

Translation of Franz' letter with comments (*in blue*):

Tsingtau (*english:Tsingtao today: Qingdao/China*) August 1942

My dear ones!

We left Mexico on April 27, 1941 on a Japanese ship (I think it was the last one) and went directly to Japan, where we arrived in Yokohama on May 21st.

Since a lot of returnees came from North America and only 2-3 trains per week passed through Russia, we had to sit in Japan for 3 weeks until we got passports and visas to travel through Russia. We were able to start our journey through Russia on June 19 from the Russian-Manchurian border to get home finally. (*The plan of Franz was to get back to Germany by using a route from Japan through China and Russia to Europe.*)

We made another detour to Beijing for a week to see it. There were rumors that there might be a possible war between Russia and Germany and we were warned by different parties not to drive or better should wait somewhat, but we wanted to risk it and thought that we would still get through well. Two days earlier we would have been successful, because then we would have come to Moscow instead of Omsk and after a month we would have been exchanged with our diplomat via Turkey.

So after three days of a very good ride we reached Novosibirsk (it is the same cursed place where I lay in the earth barracks in 1915). (*Franz was in Novosibirsk as a German soldier in WW I*) The radio with all the loudspeakers suddenly blared through the train that Germany was at war with Russia. We were nine women and 22 men, I was the only one with his wife. We understood immediately that we were now stranded in enemy territory (for me it was the second time) and all of us understood the fact that we were at the mercy of this Russian pack.

We traveled all night to Omsk without being molested. There we were taken out of the train at 3 o'clock in the morning and our trip to Germany had finally come to an end.

We were interned for the next two months, mostly in prisons. With bugs, dirt and very bad food we came into intimate contact. 450 g black bread, an aqueous fish soup or herring made our daily bread. We went to the dog very briefly, because illness, like dysentery and water in the joints overtook many of us.

We now had a thorough opportunity to look behind the curtains of this Russian paradise. It is hard to believe the difference between Russian propaganda and reality. It would go too far to explain all of it. I hope that you will be able to speak to the bearer of this letter in person and that we will come home soon.

(The letter was delivered by an unknown bearer to Franz' brother Ludwig Schömbbs in Germany with the request to forward it to their brother Bernhard)

We were exchanged for Russians on August 22nd, after exactly two months of imprisonment. We were released across the border to the Chinese. After a long train journey via Harbin to Mukden (*both Chinese cities*) we reached Tsingtau, our (*Germany's*) former colony, where we have been living for 11 months now. (*Tsingtau today: Qingdao/China*)

Rosl became sick with typhus soon after we arrived in Tsingtau. When she was done with it, she suffered from phlebitis and was in hospital for 5 1/2 months. Since the beginning of May she is now out again, has to walk with a stick and this only for a short distance, because her leg is still swollen and hurts as soon as it is overexerted. She has massages 2-3 times a week, which is very good, but it will take a long time until it is back to normal.

We are supported by our government, as the Russians took all our valuables except for the wedding rings. It was a lot of what I had with me, but the most precious thing, the head on my neck of course, we saved. They also left us the clothes. So once again we had a bit of luck.

(Bianca, Ludwig's granddaughter, told Monika Schoembs what she had heard about the incident from her family. Franz had all his valuables with him and carried them all over his body as he traveled through Russia on a train. Soldiers came into the passenger compartment with weapons and demanded all valuable things such as money, gold, silver or jewelry from the travelers. If someone did not comply with the instructions for delivery of the valuables and, if the soldiers would find something by controlling the travelers, this person would be shot immediately. To save his and Rosl's life he gave up everything he carried.)

We lack nothing here in Tsingtau, but we want to go home. Apart from us, there are others sitting here, especially women with children from the Dutch East Indies, who were interned for 11 months and whose husbands are now imprisoned in India.

I hope the bearer gets home safe. Because of Rosl I couldn't go with him but I hope that the trip home comes true this year. *(They left Tsingtau in 1949, seven years later, and returned to Mexico)*

Are Ludwig and Bernhard *afield* and how are Käthchen, Erika and Gretel doing?

We haven't heard a word about Mom since we left Mexico. *(Franz is concerned about his brothers who probably are soldiers at the front somewhere. Mom is Rosl's mother.)*

I thought soon the Mexicans were involved in the war, but I don't think our relatives over there have anything to fear.

(Franz speaks about Franziska without naming her, probably out of a caution)

Among the women from the Dutch East Indies is a Mrs. Dr. Schild, whose husband was formerly in Giessen. She is from Mainz and has a little girl. Her husband is interned. I think they were in Java. She heard my name and I met her. She said that Ludwig had been witness at her marriage in Giessen in 1924?

I will give Ludwig's address to the bearer of this letter. Then please forward the letter to Bernhard. You can send radio greetings by the local group of the NSDAP or directly to the German shortwave transmitter (East Asia) Berlin with wording or greetings.

Please make use of it, three times a week greetings from Germany are broadcast. As addressee you only have to specify Franz and Rosl Schömbs Tsingtau China.

I've always been personally on the radio here waiting for it. Let friends of ours know that they can do the same. I don't think it costs you anything.

We had sent packages of coffee, soap, etc. to all of you from Japan before we started our journey. Did they arrive?

I hope you're all well. Say hello to all your friends, don't forget Anna Ruf, her Philipp was an active soldier.

We ourselves are healthy and we lack nothing. One could say on summer holidays at the sea, but I will do 1-3 salto when I can finally continue to travel again. I could never feel comfortable among these people and one has the feeling of being unwanted.

Do you see Bernhard at times? Ludwig can easily manage to send greetings through the shortwave radio station Berlin, but it is expected to do so soon, as we've been waiting so long.

I will now close and hope that you are all well. Pass the letter on to Bernhard and Gretel, maybe the bearer personally will come and tell you a lot more.

With best wishes and hope to see you soon again
Your Franzl

Greetings to everyone. Hopefully we'll see you back home soon. Do you ever hear of my mother?
Yours sincerely yours, Rosl