

# INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE FOR PEACE

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Please reply to: -  
D. L. Sainty  
Relief Section 109  
British Red Cross  
B. A. O. R.  
26th November 1945

Dear Derek,

## Report 31

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The Job : To continue the story from last week -

### Ambulances over the border.

Permission was definitely refused last week, and so it was with some surprise that the girl who does the interpreting for the Army at the frontier heard the Russian Captain a couple of days ago ask why the Ambulances hadn't been sent across. They went yesterday for the first time, to Heiligenstadt, a town about 12 kilometres from Besenhausen, but not far from the frontier. Yesterday was not a very satisfactory day for the ambulances as a whole, for the organisation at the other end was not good, and two out of three loads brought were of people who were rather better than the people who would have been picked up at Besenhausen if the Ambulances hadn't gone to town, so to speak. Some doubts were expressed among those who had been with the buses as to the value of running the service, but as (a) the organisation ought to improve, (b) there is a transit camp nearer Besenhausen than is Heiligenstadt, and (c) the people we picked up at Besenhausen obviously must come from somewhere on the other side of the border, it was decided to send our German-speaking spearhead this morning to see what could be done. Ian and Marian and I went with only one ambulance, but didn't get as far as Heiligenstadt. We were stopped at Arenshausen, which has a station and the transit camp aforesaid, by a Russian soldier and a German doctor, the first to bring us before his Commander, and the second to solicit our aid for a man who couldn't walk. The visit to the Commander was without incident; after waiting several minutes until a Russian could be found who spoke German we were let off without a stain on our characters, escutcheons or b. d. tunics. In fact when he knew what we had come for he was quite happy (this being a Commander entirely separate and distinct from him who had given permission for the trip, you understand). The doctor took us thence to a largish house used as a Red Cross depot and there we picked up the man who couldn't walk (he was paralysed), several other old people who couldn't walk at all and some more who could only walk with difficulty. Then in order to make sure of a second trip we didn't ask about the organisation on that occasion (the roads were bad - we had our first snow yesterday) but came away with a full ambulance. We hope to be able to do a regular and satisfactory run daily to Arenshausen and when necessary to Heiligenstadt from the day after tomorrow to pick up the worst cases who should by then be specially picked out for us.

Our two or three trips to date have enabled us to check three statements made very definitely by the Mil Gov here when we first came and since :

(1) There is a queue on the other side of the barrier stretching for anything up to 20 kilometres. This is not so. There is a queue of about 6000 People from 9 to 12, and some stragglers along the road to Heiligenstadt. Beyond that of course we don't know.

(2) There is no provision whatever for the people on the Russian side, except that the Russians do try to do something for the ex-Wehrmacht men. Not true. There are transit camps, staffed by Germans but very stringently regulated as to the details by the Russians.

(3) The Russians have disbanded the Red Cross in their zone. They have overlooked the border district, if that is the case. Red Cross doctors and nurses function in all the places we've been to, and the Red Cross ambulance service through the frontier was one of the first things which made us think it possible (in spite of Mil Gov prognostications) that we might be allowed to assist.

Rumours, etc. :

The cutting down of the exchange to 1500 a day did not come off, thank the Lord. So the organisation of the dormitory camp was cancelled, and the next day but one we were asked to get it ready again for another reason - that all eastward bound people had to have their papers stamped to the effect that they weren't allowed to come back if they went into the Russian zone. A great deal of time has been wasted since then (not by us) in stamping papers of all conceivable kinds belonging to 100% of the people going over. Wasted because it's impossible to check. However, the latest is that the whole business is to be put on a regular system whereby people wanting to go east will register with their burgermeisters and go through a transit camp (not here).

Just been interrupted by the advent of Der Prinz von Sachsen-Weimar, (preceded by about 3½ minutes by a Faithful Retainer, young,) who wanted to get to Göttingen to see the Oberst there, being anxious about the fate of his mother and sister who are going east while he goes west. We've just seen him and his wife on the bus for Göttingen which arrived opportunely. Says he's the nephew of our gracious Queenmother. In addition to his anxiety about his family he was much exercised about his luggage, which we had to tell him we couldn't transport for him and he'd need to leave in Bremke. Ah, well.

Can't think of anything else important enough to report on now, and this has gone on long enough anyway.

All the best,

David

P.S.

Statistical summary of Friedland movements (Friedland employs a statistician who has a glorious time with graph paper and coloured pencils - I quite envy him):

<u>From 16.11.45 to 22.11.45 -</u>	Civilians : Evacuees	24.146	
	Refugees	5.802	
	D.P.s	43	
	Soldiers :	<u>1.023</u>	<u>31.014</u>
	Men ) excluding	9.508	
	Women ) Soldiers	14.820	
	Children ) & D.P.s	<u>5.620</u>	<u>29.948</u>

29.991 were transported by railway from Friedland, of whom 85% went with special trains and the remainder with normal trains. The other 1000 odd presumably found their own way (the equating of the number taken by train and the number of civilians is coincidental, unless the statistician has made a bloomer).