

This is an excerpt from a family chronicle written by Thomas Boysen, the grandson of Bruno Christoph Ingwer Boysen in 2018. The text is not intended as a scientific historical treatise and if there are any errors about the general history of the time periods portrayed, then the author begs for forgiveness.

Bruno's Childhood and Youth

Bruno was born January 11, 1896 and was an only child. His mother, Catharina Caroline Dorothea Schmidt (21.8.1873 in Schmilau, Lauenburg – 19.1.1896 in Haderslev) died only eight days after his birth. He later deplored this somewhat, saying he often felt lonely at home. He went to primary school in Vojens. His parents were not really the type to promote higher learning. But since Bruno's marks were good, maybe the teachers pushed them to send him to the "*Königliches Gymnasium zu Haderslev*" after grade four (a middle school that went to grade ten).

Every morning Bruno took the train from Vojens to Haderslev, which was only 12 km away, so he could still live at home. Once he had completed school in Haderslev however, the nearest school where he could finish his "*Abitur*", which would allow him to go to university, was in Flensburg.

Flensburg was too far to commute daily and Bruno had to move to Flensburg and rent a room.

World War I began on July 28, 1914. The general war mania in Germany also took hold of the older students. The government made them an offer to grant early "*Abitur*" (high school diploma) for those who volunteered. They would save nine months of school. Everyone in Bruno's class, including Bruno, accepted this offer. In August 1914 they took emergency exams.

Bruno's military service 1914 – 18 and in the 1930s

While his parent's generation was able to avoid any military service, because they were too young for the 1870/71 war against France and too old for World War I, Bruno's life was immeasurably influenced by both world wars. This probably contributed to his early death.

The war started for Germany on August 1, 1914. On August 8 Bruno wrote his early exams and on August 12 he joined the army. Bruno signed up with the "*Füsilier Regiment Königin Nr. 86*", an infantry regiment based in Flensburg, and stayed with that outfit for the entire duration of the war.

France had set up a fortification along its border with Germany, called the Maginot-Line. This looked impenetrable to the German military and their plan was to violate the neutrality of Belgium and attack France on its less fortified northern border. They figured that the passage through Belgium would go quickly but the Belgians put up a strong defence and the large fortresses like Liege took much longer to subdue than planned.

A member of the regiment wrote a detailed chronicle of its exploits during WWI in 1926. The narrative is fairly honest concerning the hardships and how they weighed on the soldiers in the trenches. Several documents record the battles that Bruno participated in. Based on these and the regimental chronicle a narrative is possible that should be a good representation of what Bruno endured.

In contrast to WWII, it seems it was normal for photographers to accompany the troops into the field. The pictures were given to the soldiers as postcards to send home, so it is possible that some of these pictures were staged for propagandist reasons and the appearance of calm was not real.

After only four weeks of training, Bruno left by train to join his unit. This took a few days. He arrived at his regiment on September 30. He was among around 1,000 mainly volunteers who arrived at Vassens in northern France with very little military training or conduct. This happened only a few days after the forward momentum of the German army had been stopped. Bruno's arrival to the front coincided with the establishment of a stalemate characterized by trench warfare with very little movement of the front lines. The regimental chronicle describes that the enthusiasm of the first few weeks had by that time totally dissipated. The losses were substantial; some companies had been cut down to a quarter of their original strength.

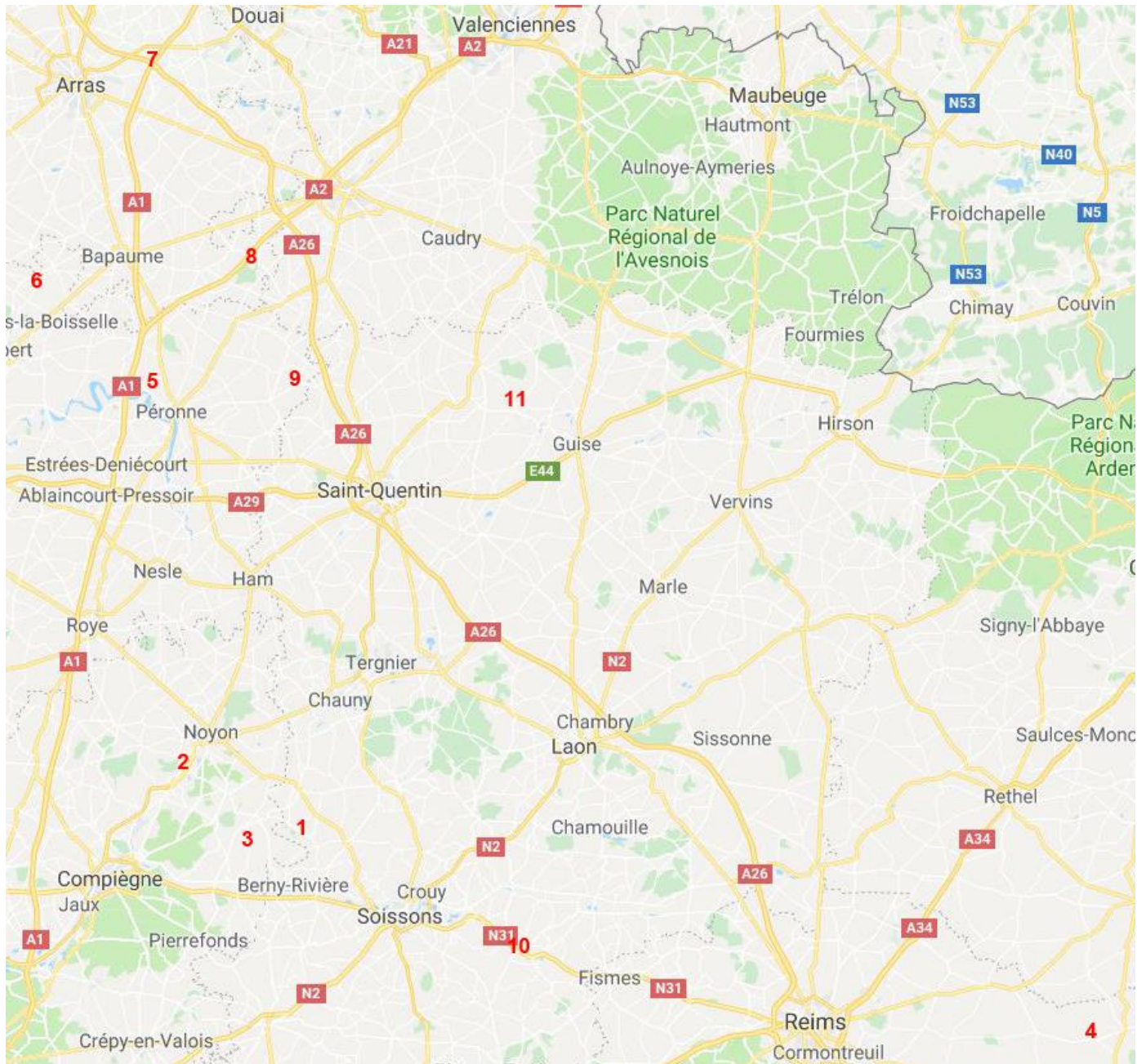
The new recruits however, brought with them renewed enthusiasm and excitement, humour and after only four weeks of training very little military capacity. The young volunteers tried to compensate for this with a heightened eagerness to volunteer for special duties.

Bruno's first week was quite calm without any serious artillery shelling. Life in the trenches was cold but the sky had cleared up. On October 9 they had to march about 12 km northwest to Noyon and then south to a line between the villages of Pimprez and Dreslincourt in the Oise valley. Strangely, substantial parts of the population still lived in these villages and suffered from losses through French artillery fire.

On October 11 he sent a postcard from Chiry (-Ourscamp), halfway between Noyon and Dreslincourt and reported that no one in his outfit had yet fallen. By then, he had already spent a day or two in the front line and was being cycled out for a rest. He was at what he called a castle but that was actually an old monastery built in the 13th century, which the German army used as a depot and rest spot as well as the regimental HQ. The monastery must have been quite impressive but was shelled by the French in 1915. Bruno writes that they were to burn it down in case of a retreat. Bruno wrote that they had lots to eat and had made a great veggie soup.

The lull in the fighting was used to deepen the trenches and build bunkers where the soldiers were a bit better protected from the elements and more importantly from enemy shrapnel. However, the second half of October was very rainy and water started leaking through the earthen ceilings.

The fresh recruits experienced difficulties as older soldiers did not accept them because of their lack of military conduct and discipline. The commanders responded to the young recruits' thirst for action by sending them out for reconnaissance patrols of enemy activities (800 to 1000 metres separated the two armies).



Bruno's main locations during WWI

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| 1. Vassens, where he first got off the train, Sept. 1914 | 2. Chiry, Dreslincourt, his first battle, 1914 |
| 3. Moulin-sous-Touvent, 1914/15 | 4. Sainte-Marie-à-Py, Champagne, 1915 |
| 5. Belloy-en-Santerre, where he was buried alive, August 1916 | 6. Grandcourt, January 1917 |
| 7. Rœux, April 1917 | 8. Havrincourt, Flesquières, May 1917 |
| 9. Templeux-le-Guérand, where he was shot in the shoulder, March 1918 | 10. Braine, Vailly-sur-Aisne, July 1918 |
| 11. Grougis, his last battle, October 1918 | |

They were sent on the first few runs with experienced soldiers, then alone. Except for some shelling and an attempted attack on the trench positions where Bruno's company was located, little happened in the following weeks.

The regiment was relieved on December 21 and did a two-day march to quarters 15 km behind the front where they spent Christmas. Before the New Year the regiment took positions in front of Moulin-sous-Touvent, just 12 km southeast of their old position and very close to the position they had held earlier in October. The trenches in their new position were badly built and maintained. It rained the first part of January and the mud was knee-deep in the trenches. The clay walls started caving in and turned the mud into an extremely thick and sticky substance. Soldiers became stuck so badly that they needed help to get out. The mud got into rifles and backpacks and there was



no dry place to store the ammunition. The mud made life absolutely miserable. Nevertheless, new trenches were built. In some places the enemy trenches were only 60 metres away.

1915

January 1915 was the most miserable month while February was a bit dryer and warmer. This provided an opportunity to improve the trenches' infrastructure with things like boardwalks etc. and get control of the mud. The protective structures were also enhanced and by April they were in good

shape. During this time there was just some shelling going on, nothing very intensive.

The photo above was taken around Easter 1915. In May the shelling intensified and in June the French attacked and broke through the regiment's central position. Loss of life was horrific on both sides. The regiment eventually stopped the attack but some ground was lost to the French. Bruno's company was on the flanks during this first attack and did not feel the brunt of it, but Bruno was sent to the field hospital in Blérancourt with a bad case of scabies. The next two weeks saw continued attempts by the Germans to regain lost ground and all troop units were engaged in very heavy fighting. Food deliveries were sparse and water became a serious issue in the last few days of fighting. It was also not possible to properly take care of the fallen and the smell of rotting corpses filled the warm spring air.

Out of a total of 3,000 men the regiment suffered 220 confirmed dead, 569 wounded, 250 prisoners taken by the French and around 600 missing, probably dead and never properly buried. More than half the regiment's men were wounded, dead or taken prisoner in only two weeks of fighting.

After these events the regiment had a quieter time and was pulled back a bit. In the second half of July they went to the front again and suffered during two weeks 46 dead and 106 wounded through artillery fire. Bruno was promoted to *Unteroffizier* (sergeant, non-commissioned officer) on July 31, 1915. In mid-August the French troops had dug tunnels underneath the German positions and blew up a trench where Bruno's 2nd Company was positioned. Bruno is not mentioned by name in the chronicle but it may very well be that he participated in the ensuing

firefight, where his company resisted five separate attempts by the French to occupy the crater the blast had created.

Until mid-October things calmed down again and on October 16 the regiment marched about 15 km to Tergnier where they were loaded onto rail cars without yet knowing where they were going. They hoped for Serbia where the war was totally different and not paralysed in trenches, but they were disappointed and sent to the Champagne region. They were off-loaded in St. Morel, south of Vouziers, about 100 km from their old position. There had just been a major attempt by the allies to break the front with an unprecedented use of material and soldiers, so the local regiment was not in a good mood.

1916

Fortunately, the situation at the new position around Sainte-Marie-à-Py had calmed down. The regiment stayed there until February 1916 in relative calm. During this time the troops rotated between 10 days at the front, then rest in backward positions for 10 days and finally 10 days on alert before they went back to the front. The trenches in this position were dug into chalk soils that did not create the sticky kind of mud that clay makes but the chalk still dissolved in the rain. And the rain was plentiful. The soldiers were kept busy digging more trenches and repairing those that French shelling had destroyed. Losses were bearable and the shelling less than in the previous positions.

There was approximately one soldier per metre of trench. They were organized in groups of 6-8 and shared a bunker where they would take cover when enemy artillery was firing. They would stay in this position for their ten-day stint and take care of all bodily functions in close proximity. Since it was impossible to clear the no-man's-land in between the enemy trenches of fallen soldiers, the stench of rotting corpses was terrible. They also had to deal with the rats that started feasting on the corpses. Out of fear of sniper fire, the soldiers had to keep their heads down during the day and would only look forward through a steel shield with an eye slot. A lot of the maintenance work on trenches had to be done at night. There were only two shifts, day and night, and they spent their down time sleeping in whatever spot they could find that was dry, or not.

Forward patrols to the enemy trench were done at night. A small group of soldiers armed with pistols and hand grenades would creep out of the forward trench and very slowly crawl through the barbed wire and across to the enemy trench. They would stop directly in front of the trench and listen for a few hours to what was happening. They could almost touch the enemy soldiers. This was done at any time of year in any weather. Bruno certainly also experienced his share of patrols.

On February 27, 1916, the regiment launched a large attack that had been meticulously planned in order to gain about 300 metres and a little hill. The position was intended to give them more cover, while also exposing the French positions. Bruno's company was among the front lines ordered to storm the French positions after a seven-hour artillery bombardment. Since almost 2000 men took part in this it seems certain that Bruno was among them. The attack was successful and they took 300 French soldiers prisoner. The regiment's own losses were 84 dead and 230 wounded. They also found lots of ammunition and materiel in the French trenches as well as plenty of good food. It seems the German rations were nowhere near the quality and quantity the French were still enjoying at this time. After two full days without rest the regiment was relieved. The Kaiser came to the front to thank the regiment in person for their good work.

The regiment earned two weeks of rest and in this period two innovations were distributed: the steel helmet in its typical German shape and gas masks. For the gas masks all beards had to be shorn off. At first there were only enough steel helmets to accommodate the most exposed soldiers in the front line. Even in 1917 pictures show few soldiers with a steel helmet. Bruno was promoted



to the second highest rank of non-commissioned officer, *Vizefeldwebel* on March 16, 1916. Two weeks later, he was transferred to the 4th Company. The photo left is from May 1916 in the Champagne.

The regiment was ordered to launch a gas attack. Gas was brought into the German positions as early as mid April but there was not a suitable wind until mid-May (gas bottles were just opened and the wind was to carry the gas to the enemy lines). In order to find out what the effect of this new weapon was, the regiment launched a limited attack to capture French soldiers. Those captured testified that over a thousand soldiers had died from the attack.

In mid-June the regiment was relocated again, this time to a quiet spot near Rethel, about 12 km behind the front. They were held in reserve to counter the large allied attack that had broken through the lines. This time was very peaceful. The soldiers were billeted in civilian houses and were able to enjoy life for a while. An important part of such rests was always the de-lousing procedure.

On July 10, 1916, the regiment received its marching orders and moved to a position just south of Belloy-en-Santerre in the Somme valley. The word they received from above was that they should not expect to come out of the next position and that the success of the entire war rested on them. They relieved the troops previously assigned to the position on the evening of July 11. An artillery bombardment started almost immediately and lasted all night. The German artillery answered but some of their shells fell on friendly positions.

Over the next few days the artillery shelling was intensive and almost continuous. The French also used gas grenades when the wind was favourable but they did little damage because of the gas masks and a fortunate wind that quickly diluted the gas. The shelling caused heavy losses but fortunately Bruno's company did not spend much time on the front line. After ten days of heavy shelling with smaller attacks almost every day the French launched a large attack on July 20. The German troops had suffered heavy losses, were tired and had not received sufficient food or water during the heavy shelling. Many trenches had been destroyed. The troops were also somewhat depressed because it was clear to them that the French had a serious advantage in terms of resources. The number of grenades lobbed at them was a multiple of what their own artillery could manage. There were practically no German planes in the sky and the French hot-air balloons and aircraft could do their reconnaissance and guide their artillery at will. Nevertheless, after initial losses of terrain, the German troops recaptured all losses by the next morning. These ten days cost the regiment over a third of its troops. The following night the regiment was relieved and finally got some rest. But four weeks later on August 20 the regiment went back into almost the same position as before.



The dog in the picture had been tangled in the barbed wire in front of their position, so the soldiers freed it. The man next to him was 36 years old and he and Bruno were bunk buddies.

The allies were still trying to create a break in the German lines and the daily artillery shelling was heavy. In the first three days the regiment suffered 26 dead and 152 wounded. On August 29 there were 18 dead and 54 wounded. The same day a heavy downpour filled the trenches with up to 50 cm of water. By August 31 the troops had gone five days without sleep.

That day a bomb hit close to Bruno's position and he was buried alive. Fortunately, he was pulled out. He was sent to a hospital in Sickendorf (between Gießen and Fulda). How long he stayed is unclear. He was fortunate that he did not have to endure the next few days on the front line because those were catastrophic for the regiment. In this second engagement at the Somme, the casualties (wounded, dead, missing and sick) were two thirds of the original regimental numbers. In the two engagements within five weeks, the combined casualties were considerably higher than the regulation regimental strength of 2927. Bruno was lucky to have made it out.

On September 4, 1916, while he was still in the hospital, Bruno was promoted to reserve lieutenant. This must have been in the works for a while. A handwritten document dated March 10, 1916, shows the village administrator of Vojens confirming a declaration from Bruno's father That he had offered to give a monthly stipend of 250 Reichsmark to his son to finance his aspiration of becoming an officer. It seems that such promotions would not have been possible without such a financial contribution.

He was also awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class on September 23, 1916. There is no further record about what he did until January 1917, so that is when the story continues. He might have been to some training in the interim.

1917

On January 16, 1917, Bruno was back with his regiment but now in Company 12. They were positioned near Grandcourt in trenches where the mud was knee-deep. The casualties from sickness now by far outweighed those at the hands of the enemy, who were now British troops. By mid-February the regiment was again relieved and deployed to reinforce a part of the so-called Siegfried-Line. The top brass had decided that it was not worth trying to hold every foot of terrain considering the devastating effect of the enemy's artillery and the difficulty Germany was having matching resources. Bombs and grenades were in especially short supply. They decided to shorten the front and set up new trenches along a line where the Germans would have an advantage. Bruno's regiment was used to expand the fortifications and also to secure the retreat of other troops to that line. Their own retreat to the new line was completed on March 17, 1917. Only a few days later Bruno was transferred to the 7th Company.

With the new Siegfried-Line considered difficult to penetrate, the allied forces concentrated on the flanks. By now the US had officially declared war on Germany even though this would not have a major effect on the fighting until much later. The regiment was able to pass a calm Easter holiday in Valenciennes but the following day they were ordered to move to the east of Arras, to the village of Rœux. Again, the opposing side was British. Their artillery fire was more systematic than the French. It started on one side and slowly moved along the trenches to the other. This allowed the soldiers to move away from the impact zone. The movement was described like an accordion and the losses were much less than in previous engagements with the French.

April 23, 1917, was another day of intense combat activity. The British attacked the German positions at Rœux and forced the Germans back for a while, with very heavy casualties on both sides. It was here that Bruno probably saw British tanks in action for the first time. They rolled up to the trenches, turned sideways and shot with their machine guns all along the trench. Right behind them the infantry cleaned up the rest. At the end of the day the Germans received



reinforcements in time and were able to push back the British, so no ground was ceded to the enemy but many lives were lost. The battle in Rœux was part of a major British offensive around Arras. The same scenes reoccurred along a stretch of trench 30 km long. It is not clear whether Bruno participated in this battle since a postcard seems to indicate that he was in Berlin for training.

After this battle the remainder of the regiment, now down to only 1,000 men, were allowed to rest. They were set up near the town of Caudry, about 13 km southeast of Cambrai. Bruno's battalion was set up in Ligny-en-Cambrésis.

During this time Bruno was again transferred, this time to the 8th Company. They moved out again around May 5 and took up a new position in the Siegfried Line, 13 km southwest of Cambrai in Havrincourt. The owner of the local chateau, a Marquis d'Havrincourt, had offered the German army 20 million francs if they left his chateau out of the combat zone. However, for military reasons, they could not avoid it and built their trenches right in front of the chateau. It seems that much later other German troops burned the chateau down before retreating.

Warfare in Havrincourt was not very intensive. Every now and then there was some major shelling but otherwise only low-level patrol activities. On July 12 Bruno was transferred to the 2nd Machine Gun Company. It seems he was made the leader of a platoon (*Zug*). The down time was spent mainly in Noyelles and Cambrai, which the regimental chronicle described as quite pleasant with a lot of entertainment value. Bruno must have benefited from this having enjoyed what seemed to be his first leave since the beginning of the war from August 3 to 16. At the end of August, the regiment was relieved and boarded a train for Flanders.

Flanders had been the scene of intense battles in July and August. The British wanted to capture Zeebrugge and Oostende, which were the bases for the German U-Boats that were causing considerable damage to the allied supply lines. By the end of August there was a lull in the fighting and for about two weeks the regiment was at rest. The new position was at the Houthulst Forest, a few kilometres north of Passchendaele. The main attack by the British occurred there and Bruno's regiment was not involved in the most intense fighting. The opposing force of Bruno's regiment was French. The new position was totally different from what they were used to. The groundwater was so high that trenches were constantly filling up. Instead of earthen bunkers scattered in various places only a few concrete bunkers (pillboxes) were available. With the help of airplanes these bunkers could be specifically targeted. They could only withstand up to 15 caliber shells.

The heavy shelling started on September 26, 1917, and further intensified on October 8, with only a few breaks. The enemy was using large caliber canons that were much more terrifying than the smaller ones the regiment was used to. On October 9 two of the regiment's battalions were relieved, including Bruno's, just before the French launched their attack. Yet once the attack had started, they had to get back into the fight. The losses were again significant but the Germans prevented a breakthrough, even if giving up some terrain. The number of casualties on the allied side was much higher than on the German side.

On October 10 the regiment was finally relieved and eventually loaded onto a train to the east. The destination was Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. The train trip took five days and they arrived in Vilnius on October 21. They spent a month there without seeing any action. Indeed, the mood looks quite relaxed in the picture on the right. Since the Bolsheviks had taken power in Russia on October 7, and they seemed open to an armistice or peace talks, there was little priority for keeping the regiment in the east. On the western front the British had launched a major attack at Havrincourt and had pushed the Germans back to Noyelles. Unfortunately for the regiment they were ordered back to the western front and boarded a train on November 21. By the time they reached the west the main thrust of the British had been stopped and they left the train in Mulhouse in Alsace, a part of Germany since the war against France in 1871. Again, the regiment saw no action there and



stayed until February 9, 1918 (see picture left). The time was spent in training, especially attacking exercises. Bruno was again able to take leave from December 16 to 29. Whether he was able to go home during this time is unknown.



1918

Their new position was just five km southwest of Havrincourt, so they were back into trench warfare. This lasted only ten days, during which they suffered no deaths, just a few wounded. The German army was planning a major offensive. Once they were relieved and behind the front the soldiers could see the preparations coming to fruition as huge columns of materiel were being brought close to the front. The chronicle says that the prospect of finally going on the

offensive after three and a half years of defensive combat raised the men's spirits. One wonders whether this was just part of the propoganda.

On March 21 the Germans attacked with 750,000 troops. Bruno's regiment was a part of the centre-piece. They charged and broke through the British lines. This went on for three days and they advanced 18 km before they were relieved and placed into the third line while the attack

continued. On March 30 they were back in the front line again. The German attack stalled and the regiment spent most nights in the field, either waiting as reserve or in the front lines, but always exposed to shelling. On April 17 the regiment was finally relieved, but only for a week. They were positioned in another tough spot where the British artillery was dominating the scene. The obvious material advantage of the allies continued to affect the soldiers' morale. They figured that the German attack had stalled mainly because of a lack of artillery support prior to attacks. The British lost enormous amounts of ammunition and equipment during their retreat but this did not affect the intensity of the shelling. Their reserves were formidable and highly superior to the German ones.

"Luckily" for Bruno, he saw very little of all this. He was shot in the left shoulder (with the bullet stuck in his shoulder) on the first day of the offensive near Templeux-le-Guérard. He was somehow transported to a hospital in Charlottenburg, now a part of Berlin, Berlinerstraße 183. The next month he had left the hospital. The stamps in his pay book indicate that he was in the 3rd Machine Gun Reserve Company of the IX Army Corps in Flensburg. Maybe he was able to go home to recuperate. Bruno did not rejoin the troops until June 11 and returned to the 2nd Machine Gun Company, 2nd Battalion. The same day, he was awarded the Iron Cross I Class. A month later he received the Hanseatic Cross.

He joined the regiment while they were enjoying what is described as the nicest time during the entire war, a rest station in Tournai in Belgium that offered good entertainment, good lodging and above all quiet. The picture on the right is from August.



By mid-July the German momentum had dissipated and the allies were attacking again and gaining ground. Bruno's regiment was positioned near Braine and the monotony of trench warfare had begun again: guard duty, shelling, fixing trenches, guard duty. Sporadic attacks were launched by both sides, only this time in great heat.

The German army decided to shorten the front again and the troops were pulled back. Bruno's Company was positioned east of Soissons in the village of Vailly-sur-Aisne. During the night of 16-17 September Bruno's 2nd MG Company repelled multiple attacks by large patrols. The next day the battalion left for a period of rest. On the 28th his battalion secured the retreat north for the rest of the regiment.

The regiment had by then been in active duty for two months without the chance to have a bath or be de-loused. Nevertheless, the troops continued their defensive battle and managed to repel enemy advances, for the most part. In mid-October the troops retreated again and Bruno's battalion was positioned at Grougis, still in the same general area. On October 16 the allied shelling continued during the entire day. The next day the neighbouring regiment suffered a breakthrough as the connection between the two companies had been weak to begin with. The French were able to get behind the 1st Battalion and took the entire battalion prisoner. They then proceeded uninhibited and surprised the 2nd Battalion (Bruno's). In the panic that ensued large parts of it surrendered, including a few of Bruno's MG troops. The battalion staff bunker was

directly hit by a shell, leaving the battalion without guidance. What was left of the regiment retreated further back and then held their position for a few more days before they were relieved.

The rest period brought additional troops. The chronicle writes that these were already somewhat infected by revolutionary propaganda. The mood in Germany had started to turn against the war because of its duration and the number of fallen soldiers, losses that were unprecedented in living memory.

In the next few months Bruno's position changed a few times. He held a staff position for a while and then a few times he was adjutant for either the 1st or the 2nd Battalion.

On November 3 the newly formed 1st Battalion again fell victim to a breakthrough on its flank. It was surrounded and taken prisoner. The regiment's last engagement with ground troops was fought during its retreat on November 7. During the further retreat to the Belgian border they suffered from aerial attacks and lost still more men.

On November 11 a truce was finally declared and the war was over. The regiment had suffered a total of 3,996 deaths. It started marching back the next day, spending three or four days marching and then a day to rest. They arrived on December 20 in Kassel, where they boarded trains. On December 25 they reached Flensburg and marched into town. There was just a small group remaining from those who had originally enlisted in 1914, and most new recruits had no longer come from Flensburg and its surrounding area. The mayor held a speech at the Südermarkt and from there they marched to the garrison and dropped off their weapons. That was the end of the regiment.

After the war

Bruno continued to socialize with former comrades and maintained ties to the military after the war. An association of former officers of Regiment # 86 met regularly at the "*Hotel zum Kronprinzen*" in Hamburg. The owner, Ernst Loelf, had also been a soldier in the regiment and is mentioned once in the regimental chronicle. Every spring they organized a large event bringing together members living outside of northern Germany who would come with their spouses.

At some point, Bruno seemed to have been secretary of the association.

The main reason for this association was the camaraderie with peers from around Flensburg and of course, the shared experiences during the war. It seems surprising that one of Bruno's friends, Hanssen, was also a member, despite having a strong Danish orientation. His father even published a patriotic Danish newspaper in North-Schleswig and sat as the only member for the Danish minority in the *Reichstag* (parliament) under Kaiser Wilhelm.

According to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was only allowed a standing army of 100,000 troops after the war. When Hitler broke the treaty in 1935 and reinstated compulsory military service for all young men, Bruno briefly considered a career as a professional officer in the new army's administration as his business prospects did not look too good. But in the end, he resisted. The resurrection of the "*Wehrmacht*" was widely celebrated by the Nazi regime who organized a parade with the Burgplatz in Flensburg acting as the grandstand. Soldiers marched past the last commander of Regiment # 86, *Oberstleutnant* von Drigalski. He was a small man with a pince-nez and a spiked helmet dating from the Kaiser period. He lived in Rahlstedt, close to Hamburg, and Bruno and his friends called him Isidor. His signature is on Bruno's discharge document.

Instead of applying for a full military career, Bruno joined the army reserve. During the years 1937/38, Bruno participated in a number of four-week training stints in the new *Wehrmacht*. These were entirely voluntary and it is difficult to understand today why he did it. 20 years after the second

world war, very few would have considered voluntarily attending training courses in the *Bundeswehr*.



Bruno during volunteer training, 1937/38 (9th from left)

Bruno was not the smart and sporty type as the pictures from that period clearly prove. His business was in a phase of rebuilding and he could not really afford to be away for four weeks at a time. Why did he do this? Maybe it was the close bond to many friends from his old Regiment # 86, who also went on these training stints. His private remarks about the “brownshirts” do not indicate that his motives could be attributed to being a true believer in the Nazi cause. It is also possible that the visible economic improvements of the time, peace and order in the streets, falling unemployment rates, the propaganda success of the Olympic Games in 1936 and the fact that Germany had shaken off the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, may have contributed to his enthusiasm to participate.

Bruno liked socialising. He liked being together with people, be it with family, at work, at the tennis club or among soldiers. He liked to party, drink and sing and that part of being a soldier must have appealed to him.

WWII: Bruno gets drafted, discharged and goes undercover in Copenhagen

On August 15, 1939, two weeks before the war started, Bruno was ordered to appear for duty. However, he managed to postpone that date because his business required him to attend the world famous “*Leipziger Messe*” (trade show), which was scheduled for the end of August. Bruno actually went to Leipzig but he had to return early after a telegram ordered him back.

On September 1 the war started. The German propaganda announced that the Polish army had started shooting, but that was obvious nonsense. There was no equivalent to the enthusiasm that accompanied the beginning of the war in 1914. However, there was also no public criticism or opposition to the war. Since people had to assume that there were snitches everywhere, most did not dare to voice even the slightest critical opinion. The newspapers, radio, teachers and public speakers all strictly adhered to the party line, which was 100% support for the state and the war.

Bruno was assigned to the Infantry Regiment 90 in Wentorf (near Hamburg) and became Company Chief of a reserve unit that trained new recruits. In this capacity, he was given a beautiful horse that had been confiscated from a wealthy lady from Hamburg. Her husband was the local boss of the well-known company “Maizena” and Bruno and Sophie actually knew the family socially.



A rationing system for food was immediately put into effect and all houses had to darken windows at night. Butter had been rationed even before the war. Bruno’s car, a new Mercedes 170 V, was confiscated.

The Polish troops and cavalry were no match for the German industrial war machine that attacked from the west. And in the east Stalin invaded Poland on September 17. The war in Poland was over after three weeks and the country was cut up between Hitler and Stalin. Bruno was not involved in any combat. He was stationed in Hamburg until 1940 and regularly went home in the evenings.

The next step in Hitler’s war plan was to invade Denmark and Norway, which he did on April 9, 1940, despite both of them having declared themselves neutral. Denmark surrendered within six hours of the invasion.

In 1940 Bruno was transferred to the staff of an army division in Viborg, Denmark and was responsible for logistics. Judging by the stories he told about this time, it must have been quite pleasant. Interestingly, Bruno kept a picture in a photo album of the gravesite of one of the few Danish soldiers killed during the Invasion. This probably shows his strong emotional connection to Denmark.

On August 23, 1941 Bruno was discharged from the *Wehrmacht* holding the rank of captain. The official version was that his blood pressure was too high. This was probably true but also an excuse, because somehow Bruno had become involved with German military intelligence, the “*Abwehr*”, and was assigned to go undercover in Copenhagen. His task was to organize the collection of intelligence on whatever he could find out about the economies of enemy countries

through contacts and agents in Sweden. In a later Danish document that exonerated Bruno from having committed any war crimes, it says that Bruno was working for the *Abwehr* since May 1941, so either this was an error or he had started working for them already during his time in the army.

It took a few months to get organized and Bruno resettled his family sometime during the winter of 1941/42 to Copenhagen. Sweden had maintained its neutrality. Nevertheless, there were many Nazi sympathizers in Sweden. This probably made Bruno's task a bit easier. He already had contacts there because of his previous business activities. Every two months he had to travel to Hamburg for a debriefing at the headquarters of the spy agency in the Hamburg General Command.

Bruno bought a very nice house in the Ibstrupvej that still stands today. There was a mortgage on the house, so he probably bought it with his own funds. However, it is possible that he was granted some money from the *Abwehr* to ease the move to Copenhagen.

Bruno used his connections not only to gather intelligence but also to obtain articles that were not easy to come by in Germany. He always travelled with suitcases filled with goodies and shared these with friends in Hamburg. The family maintained strong social contacts with Danes and met very few Germans. Most often those people would be business contacts.

Compared to most European countries Denmark remained quiet for the period immediately after the German occupation. At first, resistance took the form of musical gatherings where thousands of people would sing Danish songs celebrating Danish history and especially the valour of Danish soldiers in the war of 1864. The German occupation authorities thought of the Danes as little Aryan brothers and allowed the Danish government to continue administrating the country. In March 1943 they even allowed parliamentary elections with a multitude of parties. This became an opportunity to declare opposition to the occupation. The voter turn-out was 89% and 141 of 149 seats were won by the coalition of parties opposed to the occupation, with the social democratic party gaining the most seats. The price to the Danish state for these concessions was that the communist party had to be outlawed and the known communists arrested. As well, the Danish economic activities were redirected towards Germany. Denmark's agricultural contributions to the German war effort were especially significant.

The elections emboldened the resistance movement and acts of sabotage started to become more frequent. After an act of sabotage at the Odense shipyards in 1943 the facility was occupied by German troops. The workers laid down their tools in protest. The protest spread and developed into a general strike. The German military then issued an ultimatum to the Danish government to prohibit strikes and gatherings of more than 5 people and implement other repressive measures. When the Danish government refused, the Germans took over the government of Denmark, ending the relative freedom the Danes had enjoyed until then.

Interestingly, General Halder, the former Commander-in-Chief of the *Wehrmacht* (his successor Keitel was a defendant at the Nuremberg war-crimes trials and was subsequently executed) visited Bruno and Sophie at their home. It is not clear how Bruno came to know a man of such importance. Halder had been sacked because of some dispute with Hitler. After the war it turned out that quite a few members of the *Abwehr* were actively opposed to Hitler, but whether Bruno knew about this, is unclear.

Some people in the *Abwehr* had been involved in the assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944. An atmosphere of fear was being worsened by daily reports in the media from the infamous "People's Court" (*Volksgerichtshof*) that had been set up specifically to deal with the aftermath of the assassination attempt. The accused had little chance of being acquitted and were given draconian sentences. When Bruno was ordered to Berlin in early August 1944 for a meeting with a security body investigating the role of German officers (old guard WWI types) in the

assassination attempt, great anxiety befell the family. Sophie was understandably very worried. Bruno assured her that he had no involvement or knowledge of the plot, but even an unjustified suspicion by one of the interrogators could have been enough to cause big problems. Fortunately, all went well and he returned 5 or 6 days later.

When it became obvious to the German military that the Danish resistance and the Danish police were collaborating, the Germans devised a trick to round up the police force. They organized a fake air raid on Sept 19, 1944. Standard procedure in such cases demanded that all policemen had to report to their duty stations. However, this time German troops were waiting for them. Practically the entire force was arrested and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Most survived, but not all. Bruno had good contacts to the Danish police officers Helmut Krause and Bjørnsen, who he frequently saw to renew his residency permit. Bruno asked a GESTAPO commander whom he knew well, whether he had sufficient clout to get them released. It seems he did and the two were released fairly quickly. Afterwards, Helmut Krause maintained very good relations with the family. Bjørnsen however, did not. Klaus assumes that Bjørnsen feared that he might be accused of collusion with the Germans, while Krause did not care. Krause even continued this relationship with Bruno when he was imprisoned after the war. Unfortunately, his Danish connections were useless since Bruno was a British POW.

The GESTAPO commander who managed the release of the two Danish policemen was Hans Hermannsen, aka Onkel Hans. He was a detective with the GESTAPO. Onkel Hans had started with the police in Flensburg in 1922, where he worked in the political section, persecuting communists etc. His party affiliation was with the social democrats. When the Nazis took over in 1933, he was immediately fired because of his political affiliation. In 1935 the Nazis reorganized their efforts to fight communists by centralizing all political police units in one organization. This is probably the context in which Hans Hermannsen was asked to rejoin the force. The Nazis reinstated him and put him in charge of chasing communists who had fled to Denmark. As a part of this deal he became a member of the NSDAP. After the occupation of Denmark, he was transferred to Copenhagen, where he continued his hunting of communists.

Bruno once asked Onkel Hans during a visit whether the GESTAPO would torture prisoners. Onkel Hans denied this and said that they might slap them around a bit but would not torture them. It does seem that the Copenhagen GESTAPO was fairly lenient with many arrested resistance members, most of which were released after a short custody.

Whether Onkel Hans was actively working with the Danish resistance or was lenient because of his own political views is not clear. He was never interviewed after the war, so we know nothing about his motives. Onkel Hans was arrested after the war but due to his good standing with the Danish resistance he was very quickly released. He stayed in Denmark for a period and was finally sent home in 1946. With the Cold War just beginning, he again joined the police force and took up his old job of persecuting communists. He died in 1952.

Bruno had informants who were allowed to travel to Sweden and obtain information through media or other sources. There was always some illegal traffic between Denmark and Sweden, including Danish resistance fighters and Jews.

The main Danish underground opposition to the occupation was the Holger Danske resistance movement. This group had a safe house or base diagonally across from Bruno's house on Ibstrupvej. The building was a normal residence and a family lived in it. The father had been a sailor on a Danish or American merchant ship and was killed when it was torpedoed by a German U-Boot. One of his two sons was in Sweden with the Danish Brigade that was preparing for combat in Denmark, if that was ever to happen. The other one was named Bent Anders Koch.

The family later asked itself often, whether Bruno had ever been targeted for assassination by the resistance. Killing German citizens was a tactic employed by the Danish resistance after the Germans had forced the Danish government out of office and they played a tit-for-tat game with the GESTAPO. Dines Bogø determined that Bruno had indeed been on the hit list. But he was taken off it because they thought that an assassination attempt would raise suspicion about their safe house in Ibstrupvej and cause trouble for themselves. Bruno was well aware that something was going on in that house but out of sympathy for the Danes or self-preservation he never revealed this to his superiors. If the German authorities had ever received information about those activities, the house would have been blown up and the resistance would certainly have suspected him of being the informant, probably bringing down some retaliation on him. The resistance killed about 1,500 people in total, Germans and Danes, between 1943 and 1945. The Danish victims had all been suspected of collaborating with the occupiers.

Dines Bogø, a Danish historian, mentioned Bruno on his website and gave quite a bit of personal information, including his code name Major Busse. However, the picture that went with that name was of a different person, a man in a SS uniform. After further investigation, it turned out that there was a SS-Officer also named Bruno Boysen stationed in Copenhagen at the same time as our Bruno. Interestingly, the SS-Bruno was from Bredstedt, where Bruno's father had been born. However, it was established by a local historian in Bredstedt that there was no family relationship. For Bruno's descendants it is important that there is no confusion about these two Bruno Boysen's, as has often happened in the past in publications on the internet. The pictures below show the SS-Bruno. The SS Bruno Booyesen was born on 20.03.1913 as Bruno Friedrich Moritz Boysen.

These are the career details of this "false" Bruno Boysen: Bruno Boysen, geboren 20. 3.13 Bredstedt, SS-Nr. 21 358, 5.40 Hstuf.. u. Chef,8./Art.Rgt.3, 11,41 Hstuf. u. Chef,4./Art.Rgt.5, 1.45 Stubaf. i. Pz.GR.24, Moore, laut DAL SS 1.10.1944 Nr. 4030 Partei-Nr. 753 462, Führerschule Braunschweig 1935, 21.6.42 Stubaf, EK I, Verwundetenenabzeichen, sonstige im Felde erworbene Auszeichnungen, Ehrendegen und Ehrenring des RFSS, wird am 1.10.1944 beim III. SS-Pz.Korps geführt, laut DAL der SS v. 1.10.1942 Nr. 2976, Stubaf. beim SS-Hauptamt, DAL der SS v. 1.10.1943 Nr. 3948, Stubaf., im Original „SS-Hauptamt“, handschriftliche Ergänzung: "SS-St.Kdr. Kopenhagen".

Unfortunately, there are still, it seems mainly Danish websites that stubbornly get it wrong, like these two: https://da.unionpedia.org/i/Bruno_Boysen https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Boysen

I wish they would correct their sites.



After the war in Copenhagen

On May 4, 1945 the German troops in Denmark surrendered. The following day Bruno was picked up by the newly sovereign Danish authorities because he was a German national.

Directly after the war there was a lot of hysteria and anti-German feelings, which sometimes took a violent turn. Many Germans were denounced, mobs marched here and there and people were rounded up. Fortunately, the family was never really harassed by anyone the entire time they spent in Denmark.

Bruno was released by the Danish authorities within about a week. He continued his business activities as well as he could.

One September day in 1945 at 7.00 in the morning, the house was surrounded by plainclothes policemen. Two of them entered the house and asked the maid, Mine, where Bruno was. They were very civil. She led the policemen right into the master bedroom, where Bruno and Sophie were still in bed. Bruno was first taken to the Vestre prison. A few days later he was transferred to the Alsgåde School that was being used as a temporary prison for Germans.

Bruno's identity as an under-cover agent had gone unnoticed by the allied intelligence services. A scan of an official document listing all known and suspected agents of the *Abwehr* in Copenhagen dated March 1944 is on the internet but Bruno is not on that list. Bruno was very careful not to wear his uniform in Copenhagen. In fact, the uniform always stayed in Flensburg. His guests, who at times were German military, also never wore uniform when they came to visit.

The reason why Bruno was arrested was because Hans Hermansen, the GESTAPO officer, was cooperating with the authorities and had passed on his name to the British and/or Danish authorities. After he was arrested at the end of the war, he immediately started supplying information on German activities. Maybe he held on to information about Bruno until the first wild hysteria in Denmark after the war had subsided. Anyone being arrested in the first days after the war risked being sentenced to death. In September things had already largely calmed down and maybe since Bruno's identity was bound to come out somehow, he volunteered this information. However, this is speculative.

No charges were ever laid against Bruno. Instead, he was officially being held by the British to testify in proceedings against Danish citizens who were being accused of collaboration with the occupying forces. To Bruno's relief, none of his former "informants" were ever convicted. A few of these cases made it into the newspapers.

Late in 1945 or in January 1946 Bruno's helpfulness and maybe also his naivety got him into trouble. Most of the prison's inmates were German and did not have any local contacts, while Bruno had his wife regularly bring him additional food. With the help from some Danish guards who he kept happy with a few little presents, he smuggled food into the prison, which was then distributed among the inmates.

One of his former employees, Andersen, had opened up a café after the war. Bruno asked him to store his remaining stock of merchandise that Bruno's company had imported during the war in this café. The merchandise included dinnerware that was welcomed by the guards as a thank-you for allowing the smuggling of food.

Bruno promised one of these guards a mocha set and made a drawing where he could pick it up. Whether someone saw this or whether he had simply been denounced, the guard was arrested. The tabloids made a big affair out of this and it was said that the drawing was part of an escape

plan our father had masterminded. Even though this was proven not to be true, Bruno was still sentenced to six weeks of solitary confinement, which he spent in the “citadel”.

One newspaper story called the incident a “fantastic spy affair”. Bruno was also linked to the suicide of a Danish double agent, Mogensen, to whom Bruno had contact and who at some point did visit the house in Copenhagen. One of Bruno’s former class mates was charged and went to court and Bruno was interrogated as a witness. The man was acquitted.

Bruno saw all this as a gross injustice. He had just wanted to help people and make their time in prison a bit more comfortable. It is difficult to believe how Bruno could see himself as entirely innocent. After all, he had lived a double existence as a foreign spy in an occupied country.

After the solitary confinement, Bruno was fortunately transferred to Trekroner, a sea fortress at the entrance to the Copenhagen harbour, built in 1787. About 15 other senior German officers were being held there, as well as the last German ambassador to Denmark.

The final chapter in Denmark is the confiscation of the family’s real estate. Bruno still owned his father’s house in Vojens as well as the house in Copenhagen. Shortly after the confiscation, the family was extradited to Germany. It seems certain that the allies had long planned to confiscate all German and Japanese property in other countries. The Danes had little to say in this matter and simply referred complaints to the British. Bruno had miscalculated here. He had not played it safe and sent all valuables to Germany before the end of the war.

In May 1947 the British authorities decided that Bruno was of no further use to them. A government official came to the house and demanded that Sophie hand over the keys and said that they were being extradited. He was fairly nasty and explained what they were allowed to take with them, which were personal items, and things that would not sell easily at auction.

A month later Bruno followed the same route after he was released from prison in Copenhagen. Bruno was provided with a letter from the Danish police that declared that Bruno had been arrested only to serve as a witness against Danish collaborators and had committed no crimes. Quite rightfully, Bruno placed much importance on this declaration of honour.

Bruno lived in Hamburg where he tried to build up a new business in import/export. In September 1950, he suffered a debilitating stroke and died on April 20, 1952 in Flensburg.