

BERLIN - NIKOLASSEE 12. BIS 28. JUNI 1946

Extracts from the diary of the team leader of Relief Section 143 IVSP (Berlin) relevant to the running of the first international work-camp in Berlin, June 1946.

The chief Berlin German Voluntary Welfare Societies have formed a committee for the welfare of returning ex-prisoners of war. The chairman, Herr K. is one of the staff of the daily paper "Tagesspiegel" which has already raised a large sum of money for building homes for those "Heimkehrer" as the ex-POW's are called. The first home-building scheme is planned for the Nikolassee, one of the outer suburbs of Berlin, and IVSP together with its German equivalent IFDF (Internationaler Freiwilliger Zivildienst für den Frieden) have offered to help with the buildings.

In April we applied for permission from Miss B, Berlin Military Government Education Officer, to start a German IVSP (IFDF) group in Berlin, commencing with week-end work-camps, "stump-grubbing" to provide fuel for old people. In May, specific Mil.Gov. permission was sought for the Nikolassee project and for our IVSP team and members to be involved, and to work and live on site with the German volunteers. There followed an intensive period of contacting possible sources of volunteers. A handbill was produced.

Tue Jun 11

Herr K. of the Tagesspiegel and I inspected the site and I moved in for the night - into one of the wooden huts, set aside by Frau K., Red Cross sister in charge of the "Volksküche" (Community Kitchen). There are five large hutment's which are to be repaired and will house 150 Heimkehrer, and the first few of them will help in the reconstruction work. These six or ten helpers will live with the six to ten IVSP (IFDF) volunteers and share their communal life, thus forming a working IVSP group of about 20 people.

Wed Jun 12

After breakfast supplied by Frau K., volunteers began to arrive - Herbert, Willi, Anneliese and Trudi, and, as day-visitors, Gretchen and Hilda. The first job was to dig a draining trench around the hut to prevent its floating away. The torrential rain of the previous night scarcely abated all day. We all ate Mittagessen in the Volksküche. Then I went in search of Herr V. of the Bauamt and Herr F., the architect. For this I used the Team's car. We were promised four "Fachmänner" (skilled workers) who would arrive at 8 am next morning. The two greatest difficulties are Equipment - I already brought plates, mugs, pots, jugs, basins and most of our woodworking tools. But brushes and brooms, light bulbs, nails and screws, a cooking stove, pails and dusters - all these had to be bought. It took the rest of the day with a car, and I began to learn something of the desperation of the ordinary German housewife, going from shop to shop - I clocked up 119 km - for the handful of things; and they do it on German rations!

The second great difficulty is Food. The obtaining of emergency ration cards would take time, so army rations had to be called in to fill the temporary void. In the evening we had a visit from three other members of the relief team, and Trudi was persuaded to give us a few songs. By adroit management each person could sit near the little stove in turn and avoid the drips from the roof.

Thu Jun 13

It took Frau K., and me most of the day to sort out the food question, and I learned a great deal about the complications of the German rationing system. Today work started in earnest - four "sisters" and three "brothers" - more men were expected, but they did not arrive. It is now getting very difficult to find a dripless spot in our hut - the lights have fused once again because of the rain which has been pouring down all day and all night.

Fri Jun 14

Raining hard. Gruel for breakfast, bread and "Coffee". We have put handles on the tools, sharpened them, blunted them and sharpened them again. All nails have to be straightened out and used again. One old hut has to be taken to bits in order to provide partitions for the other five.

Sat Jun 15

Herr K. of Tagesspiegel wondered why there were so many women on the work-camp. Oatmeal soup, potatoes and lettuce, followed by cherries - our main meal of the day.

Sun Jun 16

Heavy rain continuing. Sweet gruel; bread, sausage, lettuce ...

Mon Jun 17

Herbert turned up drunk at 9 am; his wife having delivered a baby yesterday; but the others are an understanding lot.

Tue Jun 18

Carrying wooden sections - Herbert and Willi doing the skilled jobs. In spite of everything, one or two partitions are now in place. Sawing wood for the fires is a full time job for someone. Little gadgets are being made and in a day or two, especially when the rain stops and the sun comes out again, everything will be fine. Food monotonously the same and scarcely adequate.

Wed Jun 19

Paint arrived, creating a happy atmosphere; then K. from the Tagesspiegel and V. from the Bauamt - and expressed pleasure at our progress. As a consequence a much-needed sense of direction has been given to the work.

Thu Jun 20

Work going well: mainly straightening nails. Herr K. worked with us in the afternoon.

Fri Jun 21

Working steadily.

The team leader's normal duties took him not only around Berlin, but also to the British Zone, where he was able to scour for fresh sources of much needed tools. Unfortunately the car was ransacked on the way back.

Wed Jun 26

Major crisis - doubt has been thrown on the possibility of making the place into a Heimkehrerlager.

Thu Jun 27

Called on Herr K. Not very satisfactory. Decide to close down the camp temporarily until the firm decision has been made on the future purpose of our work at Nikolassee.

Fri Jun 28

Farewell party, which began stickily, but ended well.

July 2nd

A visit to Dr.L. of the German Red Cross; he said he knew nothing of the hold-up at Nikolassee, and he demanded an explanation from Herr K. The latter promised one by the end of the week. I now learn that Dr.L. has been made to resign from his position as legal adviser to the Red Cross; and also that Baron von S., a director of Tagesspiegel (whose wife is a high-up in the Red Cross) had been made to resign from his position as from 9 days ago.

July 15th

Frightful meeting with Herr K. and Herr A. about Nikolassee.

*Aus einem Manuskript von
Basil Eastland : "This was our life 1945 - 1948"*