

DONAUESCHINGEN

24. 7. - 17.9.1949

From many parts of Germany and beyond we came to build a village of Peace in the fields and hills for those who had been driven from their homes by the fury of war.

How we toiled that first week, and discovered our limitations by the end of it ! White handkerchiefs round blistered hands; white handkerchiefs on heads; a few burned backs and bodies too tired for much activity in the evenings; too tired sometimes to sing. The spirit and the will of many of the younger and newer volunteers was fine, but post-war conditions must have effected stamina. Lacking the long experience and tradition of Service Civil, the volunteers who came wanted more than a work-camp and needed as much the intellectual and spiritual inspiration of the common life. This problem of emphasis was a growing concern to all on the service, though the older and more experienced volunteers seemed least troubled by it.

But, though at times we looked like amateurs and dug the first cellar too deep, and the second one too shallow - according to incorrect instructions - much was achieved. Ten houses were to be built and when we arrived four were up to roof level and our fellow campers, the Nothelfers, had nearly excavated a fifth cellar. By the end of our stay five others had been excavated with the help of the Nothelfers, the "Flüchtlinge" and occasionally a few people from the town. Each one was 9 x 19 metres and about 1 metre deep and involved the removal by truck and wheelbarrows of about 250 tons of earth. The weather was wonderful and rain very rarely made it harder work. We spent considerable time helping to fill the concrete mixer and the wooden forms for the walls. It was inspiring to see them rise so quickly from the new holes and be quickly divided up, by brick walls which we helped to build.

It was also interesting to help with the interior construction of the nearly completed house in the town.

The work was well organised and co-operation with the Nothelfer-volunteers and the permanent workers, nearly all refugees themselves, was informal and very happy. Perhaps two of the most valuable things which came out of the camp was the friendly and understanding contacts which were made with the refugees from East-Germany and the friends from the Nothelfergemeinschaft. It is a pity that more contact was not made with the townspeople.

Perhaps the most memorable social activities were the socials and dances in the camp with our fellow workers; and the lovely trips we enjoyed in the Black Forest and down to Bodensee. We must mention the grand occasion towards the end of camp when we had a supper with the town youth, attended by the French Military Governor and other town officials. This was followed by music and singing from the Schwarzwaldbuben, other sketches and items by our "artists" and a dance.

It was not an easy camp. Every camp has its own peculiar difficulties. All of us must have been shocked and saddened by the news of Claudine's nervous breakdown near the end of the camp, and we hope that she will quickly recover.

Nevertheless, most people were sorry to leave and found it a very worthwhile experience. We learned a lot and had our moments of achievement. Few of us will forget the quiet week-end at Friedensdorf and the great silence which held us round the glowing embers of a dying fire on a dark hillside in the Schwarzwald.

Let me echo PierreOppliger's thanks for everyone's efforts to make the camp a success and wish everyone courage in the struggle for Peace.

Amitiés, Auf Wiedersehen

Holton Beckering
October 1949

Bill Skinner