

On 3 September 1941 Friedrich Mennecke writes to his wife about a trip to Dachau concentration camp, where he inspects prisoners and selects those to be murdered¹

Letter from Friedrich Mennecke,² Hotel Bayrischer Hof, Munich, to his wife,³ dated 3 September 1941, 8:30 p.m.

Dearest Mutti,⁴

At 8 p.m. I booked an urgent call to you, and until a short time ago I was waiting downstairs in the telephone room, but I am now ensconced in room 442, so that I can speak to you from here. Hopefully you'll be on the line soon! Are you already waiting for my call? And now right away the first question: 'Was there an air-raid warning last night? And you are all right?!' Soon I will hear it from you!

Hooray! 8:45 p.m.: I already got through to you! Oh, love, the aerial torpedo sounds so scary! Hopefully something like that won't happen again – or even something worse. Always go into the cellar right away so that you stay safe for me! I told you earlier all about things. The trip here was nice, but the train was packed after Frankfurt am Main, so I sat tight in my corner and just 'watched' the whole time. I met Dr Wischer⁵ at the Schottenhamel Hotel, as well as Prof. Nitsche's⁶ daughter, Mrs Wilhelm. Right away we were told that Steinmeyer⁷ and I were staying at the 'Bayrischer Hof'. We went to the

1 HHStAW, Abt. 631A, Nr. 1652, fols. 129–132. Published in *Friedrich Mennecke, Innenansichten eines medizinischen Täters im Nationalsozialismus: Eine Edition seiner Briefe 1935–1947*, ed. Peter Chroust, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 1987), pp. 198–200. This document has been translated from German.

2 Dr Friedrich (Fritz) Mennecke (1904–1947), psychiatrist; joined the NSDAP and the SS in 1932; junior physician at Bad Homburg von der Höhe, 1935; senior physician, 1938; chief physician and head of Eichberg regional psychiatric hospital, 1939; SS-Hauptsturmführer, 1940; from 1940 advisor to the 'euthanasia' programme; army doctor in the Wehrmacht, 1943; arrested and sentenced to death for murder by Frankfurt Regional Court in 1946; died in prison.

3 Eva Mennecke, née Wehlan (b. 1913), technical assistant; married Friedrich Mennecke in 1937; joined the NSDAP in 1940; arrested in 1945 for collaborating with her husband on the 'euthanasia' programme; released the same year.

4 German for 'mummy', colloquial term for 'wife'.

5 Dr Gerhard Wischer (1903–1950), psychiatrist; joined the SA in 1927; involved in screening 'people with hereditary diseases' in Arnsdorf psychiatric hospital from 1934; joined the NSDAP in 1937; medical officer and director of Waldheim psychiatric hospital, 1938; one of the doctors involved in selecting patients from this hospital to be murdered, 1941–1943; arrested in 1945; sentenced to death and executed in Waldheim in 1950.

6 Dr Paul Nitsche (1876–1948), psychiatrist; senior physician at the municipal psychiatric hospital in Dresden from 1908; director of Leipzig-Dösen psychiatric hospital, 1918–1928; professor, 1925; director of Pirna-Sonnenstein psychiatric hospital, 1928–1939; joined the NSDAP in 1933; director of Leipzig-Dösen psychiatric hospital, 1940; judge at the Higher Hereditary Health Court in Dresden; from 1940 advisor to the 'euthanasia' programme and its medical director from autumn 1941; sentenced to death by Dresden Regional Court in 1947 and executed in 1948.

7 Dr Theodor Steinmeyer (1897–1945), psychiatrist; joined the NSDAP in 1929; SA regimental physician; director of Ellen psychiatric hospital in Bremen from 1934; worked at Marsberg psychiatric hospital and the child and adolescent psychiatric hospital in Niedermarsberg from 1939; advisor to the 'euthanasia' programme from 1940; worked at its Berlin headquarters, 1941–1943; manager of Pfafferoode psychiatric hospital in Thuringia from 1942, involved in the selection and murder of patients; committed suicide while in US captivity.

train station at 7 p.m. to pick up Prof. Nitsche (and Prof. Heyde),⁸ as well as Mrs Nitsche. They didn't come, but right after we got back to Schottenhamel, Prof. Nitsche and his wife showed up with Bauer and 'hard-working Lieschen', who had come straight from Berlin. Dr Lonauer⁹ had already arrived on Monday and is staying at the Hotel 'Rheinischer Hof'. Then I came straight here to move into my room, and it turns out that Steinmeyer and I are staying in Rooms 441–443 (two single rooms plus a bathroom). Then I went back to the train station and picked up St[einmeyer], who could barely speak because of a cold. Back here again and then back to Schottenhamel to the others. The Nitsche ladies had already retired, because they wanted to continue on to the Alps early today. We men stayed up chatting together until 11:30 p.m., including Director Dr Ratka¹⁰ from the institution in Gnesen (Warthegau), the new one working with us. I slept very well and without interruption, but first I thought for a long time about my little Mutti. This morning at 7:45 a.m., Dr Lonauer picked us up in his Olympia. We drove straight out to Dachau in the two cars. But we didn't start work today, because the SS men first have to fill out the top sections of the forms. This began today, so that we can start with the inspections tomorrow. There are only 2,000 men and the job will be finished really quickly, as they are simply glanced at as they pass by, like on a conveyor belt. At 10 a.m. we drove back into Munich and at 11 we drove on to Starnberg, where we had lunch. Then we drove to Leoni along the eastern lakefront and first visited Berg Palace, where Ludwig II lived before he drowned himself. Then further by foot, to the place on the banks where he threw himself into the water, and further still to the Bismarck tower. There we had coffee and I wrote you today's card (Steinmeyer stayed by himself in Munich). At 6 p.m. we were back here, took a little tour of the city and then sat down at 7 p.m. for dinner in the local hotel restaurant. I had beefsteak for lunch (100 grams of meat), and this evening veal liver (50 grams of meat). From tomorrow we will have lunch and dinner in the camp. At 8 p.m. the others went out because some of them wanted to go to the cinema, and I booked the call and started to write. Steinmeyer left me a note to say where he would be until 8:30. Since that is already long past, now I just want to go to the Reß wine tavern, which is right next door. There I will write some more. Kisses – ahoy!!

9:50 p.m. 'Kunstgewerbehaus inn, Eberspacher wine tavern, leaseholder: Martin Modlmayer': this is the Reß wine tavern, very pleasant and well frequented. I just had the leaseholder sent over to me so that I could speak with him. This place is 100 m from my hotel, and they only do wine, but no Rheingau, only Niersteiner and Westhofner, so

8 Dr Werner Heyde (1902–1964), psychiatrist; joined the NSDAP in 1933; assistant in the Racial Policy Office of the NSDAP from 1934; joined the SS in 1936; from 1939 professor and director of Würzburg university clinic; medical director of the 'euthanasia' programme, 1939–1941; practised medicine in Flensburg after 1950 under the name Dr Fritz Sawade; chief expert at Schleswig Regional Social Court; arrested in 1959; committed suicide while awaiting trial.

9 Dr Rudolf Lonauer (1907–1945), psychiatrist; joined the NSDAP in 1933 and the SS in 1937; from 1938 manager of Niedernhart (Linz) psychiatric hospital; from 1940 head of Hartheim 'euthanasia' killing centre; advisor to the 'euthanasia' programme; SS-Hauptsturmführer, 1942; member of the Waffen SS from 1942; committed suicide with his wife.

10 Dr Viktor Ratka (1895–1966), psychiatrist; 'ethnic German'; senior physician at Lubliniec psychiatric hospital (in the Polish part of Upper Silesia), 1928; director of the Tiegenhof (Dziekanka) killing centre at Gnesen; joined the SA in 1940; SA staff surgeon; advisor to the 'euthanasia' programme from 1941; joined the NSDAP in 1943.

Rheinhessen, and a lot of Pfalz, Mosel, and red wine. Planes have been flying constantly over Munich for the past hour, but they are German training flights; the towers of the Mariahilf Church are beaming brightly. This wine tavern is a goldmine for sure. The Reß brothers will certainly bring in an overblown rent, because there is much more drinking done here than in Eberbach and Hattenheim put together. As I said to you on the phone earlier, I will get an earlier train on Sunday. I haven't made fixed plans yet. It will be the one that you mentioned. I'll call you from Wiesbaden or Eltville. Our provisions for the trip to Warsaw, liver sausage, butter, etc., can also be got together on Monday morning so that they are fresh to take with us. Some things can also be prepared beforehand for the sandwiches, which – please – you are to make.

I want to stop now, because Mr Steinmeyer just came over to keep me company. Please, my dear Mutti, stay healthy and safe for me!!! Always go swiftly into the cellar! My biggest, dearest kisses!

Your faithful Fritz-Pa.