

I.V.S.P. - Germany

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WINTER SERVICES – PRELIMINARY REPORT

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THE GERMAN NEW YEAR SERVICES

The New Year opened a new chapter in the history of Service Civil. On Jan 1st 1947 there began two international work-services of outstanding importance. These were the two short German services, one in the Ruhr, at Duisburg; and one in Schleswig-Holstein, at Flensburg; the first really international services in Germany.

Only a very small proportion of the volunteers who had taken part in the six German services during the spring and summer 1946 had come from a country other than Germany; but in the two New Year services from 1st - 12th Jan 1947, 20 of the 40 volunteers who served came from abroad - 3 from Switzerland; 2 from France; 3 from Holland; 3 from Denmark; 2 from Norway; 1 from Sweden and 6 from England. 5 of the 20 German volunteers and 4 of those who came from abroad were women.

A wonderful spirit grew up in both services and the work was done with a will. More than 150 round metres of timber were felled in Flensburg, and the volunteers were able to see the first boat-load taken across to the island of Amrum to help the desperate fuel situation of the refugees there. Then the severe cold froze the sea and prevented the shipment of the second load. It also froze the ground so hard at Duisburg that the original clearing and digging and converting the waste ground behind the children's hospital there, into a vegetable garden, had to be abandoned, and alternative work, timber-felling, had to be undertaken during the last few days of the service.

Practically all volunteers had some knowledge of German and all were so intensely anxious to learn from each other about conditions and thoughts and plans in other lands that the language difficulty practically disappeared. There was so much to talk about that every volunteer felt at the end of the 10 days that the time had been far too short.

But in spite of all the difficulties experienced in organising the services, and the difficulties experienced by the volunteers coming from abroad, everyone left with the conviction that the services had achieved a very worthy piece of work, not only for the refugees and sick folk who will benefit from the work of the groups, but also for each volunteer who will return to his circle of friends in no matter what land, inspired by the warmth of friendship and by the experience of these practical contributions to reconciliation