

I.Z.D.
Landwirtschaftsschule
Prüm / Eifel

August 27th, 1949

To
International Voluntary Service for Peace,
3, Cromwell Road
L o n d o n S.W.7

Dear Derek,

Saturday afternoon; I can't say there's any peace - there's still the never-ending din of saws and hammers around the place - but at least a little respite for writing.

I made the journey well by dint of harping on the word "Prüm" and using my hands as a second tongue, but it's a pretty arduous business. I arrived at Aachen around 3.00 a.m. and found a man in the Customs Office who spook a kind of French. I told him where I was going, but I might just as well have shown him a through ticket to Timbuctoo for all the help he gave me; so I laid myself out of one of the station benches and snatched a few hour's sleep. When daylight dawned on the blank deserted platform I went downstairs to the barrier and said "Prüm" and "nicht can zie Deutsch" to a highly amused old fellow with brass buttons, and he obliged me by poring over a stack of timetables for a quarter of a hour and then writing down the time of my various trains on the back of an envelope. They were all wrong, I subsequently discovered, but at least they indicated the route fairly accurately. It is necessary to change at Düren, Euskirchen and Gerolstein, and besides changing at these places I also found it necessary to spend a good part of the day there. At Düren a kindly official put me on the wrong platform, with the result that I spent four hours there summering in the sunshine (they don't appear to have a waiting room). A further two hours at Euskirchen almost coming to the boil. I arrived at Prüm in the evening, grace a Dieu.

The town is in a pretty sorry state. The war went through it twice (it lay in the path of Rundstedt's 1945 come-back) and the explosion occurred before many of the ruins had been cleared away. The ammunition-dump which caused the catastrophe was situated at the top of a hill up which Prüm climbs in haphazard fashion from the railway-station in the valley. From our window we can see plainly what looks like a huge quarry-site: the crater is almost 150 ft. deep and 100 yards long, and for several acres around the fields are quite invisible, buried several feet deep in rocks and dust. The streets have a desolate appearance, they also are covered in red dust, with rubble piled up at the sides, and undamaged buildings are rare. Smoke comes from the chimneys of houses which are only half standing.

The work of reconstruction goes on at a great rate, from early morning until dark. Building noises become habitual to the ear, so that on Sundays the silence seems unnatural. I don't know if this is a fair example of German working habits, but I must say that I've never seen such conscientious and strenuous activity in England.

If any philologist has deciphered for you the address at the top of this letter you will know that the camp is housed in an old agricultural school-building. It is a large and spacious building, but unfortunately the ravages of war have admitted more space into it than the architects ever intended. There is only one habitable room, a little larger perhaps than your office, and here twenty-four people gather for meals during the day and overflow at night into the corridors and the tent out in the field. We are fortunate in having a carpenter among us, so that we have a little furniture, homely enough, and also, at least, a rainproof roof. We can't boast a door yet, but we hope to have one ere winter.

We are doing two jobs at present, and I think they will last us a couple of months. In the town one half of the volunteers are demolishing a ruined house with a view to building it up again, and the rest of us are working on the side of a hill, overlooking some very beautiful Eifel scenery, building a house for a man who has just lost his home a second time. So far we have only been digging a level site out of the hard sandstone; when that is finished early next week, we shall probably have to acquire more precise qualifications than goodwill and muscle. Perhaps it will prove a good apprenticeship for me: I've been thinking wistfully about Greece these last few months.

The communal life is much more concentrated and more closely-knit than in the English camps. This has certainly to do with the fact that our living quarters are rather cramped, and also perhaps with the temperament of the Rhinelanders, which is more sociable than ours. It is a good camp, I think, and the urgency of the work gives its splendid sense of purpose. Our relations with the people of Prüm are very friendly, despite the usual tentative doubts about our propriety (A policeman was here yesterday, very concerned lest we were sharing our beds with the girls).

The camp will last as long as there are volunteers - until Christmas at least. I am still at the stage of settling down and taking things in, but they are mostly short-termers here at present, and at the rate at which people are coming and going I shall soon be a veteran. One interesting thing is that we have here two girl students from the Russian zone who crossed the border illegally and aren't at all sure how or when they are going to get back.

George may be interested to know that so far I have spent none of his precious Deutschmarks (besides my fare from Aachen, which was just over 9 marks) except for a cup of pitch-black coffee at Düren and a pint of beer which I bought on Aachen station at 3 in the morning. Wonderful country this! Pocket money only amounts to 2½ marks a week. If you have plenty of friends this can quite easily be spent on postage, but there is little opportunity to get rid of it any other way. Fortunately, we receive a ration of thirty cigarettes a week, and thus the greatest misery of penury is avoided.

It was nice to see Wallis again for a few days. He is now re-established, I presume in the role of respectable citizen - good luck to him. Margaret is temporarily in Mülheim and Joyce Heslop will be coming back to England next Saturday and hopes to call at the office in the morning. Peter Hazel arrived from Munich a couple of days ago: I think he's going to write something. Are you going to send Michael out here? I think it would be good for him and I know he's like to come. Had a letter from Bill at Donaueschingen the other day - doing well, it seems.

With best wishes to everyone,
Au revoir,

Eric Adams