

143 / I.V.S.P.
British Troops Berlin
B. A. O. R.

I.V.S.P. scheme
Berlin - Nikolassee
10th Sept 1946

REPORT No. 3

The volunteers who served in the last "Decade" of the scheme were somewhat older than those we have had so far. They comprised : Ilse Kaufmann (52), Elisabeth Bonatz (39), Friedel Franzke (39), Agi Willke (21), Astra Willke (18), Sigrid Eberhardt (22), Bruno Fenske (26), Gerd Grabner (19). Betty Dinwiddy, from RS/143, was there full time and Douglas Sowerby spent as much time there as possible after attending to the team's business in Berlin. Ilse and Gerd have been on the scheme since it began.

The work consisted exclusively of distempering and painting, together with the cleaning down and cleaning up which goes with those operations. It was well done and the volunteers derived a good deal of satisfaction from the finished job.

Unfortunately we were suddenly told during the last week that the German authority from which the premises were rented had to hand them over to the municipal authorities which then had to decide upon the claims of a private firm which wished to buy some of the huts. It was possible that the municipal might use them for children's home. In view of this the representative of the Tagesspiegel's fund for returned prisoners of war decided to drop his project for a home for Heimkehrer. He felt that in view of recurring uncertainties (the scheme had been suspended once before) it was unwise to invest further money in the undertaking.

He was asked to talk to the volunteers and explained the situation to them. The value of the work done by IVSP would, he said be charged to the next owner and would not therefore be in vain since the money would go to the Heimkehrerhilfe. After consultation it was agreed to complete the work on the hut where the distempering was about two thirds completed, in the hope that the Heimkehrer fund would benefit and also to avoid leaving a job half done.

The immediate effect of this change of plans was a very natural depression, but the following day the work was going with a will and though it was felt to be a great pity that the immediate and the volunteers felt too that the more important aim had been achieved, that is to say the building up of a fellowship and the formation of a group with a common definite aim of the job had suddenly disappeared, purpose.

Douglas and Ernst later visited the Bürgermeister of Zehlendorf and with him saw the President of the German Red Cross - or rather of its successor body - Dr.Leist. The ultimate fate of the huts was not then decided, but it seems likely that they will be taken over by the German Red Cross as a children's home. This will be decided at Tuesday Sept 17th. Both the Bürgermeister and Dr.Leist were very appreciated of IVSP's work at Nikolassee and Dr.Leist said that if the Red Cross obtained the huts, further help by a group of volunteers would be appreciated.

The most noteworthy general feature of the social side of the Decade was the singing. One of the volunteers is a leader of a youth group in Spandau and has an inexhaustible fund of songs. At our request he brought his folk-dancing group to visit us on Sunday and we spent a very pleasant afternoon with them.

Before the end of the service we held an Abschiedsfeier at which the volunteers from the other Decades were present. The letters from other IVSP schemes were read once more, there was much singing and some dancing and in conclusion Gerd made a little speech in which he recounted how at first they had come somewhat doubtfully, wondering what would be their relationship to the English people. He went on to say, in effect, that they had not only made friends with Betty and Douglas but had formed a community the experience of which had been, he thought, for most of them unique.

After one had made allowances for the emotionalism of an Abschiedsfeier, it does seem true at least that the IVSP idea meets a very real need among young people in Germany to-day. It gives them a practical demonstration of a really democratic way of doing things without autocratic or official compulsion, and at the same time it offers them a very practical form of idealism; without idealism youth is not what it ought to be and yet German youth is profoundly and rightly cynical of idealism which never gets beyond words.

We have asked these volunteers to look out for suitable task and jobs for it is important that they should keep together as a w o r k i n g group.