

## **Plunder and the Black Market: An Eyewitness Account of the 30-Years-War**

*This is an excerpt from the diary of a cobbler from 1634.*

After capturing Regensburg the king of Hungary [*the future Emperor Ferdinand III*] travelled up the Danube with his armies. When Duke Bernhard [*of Saxe-Weimar*] and Colonel Horn [*for the Swedes*] realized this, they set about burning and laying waste Bavaria, arriving at the Danube near Launingingen. Since they were in great haste to occupy Württemberg before the Imperial troops reached it, Duke Bernhard immediately crossed the Danube. His army had been ruined in Bavaria, and since his riders had nearly all lost their horses, he arrived in our territory of Ulm with his whole army.

Since we did not regard him as an enemy, and since we had not been warned by our authorities to regard his army as such, we had hidden nothing, keeping horses, cattle and all our meager household possessions openly about us. But Duke Bernhard's troops broke into our land and plundered us completely of horses, cattle, bread, flour, salt, lard, cloth, linen, clothes and everything we possessed. They maltreated the people, shooting, stabbing and beating a number of people to death. No settlement was strong enough to resist, although several tried it but they fared even worse as a result of the attempt. We tried to resist here in our village of Weidenstetten [*about four hours by horseback to the north of Ulm city*], but we failed, although we held out bravely for two days, driving off several fierce bands of riders, by keeping all our cattle and horses in the churchyard and all our belongings in the church. But while we were holding out at the church, they set alight the village and burnt down five houses and five stables.

Once that had happened, each one of us went to look after his own property, and common defense collapsed. Several hundred riders appeared, plundering and taking everything they could drag or carry with them. Cattle and horses all went, at least those of them they could catch, and very few beasts were left behind. This happened at Weidenstetten on 10 August. [*Ulm territory claimed the loss of 2,000 horses to Duke Bernhard's troops on this day alone*].

On 22 August my fifth child was born to my dear wife between one and two in the afternoon. He was given the name of Bartholomew and christened on the same day, a Friday.

After we had survived this theft and plunder, and since it was just harvest time, we went and cut our corn and carried it home as best we could since we had few horses left. The summer crop was not ready but unripe.

Duke Bernhard's horsemen and foot soldiers moved into the Riess district around Bopfingen and Neresheim, where they struck camp and were joined by the Württemberg levies [*ausschuss*], and the Rhine count is also

expected to bring his troops to join Duke Bernhard. In the meantime the Imperial army reached Nördlingen and besieged it. Both sides faced each other for a fortnight. The imperialists tried to attack and storm Nördlingen several times but failed. Duke Bernhard tried to help the defenders but little did he realize in what strength the Imperialists had appeared. And so he went with three hundred riders and cut through the enemy straight into the town of Nördlingen, which now became Swedish. [*In fact it was not Duke Bernhard but Gustav Horn who undertook this defense.*] They defended themselves so bravely that the enemy could achieve nothing.

But after both sides had skirmished nearly every day, Duke Bernhard and Gustav Horn marched their armies out and bravely attacked the enemy on 27 August. Their numbers were too small since the Rhine count had not arrived with his troops. The Imperialists were very powerful and outnumbered the Swedes two to one. At first the Imperialists were beaten and driven back, yet this did not last and the Swedes were thoroughly defeated. Since all was lost, Gustav Horn captured and Duke Bernhard wounded, his army was ruined and it fled. Fugitive riders reached us already by midday. When we understood what had happened, we wasted no time and anyone who could run took to his legs in order to reach Ulm city on that same day. We appreciated the fact that the enemy was now after us, and the Swedes were no better. What they could steal they took with them as they fled, and so we had both sides on our neck.

We had to leave all our belongings behind. We were fortunate to escape with wife and child, and just had to leave the rest. As soon as the battle was lost, the king of Hungary attacked the town of Nördlingen, which surrendered for lack of further aid. The town council and burghers begged him for mercy, which was granted. Nördlingen then became the first Protestant Union town after Regensburg to fall into the hands of the king of Hungary.

After this the king of Hungary moved into Württemberg with his army. There was a great scare in Ulm, since it was feared that he was also after the city. Together with the citizens we were ordered to clear the beautiful wood in front of the Gate of Our Lady and everything was brought into the city.

Because the troops were in pursuit of their enemies, they laid waste to everything, plundered the beautiful little town of Giengen and burnt down. The town of Geisslingen in Ulm territory weakly tried to defend itself. It was overrun and several hundred people were massacred. The pastor had his head cut off, and the place was devastated. The duchy of Württemberg shared a similar fate.

In sum, I can not exaggerate the dreadful events from those times. They went straight through our territory and their night camp was held between Neenstetten and Weidenstetten on the Blumenberg [*village where the author lived to the north of Ulm city*]. Our hamlets were badly damaged and the king of Hungary himself stayed the night in Weidenstetten.

On 17 September we returned home [*to Weidenstetten village from Ulm city*] to harvest what the riders had left of our summer crops and also to sow a

few fields with new corn. On 19 September my son Bartholomew died between seven and eight in the morning, aged four weeks. May Almighty God give him a joyful resurrection on the last day of judgement and grant him eternal life.

On 4 October many Imperial troops arrived at Günzburg and Leipheim, plundering the surrounding countryside. Everyone had to flee to the city [of Ulm] once more, and we stayed the whole winter there. There was real hardship, famine and dearth. We were crowded together and lived in great want. Hunger and price increase came at the same time and after that the evil disease, the pest. Many hundred people died of it in this year and also in the next.

On 7 October while we were in flight my son Thomas died at Jungingen between eleven and twelve at night, and he was buried there the next morning. May Almighty God give him a joyful resurrection on the last day of judgment and grant him eternal life. This is the third time we had to flee from home.

On 30 November my stepmother died between five and six in the evening. On 1 December between four and five in the morning my sister Barbara died and on the next day my sister Dorothea died between six and seven in the morning. On 18 December my sister Ursel died between eleven and twelve at midday. May Almighty God give them all a joyful resurrection on the last day of judgment and grant them eternal life. On 29 December I returned home to Weidenstetten where we survived the winter.

In this year corn was very expensive and the Ulm imen was 9 to 12 gulden, rye was up to 8 gulden, lard 7 batzen [*almost one half gulden*] per pound, and salt cost 10 batzen per metzen. A calf cost 12 to 15 gulden in the city. . . .

*Another entry from 1646:*

Since so much had been stolen by the troops, taken into Ulm city by army suppliers and soldiers, and purchased by citizens and peasants, the clergy preached earnestly against the practice and condemned it from the pulpit. It was also banned by the authorities several times, but that helped very little and it did not stop, instead everything could be bought that way. And since army suppliers bought up and carried away all the corn and bread they could find, hoarding took place, driving prices to 5 gulden, when the whole previous year corn prices had hardly risen above 3 gulden per imen, and rye had been as low as 20 batzen and at most 24 batzen.