

British Red Cross Commission (Civilian Relief)
Relief Section 109 / I.V.S.P.

**Report on Journey with Refugee Train from Friedland Camp to Bad Segeberg.
Tuesday / Wednesday 5th and 6th Feb. 1946**

The journey was undertaken in order that we might find out something about the travelling conditions and the behaviour en route of the Refugees and the reception arrangements at the other end.

We left on the 5 o'clock train from Friedland in a compartment reserved for us by the R.T.O. The train was a long one made up of an assortment of coaches and luggage wagons, all of them in very bad condition. Few had any windows, some were minus doors and some had parts of the roof missing. Our compartment was about the best one on the train, having a good roof, good doors and whole windows. There were over 1.400 people on board.

We travelled a quite a good speed to Göttingen where we changed engines, and then on to Kreiensen where we changed engines again. Kreiensen is a station about 30 miles from Hannover, and it was there that people first began to desert the train hoping to make their own way back to their homes in Hannover and the Ruhr.

From Kreiensen we by-passed Hannover and branched to Lehrte where we changed engines again. Quite a number of people left the train there as it was evident that we would not be going any nearer to Hannover and the West. It was then between one and two a.m. and bitterly cold, even in our luxury compartment, and despite the fact that the temperature did not fall below freezing point. It is impossible to imagine what it must have been like in compartments without windows during the cold spell a few weeks ago, when the temperature was frequently 12 or 13 degrees below zero. (Centigrade).

We spoke with several families quitting the train, and found that they were nearly all making for the Ruhr. One lot had a stretcher case with them and several had small children who were shivering and crying. These were all people who should not really have been on this train at all, but who had presumably boarded it in an effort to get away from Friedland at any cost. It was impossible to keep account of the number of people who left the train but it was not considerable.

Apart from the inconvenience of dragging luggage and prams along the track to the station and the uncertainty of making a connection with a West bound train, there was a very great danger from other trains passing. While we were there, a good train carrying no lights was shunted on to the adjoining line without any warning being given of its approach.

The guard travelled in our compartment between Lehrte and Uelzen. He explained that bad coal was responsible for the frequent engine changes as the furnaces became choked up with clinker and had to be completely cleared out after every seventy or eighty kilometres. We asked what chance these people had of getting a lift to the Ruhr and he said that they would almost certainly get one in the morning although it would be in open coal wagons.

We had the usual engine change at Uelzen, and again at Hamburg, where the train was joined by a posse of English soldiers whose task it was to make sure that no-one left the train at or near Hamburg. The train travelled right through Hamburg and then the engine hitched on to the other end and pulled it back again and out a different way. We had frequent stops at signals and the soldiers had quite a busy time.

Between Hamburg and Bad Segeberg there were some hills, and we had several stops in order to get up steam. We travelled on the footplate of the engine for part of the way and listened to bitter comments by the driver and fire-man on the quality of the coal.

On arrival at Bad Segeberg the train was split into two, and each half drawn by a goods engine up the main street of the town and across the fields to the camp.

At first sight, the reception arrangements appeared to be rather inadequate, the people being expected to make their own way into the camp unaided with all their luggage, but when we raised this point with the English Officer who is Camp Commandant, he assured us that there are ambulances and a camp staff who give assistance to people who need it. There was a terrible lot of mud about - more than at Friedland even and the whole camp is really too small and inadequate, as in addition to its function as a Refugee clearing centre, it is also used as a clearing house and demolishing centre for returning German POW's.

On arrival, Refugees are once again registered, deloused and medically examined. It is the aim of the camp authorities to clear the people on the same day as they arrive as possible, those who have or had homes or friends in the area being returned to them or as near to them as possible, and the homeless ones being shared out amongst the various Kreise in the area. It is the responsibility of the appropriate Landrat to see that billets are found for them. It was emphasised that people arriving at the camp who really wanted to get to West Germany are treated as homeless and billeted out locally owing to difficulties of transport and we were requested to do all that we could at Friedland to make sure that the people caught the right trains.

We were told that there had recently been 15 cases of Typhus all of which had occurred among people from Friedland, and we were asked to be as careful as possible offer the medical examination and delousing at our end.

After being shown the camp and having had a chat with the Camp Commandant, we caught a Duty train to Hamburg and another from here to Hannover where we changed on to a civilian train for Göttingen. Owing to bad connections, the return journey actually took us longer than our journey out but it was infinitely more comfortable.

As a result of our journey we should like to emphasise the following points :

1. Considerable hardship is caused to the Refugees by lack of windows in the coaches of the train and it might be possible to do something ourselves about making emergency repairs particularly as it is more or less the same train that are used on the same journeys each time.
2. It should be emphatically pointed out to the Refugees that they gain nothing and stand to loose a lot by getting on a train whose destination is somewhere other than that to which they want to go to.
3. There should be some responsible person or persons in charge of each train who would be able to give information about the journey and destination to anyone who needed it.
4. Despite the fact that there are several stops on the journey there is no official meal halt or period when the refugee know that they could safely leave the train for a few minutes without there being a danger of it leaving without them. Such a halt is really essential and if arrangements could be made for a hot drink to be served at the same time, it would be very much appreciated especially by people with small children.
5. Owing to the fact that luggage has to be humped about the camp by refugees at the conclusion of their journey, it would be as well to allow them to make their handcarts with them whenever possible.
6. If arrangements could be made to have identical registration forms used at Friedland, this would avoid the unnecessary duplication that takes place at present.
7. Arrangements might be made to issue ex POW's with official release papers at Friedland, in order to avoid this being necessary at all the various destinations.

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(Diese Fahrt wurde von Stan Slee und Ian Meldrum unternommen.)