

UNIT FOUR
NEWSLETTER NO. 6

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As will be seen presently, this will justify the title of the "Friedland Newsletter", but first we must bring any regular readers we possess up to date with our movements. The team's sojourn at Bremke (of four months duration) is now but a happy memory; we left at the beginning of March with the knowledge that the general job we had gone to do had been reasonably well accomplished, and the German organisation adequate to cope with the job, and the specific tasks still requiring attention were in the care of a Salvation Army canteen section. But we did so with regrets for a district where we had made many friends and passed many pleasant hours. It is to be hoped that the promises to revisit these parts will prove possible to fulfil; we know that a ready welcome awaits us, particularly from the Jütte and Holtermann households.

Now we have moved to Westphalia, but we have undergone more changes than that of scene. It has been necessary to split the Section into two parts to cover the side area for which we are responsible; and our personnel has also seen alteration. We have lost Finlay, to the gain we are sure of the latest work scheme in Norway; we shall miss the Baron David, though no longer a team member, keeps popping in and out in the course of his onerous duties as Liaison Officer and Senior Representative. Douglas has followed him as Team Leader. Alan's fame has spread and he has left us to take up a roving commission as artist to the Red Cross Commission we wont promise a coloured number with samples of his work. Now we await some new arrivals, and meantime welcome the assistance, temporarily of Peggy Milne (from Unit 7) and of Jack Penney (from Unit 5).

So, over to Friedland.

I.V.S.P. Arbeitsdienst 24.2.46 to 25.3.46. We have already had official reports to write on this scheme, but feel that statistics of the number of huts erected or demolished, drains dug or cleaned, man hours worked and so on are out of place here. Let us say only that in this first scheme on German soil since the war, forty men students from Göttingen University, and one sister from Bremke and a close friend of the Unit, served for varying periods from one week upwards; that three of the Unit - Ramsay, Marian and Fred - spent the month there : and let that be the last of figures.

As to work accomplished; this is always the least interesting side (is this heresy?) but anyway, and despite wintry conditions for the first three weeks, we got through quite a lot, helped to improve camp facilities and amenities, assisted the refugees directly at a period of considerable stress and succeeded in leaving a good impression. The Military responsible for the camp have expressed a strong desire that we should arrange a further service in the summer; and every cook knows the best compliment is a request for a second helping. These students were good workers and keen; they shocked the ex-forestry workers by insisting on working with snow falling; sometimes the desire for speed left finish a little wanting; and one night they finished helping refugees with luggage at 11.30 p.m. - this after (and before) a 7.00 a.m. rouse and 8 to 5 o'clock working day.

We all lived together in a large Nissen hut - cook-house common, recreation and dining room combined - and had two smaller huts for sleeping and storage. One was thought to be enough till the last week we found ourselves with 24, as against the estimate of 15 volunteers (numbers again!). Marian and Anneliese were a tower of strength on the domestic side; the meals they turned out of the mixture of military rations, German ordinary and heavy worker rations, and extras out of Welfare stocks, were quite marvellous and a revelation to the Germans, accustomed to much less fare. Turns were taken by the men volunteers by helping with the domestic duties - the sisters expressing ever a preference for the ex-Navy men, though all displayed a higher standard of personal and communal cleanliness, tidiness and punctuality. (It was an 'Engländer' who generally held the wooden spoon for rising last, though only once - the last morning - was it necessary to delay the moment's silence to let him sit down in time for breakfast).

Sparetime activities were varied, discussions, arranged and impromptu on politics, ethics, religion and a wide field; table tennis (till the stock of balls - 2 - was exhausted), chess, bridge, and skat (a popular game with them, but only one of us made the effort to master it with indifferent success); sing-songs round the stove. relief. Perhaps the house meeting should not come under this heading though, as often in I.V.S.P., it generally afforded some light relief. We did go outside the billets too. Each Sunday we had a walk together: the district around is delightful woodland paths whether in snow or in bright sunshine, and these were most enjoyable occasions, helping us to know each other better, and giving the opportunity much interesting countryside lore and tradition. Each week saw a visit to the Göttingen theatre; the last was the crowning effort, with twenty-three of us occupying a complete row in the stalls. And of course dances and other social "dos". Before going to the camp, the German Red Cross chief and other authorities had asked us to try to encourage some sort of social life among the camp staff. We started off with an enjoyable dance with the Red Cross sisters - a group of women who are doing a grand job in the camp under difficult conditions and with few opportunities of relaxation; the following week, and in deference to the preponderant theological element in the Section we made it a party, with singing, games and sketches. Then we aspired higher; Marian arranged a programme of music and a conjurer and we put on contributions of sketches and singing to provide a concert which apparently met with great acceptance by an audience of 250 camp workers. We hope we inspired them to go on and do greater things on their own by showing what could be done with little or no resources or equipment.

To finish up we have another social and dance, entertaining the sisters and members of the camp staff, to which the students contributed a skit on camp life and a song potpourri about life in the scheme, with congratulatory references to the English comrades (though they were not above pulling our legs too). Such leg pulling was one aspect among others, typical of our communal life, which made this to like other schemes we have known. Generally speaking the students showed a more serious turn of mind than their counterparts at home; most were older and had of course spent a considerable time in the forces (and before in the Hitler Jugend). But there was still on the job, in the dormitory, at meal times the sort of chaffing that oils the wheels. The month improved our German no end; but an innocent mistake of Fred's who used the word for 'parsley' when he meant 'pardon' provided the week's best smile; whilst Ramsay's inimitable phrases provided several ready catchwords. Several results are certain from Scheme No. 1, we feel sure. First a number of lasting friendships - we expect to see several of our fellow workers down in these parts and hope to maintain pen-contact. Second, the certainty of abundant for future schemes. All are counting on opportunities for service in the summer vacation and if it is possible to enable some to go to other countries their will be a ready response. Then we expect to hear of the formation of an I.V.S.P. group in Göttingen, one to which practicable experience of a scheme will give strength and purpose. These are tangible results. Perhaps the essentially democratic nature of the scheme will also have an effect. For dealings with the Military people and to give a standing with camp authorities occasionally recalcitrant, Ramsay had to take the lead, but apart from this the decisions of the weekly meeting were given effect to, and the ideas of all considered on every point. There were some who came with minds prepared for such ideas; and others in whom a good deal of the philosophy remained and were probably less receptive. But all were agreed on the principle of International co-operation and anxious to make a success of this scheme as a prelude to others. We were told that at the first an expectation of being subjected to propaganda expressed or implied, had raised a barrier; this broke down on the realisation that the I.V.S.P. 'Deeds, not Words' meant some thing. Discussions on our aims and ideals, and the opportunity to put forward our ideas, arose naturally later from the volunteers own questions.

We must end on a note of regret. We realise the limitations of our efforts; and that this one scheme has not solved all problems. Only a particular class of society was represented; though the fact that we roped in different faculties - jurist, philosophical, medical, theological - which have normally little or no contact, was an achievement. But circumstances forced us to rely for volunteers from contacts we could make, and from classes who had the leisure and could give it voluntarily. We intend to use every effort to widen our scope. Already two Red Cross sisters have expressed the desire to join in a future scheme. The going may be slow, but the class barriers, as well as the international ones will also be broken down in time.

May 15th 1946