire.

Great anxiety in our cellar domicile! Anni is too afraid to go to bed. Phillip is afflicted with enormous anxiety all night, wants once again to get away to the east [to the Reich]. In these days we realize how our situation worsens from day to day.

I remember that The Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary will soon (07.11) be celebrated. Pope Pius V instituted the feast of Our Lady of Victory in order to commemorate the victory at Lepanto, which he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Who can count the number of miraculous deliverances which Mary, Our Lady of Victory, has since then made possible through her intercession?

We are united in our determination to today start the novena in honor of Our Lady of Victory. Our neighbors also take part. The statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary has a place of honor in the cellar.

01.10.44

A quiet night after the storm! Martin calms the jangling nerves and steadies our resolution [to remain].

A rainy day! All available containers are upstairs but aren't nearly enough to catch the streams of water entering the house. The unstoppable water seeps through and turns the ceilings into mud in some places. The weather improves around twilight.

We see fire in Morsbach, Wuerselen; smoke rises from the railway embankment, the row of houses in Turpinstrasse, which was hard hit by the continuous bombardment of the railway embankment.

Suddenly we see close-quarters fighting between the patrols behind our house. The fire of the rifles, machine guns and grenades goes to and fro, to and fro between the railway embankment and the Querhecke, where the Germans are, and the thicket on the heights, which is held by the Americans. We can clearly see the tracer bullets [the diarist uses Feuerkugeln, which can be translated as "fire bullets." I chose to translate it as tracer bullets, since that's the more technical term], since it's getting dark, which fly, well aimed, like the balls of playing children. End of the fight: six Germans in the hedge take to their heels in the direction of the railway embankment!

To bed at 9PM!

A continuous, hours-long bombardment with all kinds of weapons begins. The house shakes.

02.10.44

Afternoon! The Americans bombard the Querhecke and the surrounding area. The Germans blast the american artillery position in the woods. U. Branusdorf knocks on our cellar door in the evening. She took the risk of returning from the other side of the Rhein [rechtsrheinisch] to Aachen to collect some belongings from her apartment. Very risky!

With nervous jitteriness she spouts horror stories without end about the catastrophic dangers which face those who remain in the beleaguered city of Aachen, without mentioning the dangers which she herself faced. [She did this with] such astounding conviction that she completely dominated the thoughts of those present. A protest or plea for common sense was impossible.

Struck by her words we go to bed, unable to find peace in sleep. Thoughts of exodus rack our brains.

Lilli has acute heart problems during the night and has to get up to take some medicine.

03.10.44

Early in the morning, before we even get out of bed, we discuss the arguments for leaving presented by our over-wrought guest. We note their obvious contradictions and fantastical nonsense. Common sense wins out before we even get up. No-one in our dormitory [Schlafstube] now considers leaving.

U. Branusdorf, our guest during the night, leaves us in the morning to visit her house again, after which she'll go back to the other side of the Rhein. We take advantage of this opportunity to give U. Branusdorf some letters, which we hastily write.

04.10.44

Lilli, Anni and Marianne are busy procuring goods from Opitz in the morning. Adequate supplies for the 13 of us are guaranteed for a while.

Reconnaissance patrols clash near the flak position behind our house in the afternoon. Two soldiers bring down a wounded man

who is wearing a civilian coat and no hat. A bombed out house burns down! Flashes of distant artillery fire on the southeast and northwest horizons late in the evening.

05.10.44

We fetch lots of fruit home in the morning, namely apples! Anni encounters a sergeant at Opitz' who warns her not to let herself be seen, because the Army [Wehrmacht] will not tolerate civilians in a war zone. Mrs. Gerhards also ran into a soldier who asked in amazement "Huh? Are there still civilians here? Don't you know that you're in the middle of a battle field?"

06.10.44

During the night we heard the explosions of the mortar shells, close by and all around the house. In the morning we find that the cherry tree was knocked over.

Pfannschmidt's house suffered a shell hit. All morning long lots of fighter bombers and continuous mortar fire. As I sit at the window and look out at the street a shell hits right in front of our house. Black smoke and some shock!

The farmer Peters, who was forced at gunpoint to abandon his farm, comes back home. His second attempt to get away from the mass of refugees succeeded in Guerzenich near Dueren. He brought along two people who live in Beverau. The three take lodgings in Prang's house, since the Americans occupy his property.

07.10.44

Constant fighting in the night, in particular mortar attacks. Baltes came back into the city on his military motorcycle (as a soldier), taking advantage of the fog. He went up to Helfferichstr. to collect some possessions for the last time, since it's otherwise practically impossible to enter or leave Aachen.

08.10.44

Such a night as we've never experienced before! Sustained and booming artillery fire wakes us up at 4AM. The clanking of tanks and the roar of their cannons in addition - until 1:30PM! Not a single shot from the German side in reply.

The battle for the railway embankment heats up in the light of day. Shell hits close to the front and rear of our house! A shell strikes the fence of the strawberry field! Shrapnel enters Lilli's living room, goes through its wall and enters

the pantry!

An NCO [Unteroffizier = Non-Commissioned Officer] appears at the garden gate on the other side of the street, skittish, cowering, keeping a lookout both up and down the street. Soldiers come up from below [probably on the street]. He tells them: "We don't have any more ammunition, the tanks fire without let up." No soldier dares to go up and down the street anymore. They all sneak to the command post in Rinkens' house through the gardens on the right side of the street, well camouflaged. The telephone line to the command post has apparently been cut. Three soldiers hide in Barth's garden, dig two fox holes near the hedge in our garden.

The Americans blast the outposts without let up. Along with the usual bombardment of the railway embankment.

We see damage to glass and walls as never before. The street facing part of the house, which was in pretty good shape up to now, does not have a single intact window left. The bathroom can only be used for air baths.

We stay behind closed doors and talk only in whispers. Impossible to bring food to the the neighbors, as is our wont.

Chaplain Baurmann had intended to celebrate mass with us at 5PM. Since we consider this to be impossible we hold communal prayers in the cellar dormitory at 11AM. Deeply moved and devout in our adoration of Our Lady of Victory we trustingly sought her succor on this last octave [last Sunday of the novena they started on 30.09.44]. However, before our devotions reach an end the windows suddenly burst and shards of glass fly about us and land on the table. The cause was the blast from an explosion in front of the house. We're shocked, but no-one was hurt.

Rather than cooking lunch we make do with left overs. Our mood is such that it ruins our appetite. Especially when we consider that our neighbors are now completely cut off from our supplies. We very cautiously peek through the gaps in the roller shutters to see what our soldiers are up to, observe their movements to and from the command post.

They enjoy the fruit in our garden, especially the peaches, all of which they gobble down.

The soldiers spend the night in the cellar at Barth's place.

At twilight a soldier with a stomach wound is carried away on a stretcher behind our garden fence.

Many shell hits in the neighborhood today.

The gable side of Badet's house was severely damaged by two shell hits. The Haus zur Eule also took a hit. The nicest tree in front of Ebert's house was destroyed.

09.10.44

Sustained bombardment of the railway embankment over night. There's a knock at our cellar door before we've even gotten out of bed. It's Franz with several Americans who want to come in. They step to our beds and greet us in a very friendly manner while at the same time anxiously checking whether any German soldiers are in our house.

We're told that the Americans now control the entire left side of Helfferichstrasse, from the Beverau to our location.

Our amazement at the unexpected deliverance can't be expressed in words. We can hardly believe that we can now go out into the sunlight and breathe the fresh air without having to fear being shot or coming face to face with menacing scouts.

As if with one mind we all cry: Our Lady of Victory! We resolve never to forget our savior.

I explain to the American closest to my bed how it came about that we held out in our cellar for four long weeks under continuously worsening conditions, which he listened to with sympathy. The Americans searched the houses in such a decent and courteous manner that one can hardly see them as the enemy. The upshot is that we offer the fighters, worn out from the stresses and strains of the night, our bottle of cognac.

"Cognac will soon be off" says one of the Americans with a laugh, analogous to our oft repeated question "Are the German soldiers gone off?" - we still can't get it into our heads that not a single German [soldier] is now present in our defense area [the words in quotes are in the original text].

Some Americans enter Barth's cellar, where five German soldiers were staying yesterday evening, one of whom was kneeling in front of the entry with his weapon at the ready, partly hidden

in the corner. Luckily, the cellar was empty and no shots were fired. The last glasses of cognac are emptied in our cellar stairway. We wish the fighters good sailing in future. "Yeah, and that we can soon go back home, we've been away from home for two years!" said one who'd been sadly sitting in the middle of the stairs with his head down.

After the victors leave us we apply ourselves, with easy minds and full of joy, to our breakfast, which tastes much better today. Our modest meal is only half eaten when all of a sudden the Americans order: all the local residents of Helfferichstr. [which includes those in Erzbergerallee] must immediately group at the street [Helfferichstr.], because we're to be moved to Eupen for two days to get away from the german cannonade. No food is to be taken. Lock the house door, nothing in the house will be touched.

We take that literally, quickly pack a few essentials and move up to Helfferichstrasse at the woods opposite Rinkens' house.

Woe! The street is a sorry sight. Unbelievable destruction as the result of the marksmanship of both sides. More like the results of a bombing raid. The entire Beverau is now just a field of rubble.

Fallen warriors line the way. I observe an American who, pressed tight against a wall so that he's barely visible, takes a shot at a German with his pistol. The bullet has barely left the barrel when he jumps back like a lizard.

The Germans pound the area which was just torn from their grasp. The Americans in Rinkens' house yell "Down!". We hastily go down into the cellar with them, in which only yesterday german soldiers were holding out while the Americans were already in control of the upper floor. An american guide takes us in tow to escort us to our transportation. Before crossing the wide street to the edge of the woods he calls to us "Duck and run fast!"

We pass through a few streets of the smashed Beverau and are glad to reach the protection of the woods. Dead cattle lies along the way, some shot and others dead from starvation.

We see the tanks, the cannons, well hidden in the heavy undergrowth, which caused us so much grief for four long weeks. We pass by the Gallwitz-Kaserne, which suffered so severely from the german cannonade, and end up at the

Goldhausen pub, where we take a short break.

As we continue our journey a car shows up and picks up our baggage, which is a great relief.

By way of Lichtenbusch, which is partly abandoned, we reach Lintert, end point of our trek. The Americans have completely taken over the school. The Gatzweiler family has been evicted and is not allowed to enter their house.

We await our evacuation behind a small farmhouse, opposite the school. A crowd of german POWs opposite us. Worn out and miserable, lethargic and brooding. We're not allowed to approach them. We see well camouflaged cannons in a clearing in the woods which fire without let up across the city. An American takes down our names and addresses. We try again and again to find out where we'll end up. In answer: "You'll go to a neighboring village, don't know the name, or maybe to Eupen, or maybe to a refugee camp."

Two american reporters join us to get as much information about conditions in Germany and Party affairs as possible. Not knowing our final destiny makes us despondent, but that the Americans treat us in a gentlemanly and polite manner is consoling - not a sign of enmity towards or hatred of Germany is evident. On the other hand, it's clear that the Americans harbor a particular sympathy for the catholic part of the german population.

After a long wait two lorries/trucks drive up - one for the women and their baggage and one for the men and their baggage. Our route goes by way of Oberforstbach, Hallset, Eynatten, Eupen to Homburg and there to the refugee camp.

We're happy to leave the battle zone behind and to once again see peaceful communities which haven't been destroyed by the fighting.

Along the way we saw a valley meadow with a few tents and crowds of german POWs standing around.

List of names and addresses of people living in Erzbergerallee going from south to north

58 Rinkens 56 Opitz 55 Mertens 54 Nicolin 53 Ebert 52 Jacobs
50 Huellenkremer 48 Schleicher 46 Conrads (the diarist was here)
45 Ranzen 44 Barth 43 Pfannschmidt 42 Badet 40 Peetz

