



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918
Soldiers Describe Combat I: Eduard Schmieder (1914-15)

The ebullient emotions in the opening months of the war quickly gave way to a longing for home. The constant fear of death plagued soldiers on the front lines. This soldier's account of his dream is a graphic reminder of the emotional and psychological turmoil that soldiers suffered.

Eduard Schmieder, Student of Administration, Freiburg im Breisgau
Born October 10, 1890, Freiburg im Breisgau
Died near Liévin, May 8, 1916

Framonville, August 23, 1914

I smoked cigars as we lay under shrapnel fire while providing artillery cover. And in those very moments I once more deeply felt all the beauty of the earth and all the happiness that I have ever experienced.

In war, one learns how beautiful, how rich, our life is, despite adversities both great and small. One is glad for every new morning, even when one knows that it also brings new troubles. After each battle, one thanks God that one is still alive; one values life so much. But we would all, all of us, sacrifice our lives gladly for our beautiful Fatherland.

La Bassee, November 2, 1914

I should like to catch a glimpse of my dear homeland at the moment when victory is being celebrated – in my joy, I would find compensation for a few days in the trenches. I can imagine how lovely it is when the sun struggles through the thick autumn mist, stretching a blue tent above our dear mountains, and the whole of nature glows once more in color and beauty before it dies. There is blissful joy in every victory won for the sake of this beautiful German land.

Loos, December 17, 1914

My Christmas letters – however I may begin them – all bear the stamp of a softened, wistful frame of mind. I am thinking so much about the days of preparation for Christmas Eve, days I loved like few others. I especially remember just such a Sunday a few years ago. I went walking about the festive town, first alone and then with you, and a sudden strange longing came over me, one that was realized afterwards in beautiful dreams.

Such dreams and the thunder of guns, which is now disquieting me, do not go well together. There is an unprecedented, continuous thunder today, an unceasing crashing and growling and hissing and whistling.

But I must tell you about my last night's dream, which I can't stop thinking about, and which wants to fill me with superstitious fear. I was in the war, but strangely enough with the Russians. I was lying in an advance post in a castle. I came into a room, and, as I entered, a beautiful, tantalizing woman came to meet me. I wanted to kiss her, but, as I approached her, I found a skull grinning at me. For one moment I was paralyzed with horror, but then I kissed the skull, kissed it so eagerly and violently that a fragment of its lower jaw remained between my lips. At the same moment this figure of death changed to that of my Anna – and then I must have woken up.

That is the dream of how I kissed death.

Loos, February 7, 1915

The small Reclam books came. They made me very happy, and I have already read both with great joy. The result: I am full of many great yearnings. We had a couple of wonderful spring days – the sky was bright blue; the air was so clear that one could see far away into the distance; and over the trenches larks were singing, so that our hearts wanted to sing as well, as if there were no war, as if the deadly grenades could not be coming at any moment. On top of that these vivid stories from the olden days. They aroused in me an insatiable longing for a life lived to the fullest, which I can never achieve. Presently, I am so fond of life, and I would like to hold it close like my most heartfelt love!

Source: Eduard Schmieder, in Philipp Witkop, ed., *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten [War Letters by Fallen Students]*. Munich, 1928, pp. 144-46.

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