

# INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR PEACE

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British Red Cross Commission  
(Civilian Relief)  
B. L. A.

July 8th 1945

Dear Derek,

## **Report 14, RS / 109 / I. V. S. P.**

Here we are at Peine near Brunswick, very much in the heart of Germany and but 17 miles from the Russian sector. Bilthoven is 330 miles away and though it is only four days ago that we made our many goodbyes our stay in Holland already seems a closed happy phase of our venture.

### I.V.S.P. IN HOLLAND

The move to Germany prevented us from having the meeting which might have inaugurated some plans for I.V.S.P. work in Holland. Time alone will tell whether the impression the Unit made on Dutch friends will develop into creative I.V.S.P. activity but it is certain that much goodwill was established and that we, from our part, will try to maintain contact through personal letters. It would be very opportune if you and Donald could write personal letters - or a general circular - to the Dutch friends we have listed in past reports, welcoming their cooperation and giving your ideas on how as individuals or in groups they might develop our idea and enclosing as comprehensive a set of literature as you can muster. When we left, the Boeke School came to our home along with other friends and there were many tokens of esteem in the form of silver spoons, pipe pressers, roses, book markers with BILTHOVEN and the I.V.S.P. badge embossed on tiny wooden shields, goodbye songs and, as usual, much handshaking. I am enclosing a copy of a letter from Julia Boeke to the Unit and a report of a conversation David had with Nico de Graan.

### IVSP IN GERMANY

Though moving has become very much part of our job and packing, conveying and unpacking are met with as little fuss as a day loading and delivering Hospital Units, the thought of moving into 'enemy' country, which has been a closed book to the rest of the world for over five years save for newspaper impressions and those gained in Holland, must have raised speculations and not a little trepidation in most of us. How would we fit in with non-fraternisation, Military Government as distinct from Civil Affairs, DP's and Germans, armed protection? - The Guides had been warned not to stop at the roads and if possible to get small arms in case an emergency should arise. The last four days have settled many of our qualms and the position at present is 'easy'.

On entering Germany, my first reaction was to feel more at home in the countryside. In contrast to the flat, avened, straight roads of Holland, so often of patterned stone blocks, we were soon jolting along very badly surfaced tarmac roads, bordered with ditches and thick hedgerows, which turned and dipped in almost hilly country. It reminded me of Wharfedale, save that instead of firs on the lower reaches and clear skylines the forests covered the hill-tops.

Where the valleys broadened it was pleasant to see hedgeless blocks of clean crops in long narrow strips and not to feel the views blocked out by the well spaced fruit trees bordering the roads. It was difficult to fit this dusty, sleepy village life with its timbered and eaved buildings and lumbering pairs of oxen pushed on by narrow hay carts into the conception of the superefficient Automan State. The contrast was to come later.

Adults either ignored us or observed our passing indirectly. Children stared openly but passively, though we got an occasional smile. The general atmosphere was restrained and subdued and one wondered whether this was from choice or the only reaction to the general and individual rebuffs.

After Holland, the appearance of a high standard of living set on foot unsympathetic reactions - everyone seemed to be well fed and attractively dressed; buxom girls rode polished bicycles (with blow up tyres) and children were plentiful and bonny. It looked as though it would be a difficult task to connect them and their style of life with Nazism and Dr. Banning's photographs of starved bodies of children in Rotterdam.

The towns and cities will no doubt present a different picture, for though we have skirted the areas of intensive bombardment we have seen enough to be sure that housing will be a difficulty this winter and if the land looks rich at present, it may not be so for long with the withdrawal of D.P. labour and the permanent loss of manpower which Germany must have suffered.

The lines of German troops one saw in Holland was a depressing sight, but the presence here, wherever one goes, of individual soldiers forever walking with drab bundles, on roads and through towns, must contrast unhappily with our power to travel unarmed freely, to occupy, to stroll through their towns on sunny evenings - symbols of conquest. However meekly we carry ourselves, the very presence of khaki will be an irritant only to be softened by recognised good work - and here is our difficulty, for we work only with and for DP's. Up to the present most of the supplies for DP camps - food, medical and clothing - have come through local civilian channels, so that, to a certain extent, the better our job is done the more local communities will feel the pinch. The Germans will not have the satisfaction of seeing the improved conditions in the camp, for they are closed both to troops and civilians. But they do see and hear of the worst side of the DP's - groups of swaggering young men, well dressed in looted clothes, anxious to make their weight felt in their changed circumstances - and odd cases of looting, killing of cattle, rape hooliganism will be multiplied. Our best work for all concerned will be repatriation as quickly and efficiently as possible - but even if and when this is done, there are the many without nationality and the wish to return.

To do the job well we shall need more than an emotional impetus achieved through a picture of helpless and homeless millions who have suffered much, for this is far from being the product of forced communal living without real social roots - a nearer type would be the product of industrial slum life; built to fend for himself with the emphasis on expediency. But the above is based on ephemeral impressions gained during a short stay at Osnabrück and brief glimpses of life at the Hermann Göring Works and Peine, and will most likely be modified when we get into very close contact with the camps.

#### DP's AND THEIR WELFARE IN THE BRUNSWICK AREA

It is estimated that there are between 50.000 and 115.000 DP's in the Brunswick Area, most of them are billeted in camps on and around the Hermann Göring Works. One of the officials told me that those who had worked for H.G. had received good wages and rations and had reasonable facilities provided for their welfare. The Hermann Göring Welfare fund is at any rate providing for their maintenance - it had a credit of 1.000.000 marks and is meeting many of the needs of the DP camps. The work also produces petrol for the 250 vehicles entailed in the organisation. Food and clothing, etc. is supplied by the civilian authorities on demand, so that the set-up is rather unofficial.

The responsibility for the running of the DP camps in the first place fell upon the Occupying troops, and in certain areas - our own for instance - this is still the case. Within the limits of experience and personnel available for the section of their responsibility, a good job has been done - I am told that the conditions were pretty chaotic when the British took over from the Americans.

*NL > D 45 07 08 - 1 03*

One difficulty appears to be the constant changing of detachments due to the changing face of the British and Russian demarcation line. A special area detachment has been set up to coordinate the DP

work, but this is very new and its officers are constantly being recalled to their own battalions - also the area is not yet defined and this latter point has placed our Unit in its present uncertain position.

When we reached the Hermann Göring Works it was late in the evening and no one knew of our coming, the officer having been recalled to his detachment and replaced only the day before. As nothing could be done that night, we happily made the best of Hermann's private suite of offices (complete with bathroom) and saw the new officer next morning. The most permanent part of the organisation was 4 U.N.R.R.A. teams, one of the leaders of which had been placed in charge, over the change-over. He informed us that the previous commanding officer had allocated us to a large Polish camp (1.200) at Peine and, after a picnic and a detour on account of damaged bridges; we arrived there in the late afternoon. Our first stroke of luck was to overcome the obstacle of billets by getting a very luxurious house vacated only two hours before by 8 R.A.S.C. officers. One gained confidence in the quality of our administrators after 10 minutes chat with the Town Mayor on the problems of his job, but the story will have to wait till we come home. When we arrived at the house the German occupants (prior to capitulation) were busily packing up odds and ends - though they were expressly forbidden to take anything from the houses ("I shall have to make an example of someone" said our guide in unconvincing tones). We felt that we had done very well under the circumstances for the owners were uncongenial Nazis. The house is very comfortably furnished, though the style is probably recognisable as Heavy German - you should see the carved desks and sideboards, the Old Gold wallpaper, the ornate and complicated chandeliers and stiff oils of moorland

We were directed by the Military government to the battery to which we were to be attached, but, due to the proximity of the buildings, were royally received by an R.A.M.C. detachment which arranged for our rations and servicing and it was only through later conversations with the battery Major that we discovered our mistake. But the arrangements made were quite acceptable to both sections so the present position is : - That we have been sent outside the area covered by the special DP detachment to which we should be attached, we have had happy relationship (though they cannot be considered official) with an R.A.M.C. detachment for supplies and a battery for work, and that we are now awaiting the decision of our real detachment at Brunswick as to whether we shall remain in this probably unprecedented position. In view of the relatively good arrangements made for DP's in this district it seems likely that we shall be moved again in the near future.

There are four DP camps in this district catering mainly for Poles and Italians and named respectively Detroit, Chicago, Albany and Michigan. The largest is Albany which has a small hospital run by four Latvian nurses and visited daily by a German Doctor. Patients are brought from the three other camps and serious cases are taken to the civilian hospital in Peine. The hospital was short of sheets and we have been able to help them with a roll of fine quality balloon fabric from Hermann Göring Works. Today Mary and Winifred have made a tour of the camps and should have an interesting report if and when they come home - they have been invited for the evening to the battery's Officer's Mess'. At present, no registration has been attempted at any of the camps in the Brunswick area, but cards are on their way and no doubt relief teams will soon be getting down to what will be a big job. Certain it is that papers and plans of U.N.R.R.A. and other bodies on procedure and planning in D.P. camps are not applicable in the present situation, in which there is still plenty of scope within the essentials - order, food, shelter and clothing, preventative and curative medicine. Occupational activities have been mentioned, but mainly illegal ones such as spirit distilling from petrol, potatoes and sugar.

U.N.R.R.A. is asking for, and is likely to get, a greater measure of control of D.P.'s in this area. So far we have had a very limited view of its scope and capabilities, but at the risk of appearing reactionary I think most of us would say 'give us the army every time' - its officers, almost without exception seem to have a genuine concern to do their jobs efficiently, there is a likeable comradeship and easy approach coupled with a general youthfulness.

*NL > D 45 07 08 - 1 04*

U.N.R.R.A. seems too cosmopolitan to work as a team - this may be the British prejudice for of the team lists I have seen there has been only two Englishmen among them, but you would doubt this if you had seen the retired Brigadier-General leader of the team we met at Osnabrück - he had commandeered five bedrooms for ten people when there was an acute shortage of sleeping space and appeared to spend a measure of his time battling bravely in atrocious French with a pouting Parisian - dark and luscious.

### ODD AND ENDS

We have two German women cleaners and a real male cook! We accepted the suggestion of the Town Mayor to take on domestic staff at the expense of the borough, for it seemed the only way to prevent three people being tied up with domestic duties. Fraternisation, in the course of duty - has started in real earnest today as our three helpers speak no English and it looks like being an ideal way of learning German. They seem very pleasant and acceptable people and I think the chance of a more intimate contact will do them and us a great deal of good. Our standard of living appears to be on the up and up and no doubt this gradual infiltration of services and good living will need watching. It was, however, very satisfying to have the refinements of a special meal this evening, with coffee jugs and tureens and the atmosphere of orderly leisure over the whole repast. Archie would doubtless condemn the false basis of the relationship but there seemed to be a real pleasure in pleasing and Fred and those who have done yeoman service on the domestic front enjoyed a change.

The Hermann Goering works are a fantasy of industrialism run riot. Covering about 8 miles square they are a huge blot on very pleasant country south of Brunswick leading to the Hartz mountains. They form an unhomogeneous mass of buildings, derricks, railway lines, huge overhead pipe lines, telephone wires, electric cables, chimneys and towers of many shapes and sizes. The architecture is drab and formless and the emergency hutment's for foreign workers add depression to ugliness. No doubt the impression is emphasised by the great amount of damage done by bombing and the riot wrecking by the D.P.'s - but at their most powerful best they are a poor conception. They gave me the overwhelming impression of the breakdown of a civilization - I got a similar one when we were escorted to the sea front in the deserted section of the Hague. In 41 camps spotted amongst this desert of rusting metal live the D.P.'s and a number of prisoners of war. England has similar areas but they are excused by the unplanned growth over half a century - it will need many men of Blake's vision to obliterate and rebuild in the beauty of good ends.

Amitiés,

Ramsay