



Letters from Karl Kretschmer to His Family

Karl Kretschmer was a pharmacist posted to Kursk, Russia in August, 1942, as officer in charge of administration in Einsatzgruppe 4a. He wrote a series of letters to his wife and family which were found in a post-war investigation.

Sunday, 27 September 1942

My dear Soska,

I am feeling wretched and am in horribly low spirits. How I'd like to be with you all. What you see here makes you either brutal or sentimental...

As I said, I am in a very gloomy mood. I must pull myself out of it. The sight of the dead (including women and children) is not very cheering. But we are fighting this war for the survival or non-survival of our people. My comrades are literally fighting for the existence of our people. The enemy would do the same. I think that you understand me. As the war is in our opinion a Jewish war, the Jews are the first to feel it. Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains. You can imagine that at first I needed some time to get to grips with this...

Take care of the children for me. With longing and love in my heart, your Karl.

Kursk, October 15, 1942

Dear Wife, Dear Children,

Thank you very much for your dear letters. In the meantime, I hope you will also have received more letters from me. Meanwhile my nerves have calmed down again to some extent.

We spend the evening either playing cards, boozing, or sitting together with the boss. I have to be with the boss a great deal. I think I have made a good impression so far. The first few days, admittedly, I was tired and quickly exhausted. But then I managed to keep going through the nights and be the last to quit the field. I have already told you about the shooting, and said that here too I didn't dare fall short on the job. More or less, they have said that now, at last, they have gotten a real man as administrative officer, after the previous one turned out to be a coward. That's how people are judged here. Differently than back home. But you can trust your Papa. He thinks about you all the time and doesn't overshoot and go too far. So that's what our life is like...

It's nice that Herr Kern is going to France. I think he would have been too weak for the East, though people do change here. People soon get used to the sight of blood...

For the children, many kisses and hugs.
For dear Mom, a long and heartfelt kiss.
You are my everything,
Your Papa.

October 19, 1942

Dear Mutti, dear children,

I'm sending you a quick letter so you don't think that Papa has forgotten you...

Are the children still behaving?...working hard at school?...And how about washing hands and brushing teeth? You know how important it is not to be sloppy. Dagi too should now become accustomed to sitting properly at table and not put her elbows on the table...Teach [her] that she must study hard and always obey her parents and her teachers.

If it weren't for the stupid thoughts about what we are doing in this country, the Einsatz here would be wonderful, since it has put me in a position where I can support you all very well. It is a weakness not to be able to stand the sight of dead people; the best way of overcoming it is to do it more often. Then it becomes a habit...[T]he more one thinks about the whole business the more one comes to the conclusion that it's the only thing we can do to safeguard unconditionally the security of our people and our future...We men here at the front will win through. Our faith in the Fuhrer fulfills us and gives us the strength to carry out our difficult and thankless task.

You deserve my best wishes and all my love,
Your Papa



ABOUT THE PHOTO This photograph was likely taken in the vicinity of the Prussian castles during an outing to Berlin and Potsdam, 1943. Deputy Commandant of Sobibor extermination camp Johann Niemann is in front on the left, SS Oberscharführer Herbert Floss is on the right and next to him is his wife Danida Floss. USHMM.

Klee, E., Dressen, W., & Riess, V. (Eds.). (1996). *The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*. William S. Konecky Associates.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (1942, October 15). Letter from Karl Kretschmer to His Family. <https://perspectives.ushmm.org/item/letter-from-karl-kretschmer-to-his-family#>.