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Leszczyc

# Prisoner Of War

# 619/45

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# Prisoner Of War

619/45

Oflag! Stalag! The everyday life of a prisoner of war in Germany. His longings, his worries, his few little joys and his hopes.

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This is a book about the life of several hundred thousands Poles, British and Frenchmen, whom an evil fate has welded into one big Allied family.

**Price 3/- Nett.**

# PRISONER OF WAR... No. 619/45

S. LESZCZYC

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BY

S. LESZCZYC

Translated by

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# PRISONER OF WAR

## I.

August 14th, 1940. In a small town of Lorraine, within the conventional barrack square, a transport of officer prisoners is handed over to the commander of the "transition camp."

There are nearly a hundred of us, Poles and Frenchmen in almost equal numbers, mostly wounded, just out of hospital.

The title "transition camp" augurs no good. It suggests that we shall all be soon taken to Germany, and we had so far hoped that we might avoid this.

The officer in charge of our party, a second-lieutenant, is obviously in a hurry. He is small, and in spite of his highly polished boots he has a distinctly non-commissioned appearance. He never said a word throughout our journey.

The roll is called by the interpreter, who reads our names. Those whose names are called pass to the left side of the square. One of the Frenchmen, a young cavalry lieutenant from Saumur, is called. Smart and handsome, he strolls leisurely to the other side. His obviously harmless indifference called forth an unexpected reaction. The German dashed up to the Frenchman and slapped his face. Before the boy could recover from his astonishment, the German kicked and struck him again. The chief of the French group, an old major of artillery, was the first to react, and rushed at the German officer swinging his stick—the only weapon which he was left. The bayonets of the escort barred his way. The German walked back to his place, as though nothing had happened.

The other German officers were certainly embarrassed.

In subsequent months we learned how much store the Germans set on their reputation as correct soldiers. In their attitude towards prisoners their desire to impress, particularly with soldierly bearing, was a predominant feature.

We were to find this out on the following day, at the daily call. Several thousand prisoners formed a quadrangle. The interpreter ordered attention and the commandant walked into the middle, solemnly saluting all round. This daily ceremony did not impress us very much after the way in which we had been greeted at first.

Our melancholy quadrangle is fairly bright in colour. There is a cavalry group opposite. Their blue caps and light uniforms do not look very warlike, but we know that the French reconnaissance units and Hussars had fought well and put up a good show during the general *débâcle*. We are on friendly terms with them. Next to the cavalry there is a group including a giant negro officer. There are several other black officers and one Arab.

When we were told a few days afterwards that we were to be transported to Germany, it was added that officers of coloured races would not be taken there. Hitler's racial theory turned to the advantage of the negroes he despises.

We were searched before our departure. All binoculars and cameras were immediately seized and pocketed by the guards. We realised that it would be useless to ask for the receipts which we had been originally promised.

. . . . . . . .

We are on our way to Germany. It is a depressing journey. In France there was still a chance of escape. The French could not believe, right to the end, that we will be sent to a prisoners' of war camp. They still nursed the illusion that the Germans would bear them no grudge after the armistice.

There were forty of us to a cattle truck. Looking out through a slit in the locked door we tried to find our bearings. With the help of a small map in a pocket Larousse we traced the route of our journey fairly

accurately. Before reaching Strasbourg we turned northward towards Sarrebourg. Soon afterwards we came to the scene of our battles of two months ago. We recognised the ruin of the church spire of V. from which a well aimed 75″ shell dislodged a German artillery spotter. We passed Saarbruecken and went on eastwards through the Palatinate. There was a long stop at Mannheim on the Rhine. We looked forward to a good night raid by the R.A.F., but nothing happened. The Rhineland had to wait another few months for its first real taste of war.

From Mannheim we travelled along the Neckar. In Heidelberg we saw with satisfaction some evidence of bombing. We realised that our eastward journey was taking us to Nuremberg. By the evening of the second day we stopped within sight of the strange, massive buildings surrounding the field reserved for the Party pageant. On the other side of the railway track, about one kilometre from the forest, there were long rows of green huts.

We stepped out on a bare platform without any cover or buildings, tired by our long journey and very hungry. Soon a long column of sad men, carrying on their backs their meagre possessions, in fives marched off to the camp.

## II.

The camp so thoughtfully prepared for us was of tremendous size. There were several hundred identical huts, all painted dark green. They were surrounded by a double barbed wire fence. Along the fence there are, at a hundred metres intervals, wooden guardhouses, with a searchlight and a machine gun each. At night the prying beams of the searchlights produce a grim but dramatic spectacle.

The huts are built in groups of twenty or thirty. Each group is separated from the others by barbed wire. The huts are large. One half of each is taken up by bunks in three tiers and the other is divided into three equal sections with benches, tables and a small stove in each compartment.

We settled down for long months of dreary existence. We received mattresses made of ersatz-jute and filled with sawdust, as well as bedclothes—a pleasant surprise. There is one washing hut to every two living huts. It is just a long trough with many water taps. It might be worse.

The German organisers were thorough and tried to provide for everything at a minimum cost. What they did provide for works quite well. There are, however, many aspects in the life of a community of many thousands which have not occurred to them and the rather inadequate administrative staff seem unable to deal with anything unexpected. On the whole the Germans endeavour to be civil. The camp is destined for the French and almost meant to impress them favourably. We, Poles, are here only because the Germans did not admit, for reasons of high policy, the existence of a Polish Army and classed us as . . . members of the Foreign Legion.

The French were at first quite willing to take German courtesies at their face value, and their disappointment when they were brutally reminded of their status of prisoners was all the harsher for this initial delusion. Sooner or later the Germans always give up pretence and abandon the idea of winning over sympathisers among their prisoners. The inconsistency involved in such attempts was too fantastic to be kept up even by the best liars.

There is a complete lack of mutual understanding. The Germans deal with the French with such utter ignorance of western psychology that they themselves experience moments of pained surprise and disappointment — for instance when French officers burst out laughing at their most solemn and touching propaganda efforts.

The commander of our block, a fat Nazi lieutenant, had to give up his attempts at convincing the French that the Poles are not human, for they murdered thousands of Germans and thus caused the world war. His harangues had as their only result a tremendous increase of our popularity among the Frenchmen.

There was a severe mutual disappointment. On the

German side it was displayed by a progressive change for the worse in the treatment of the French prisoners. The latter summed up their view in a few words: "Et dire qu'avant la guerre il y en avait qui disaient que les Allemands sont aussi des hommes comme nous!"

## III.

Somebody has turned on the light. A crude white glare fills the hut. Ah . . . it's seven o'clock. I always wake up at the same time and in the same way. There is a moment of hesitation. Shall I wait for a few more minutes under my laboriously assembled, non-regulation collection of blankets? Or shall I go to the washhouse before it is too crowded? I select the more sensible alternative, and I rush out of the hut with a towel in my hand. The air is cold and sharp. I stop for a second as a glorious harmony of colour beyond the pine forest heralded sunrise — new and different every day. This is the only ration of beauty in a drab life. But it's cold. I must run to the toilet. It is unlit, and some one is already scrambling in the dark, panting and steaming under icy water. By the time I return to the hut, there is already a queue through the whole length of it for the buckets with "le jus." It has nothing in common with the French army coffee to which we had grown used, except the name. We are in the land of the ersatz. The liquid, barely attempting to imitate tea, has a sickly pink colour and its origin is the subject of much conjecture. Even saccharin fails to subdue its chemical flavour. But this is all we get for breakfast. One has to drink something hot. You can have some bread with it, but not much, for the 240 grammes ration handed out on the preceding evening has to last for the whole day.

Almost every one is already dressed. The commander of the hut, who is the officer senior in rank, reminds us that it is time for the *appel*. Handfuls of officers stream out of rows of identical huts and they all go along the narrow passage left between the huts and the barbed wire, stepping

on the boards laid across large puddles of muddy water.

On the way, there is a crowd in front of one of the huts. Everybody tries to read personally the few words scribbled on a sheet of paper pinned to the door. It is the most interesting news item of the day—the lunch menu. Though starving for months, we breathe relief at seeing that it's not going to be the "Wehrmachtsuppe" we all heartily loathe. This is one of the worst German substitutes—an ersatz pea soup. We are fed almost entirely on ersatzes. There is considerable variety—ersatz tomato, mushrooms and a mysterious brew of unknown ingredients, known by the promising name of "Koeniginsuppe." A plate of one of those products of German chemistry is our midday meal. At 5 p.m. we get a dinner of pink tea and something to put on our bread. It's mostly beetroot jam.

No wonder that food provides a never-ending subject of conversation in the Oflag. We are always hungry. At first, everyone was very keen on physical exercise. It was a natural form of self-defence against idleness and sedentary life. Now, after a few months, only a dozen among the one thousand and a half inmates of the block continue their physical training. The others are too weak.

## IV.

In the *appel* square everybody has his own place. The men are divided into groups of about 300, each led by its commander. The Poles, although there are only 70 of them, form a group of their own.

Even the most notorious slackers are already there. The commanders check their groups for the tenth time, but there are no Germans in sight. This happens quite often. It's just a little snub. Once we waited on the square for an hour. Finally, the cadet interpreter, who speaks good French and quite passable Polish, arrives, panting and puffing. He is beaming friendliness and benevolence. It is obvious that his job is to win the confidence of all the prisoners, including the Poles. But

he is too clumsy to keep his part long. He greets cordially the French commander, an unpleasant captain who kow-tows to the Germans, and begins the call. At that moment came the universally hated commander of the block, Lieutenant Staengel. The Frenchman orders " Garde à vous," and the German, after saluting, cries " repos " in a hoarse Prussian voice and receives the report. His every movement is a theatrical gesture. We all know what to think of the martial countenance and smart soldierly step of the fat bully we despise. His behaviour suggests that he prepared some new spectacular performance.

The call is over. Staengel walks up to the last of the group commanders, salutes arrogantly, and then returns to the centre of the square to make a speech. After a few words his voice, calm at first, turns into harsh shrieks, entirely unrelated to the meaning of his words. This is a cause of perpetual astonishment for the French. They can not understand the recurring outbursts of hysterical shouting. They still do not realise that the Germans cannot speak in any other tone. It's a pity they did not listen more often to the yells with which Hitler terminated all his speeches, even long before the war.

The shouting suddenly breaks down. The German assumes a heroic posture, waiting for the interpreter to repeat his words in French. Translated, they sound much less menacing.

Strangely enough this speech was not about the Poles. The postal censorship discovered in the French prisoners' letters to their families many intolerable references to the masters of the camp. For instance, one of the officers was said to have asked for " un dictionnaire boche." The German called out the name of the offender. An old sailor with the rank of commodore stepped out from the group of staff officers and had to listen in silence to Staengel's furious shrieks. He maintained complete calm, and the German's invective finally died down, faced by icy contempt. The naval officer was placed under arrest.

On the following day the incident found a humorous

outcome. It seems that the Paris jokes about the " Boches," in which they were always unable to distinguish the letters " p " and " b " were well founded. The old sailor did ask for a German dictionary, but he wrote only " dictionnaire de poche." The censor, said to possess a thorough knowledge of French, found those words highly insulting.

## V.

The *appel* is over. There will be another at four o'clock in the afternoon and that is all. There is absolutely nothing else to do and it would seem that with so much time to spare, the prisoners may be condemned to idleness within the narrow confines of their block.

But the officer prisoners display great ingenuity in devising various occupations. The intellectual life of our community of a thousand men is fairly well developed, and it can boast quite creditable achievements.

It is true that conversations about food take up a great deal of time, for the shortage of the food itself has to be made good somehow, but there are also other things to talk about.

Every block has to organise its own individual life. Although they are divided only by wire fences, the blocks are strictly isolated from each other. Each of them has its own library, reading room, theatre and its own university.

The name " university " may sound ambitious, but it is not unjustified. There usually are many specialists in various branches of knowledge among the twelve or thirteen hundred officers and cadets living within one block.

The weekly programme of lectures at our university is usually varied. The organisers, who have only two lecture rooms at their disposal, have a hard job allocating them to different " professors ! " The languages are one of the main subjects. There are beginners', advanced and superior courses. We can learn English, French, Polish, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin, Greek, and even Arabic. The last

named language is taught by a native Arab who is a lieutenant in the French army. His assistant is a former student of Eastern languages at the university of Constantine in Algiers.

We also have mathematics. A very clever young professor of Paris University conducts a superior course, while there is another for less advanced students.

The most popular lectures are probably those of a captain of Chasseurs Alpins, in civil life professor of history at one of the provincial universities of France. His " conferences " are equal to any that could be heard before the war and his vivid treatment of the subject makes it extremely interesting.

There is also a series of lectures on modern French literature, as well as on political economy, banking and engineering.

Sometimes, however, we have speakers on less conventional subjects. An erudite lectured about " The Cult of the Devil." Great interest was aroused by the lecture on: " Les vins de Bordeaux," which was postponed several times for want of accommodation.

It was eventually held late one evening, after the usual lectures were over. The room was crowded with men sitting on bunks, tables and on the floor. Deprived of wine, the poor Frenchmen listened with dreamy, melancholy smiles to an elegant and witty discourse delivered by the owner of one of the famous vineyards of St. Estephe. When he concluded his talk with a poetic apology of the delights that the connoisseur finds in the divine ruby nectar, the audience were seized by a pathetic emotion. They sought out their memories and then sincerely thanked the speaker. After all, everything we do in the camp has only one aim—to help us forget the evil present. This aim is seldom achieved. The man who could bring even a few minutes of freedom to the mind deserved gratitude.

## VI.

There is plenty of artistic activity in the camp. The amateur theatre gives much pleasure to the performers and authors, as well as to some members of the audience. The first revue had a dangerous, though Wagnerian, title: " Les maîtres chanteurs de Nuremberg " (maître chanteur means in French, blackmailer). The double meaning completely escaped the notice of the camp authorities, who do not count subtlety among their qualities. The Germans attend scrupulously all the performances, thus discouraging from attendance the prisoners themselves.

The artistic contribution of the Poles was naturally a choir, which became a great success, although its members were hardly popular in their own hut, where they held their countless rehearsals. The conductor of the choir used to play his tunes for hours on the accordion he had brought from France. He played them in six tonations, for he refused to be satisfied with fewer than six groups in his choir. By the time every group learnt its part and by the time they all harmonised their work, we all knew by heart the tune and the gloomy words of the song called " You rest for ever in your dark grave." The song was prepared for 2nd November, All Souls' Day, and eventually it was magnificently performed during the religious service, but it had made our lives a misery during the preceding weeks.

Painting was certainly the most widely practised art. For many of the aspirants, who are not in receipt of pay in camp marks, like the other officers, it is even a lucrative profession. In any case, very little can be purchased with the marks we get. In the block canteen there is no food of any kind, only writing paper, shaving kit, pen knives and— Nuremberg souvenirs. The only things worth buying are thin beer and the works of art produced by our poorer colleagues.

The hut of the French aspirants looks like a small Montmartre. There are impromptu cabaret shows and a

permanent exhibition of the artistic output of the tenants. There are among the aspirants many former students of the Academy of Arts. Their work is confined to portraits, for landscape painting is very definitely discouraged by the regulations.

At first we painted with enthusiasm the picturesque pine forest beyond the barbed wire or the odd, bulky, half-mediæval wooden gates adorning the "Reichsparteitag-gelaende" near the southern boundary of our block.

I had just started sketching one of the "miradors," that is a wooden guard tower with a machine gun, when our block commander issued strict orders forbidding the painting of any of the security appliances at the camp. The ban extended not only to the towers, but even to the barbed wire itself.

My unfinished drawing acquired a tremendous value, being the last of its kind. In the future, landscape painters had to exert their imagination over a single and somewhat uninspiring subject—rows of identical green huts. Its artistic possibilities were soon exhausted.

In the beginning, when I was still trying to squeeze some kind of beauty out of the dismal prison houses, two German soldiers walked up to me and asked for the picture. I did not try to argue, for we generally endeavoured to avoid any conversation with the enemy, and I gave them the unfinished water-colour. After about an hour the senior of the two soldiers came back with the picture and declared that the superior authorities had found it inoffensive, for the drawing went only as far as the spot where the wire was beginning. Had I drawn even a yard of barbed wire, I would be punished.

The best painter was, of course, "le maître A."—a well-known French artist and a captain of Chasseurs. He painted mostly the Germans—a thing even the poorest of the aspirants refrained from doing. From this activity, in which he had no competitor, he derived considerable benefits. The Germans fitted out for him a small studio at the end of one of the huts, next to the library. He was

even allowed to paint landscapes outside the camp and to go to Nuremberg to buy artist's requisites. It was a striking departure from the otherwise severe camp regulations. The Master's visits to Nuremberg were also convenient to others, for he was always willing to bring brushes and colours for them.

His portraits were very expensive—15 marks each—but he nevertheless had a wide clientèle both among the Germans and among ourselves.

## VII.

There are about a hundred officers in every hut. As there are only seventy Poles, we all live in one hut, with some Frenchmen to make up the number. It is, however, a genuinely Polish house. Although many of us take part in the intellectual activities of the French community, we have our own varied programme within our small group.

When we return from the morning roll-call the three orderlies are just finishing the sweeping and cleaning of the hut, but at its end there is a table with several people already at work. It is the English group. One of us once began to help a friend who was trying to read a book by H. G. Wells, but did not know English sufficiently well. Gradually an English class of eight men was formed, and it pursues a regular study of the language.

At the next table there are about fifteen members of the superior German course. The teacher is Captain H., who has a perfect knowledge of the language of our jailers.

The beginners' courses of French and German are attended by about forty men each. The commander of the hut, Major M., whose tact and kindness earned him general respect, keeps an eye on the punctual starting of lessons and good order. At 10 o'clock we always hear his voice :— " Gentlemen, the French lesson will begin now. Those not taking part in it are requested not to talk in the same room."

One of the tables, turned upright, serves as blackboard and the professor, a young lecturer in French from Nancy,

starts his brilliant and interesting teaching. He achieved remarkable results. Many of the officers learned more French in the camp than they did during nearly a year spent in France.

German for beginners is taught by one of our colleagues, a Lieutenant of Engineers. His class is as good as that of the Frenchman, and he speaks German without a trace of an accent. I was not surprised when, looking in London through the files of my friends, I discovered that he had escaped.

It must have been a hard job, but he had chances of success. His preparations had certainly been long and thorough. He was, generally speaking, a thorough and methodical man. That is why he was such a good teacher, and that is also probably why he was so heartily cursed by his neighbours, for he was also the conductor of the choir.

The lessons in our hut take up all the morning and the afternoon until the second roll-call. The more diligent pupils spend much of their time writing exercises, and sometimes this craze for languages becomes almost annoying. There are students of Spanish and even of Arabic. Everybody learns at least two languages. There is some risk of a complete babel in the minds of decidedly grown-up schoolchildren. It seems more likely, however, that most of them will find their knowledge very useful.

There is a universal tendency to make the best possible use of our enforced leisure. All those who know French do a lot of reading. The block's library, composed of books offered by the prisoners, has several hundred volumes, many of them valuable and interesting. There is a good collection of works on modern French history.

## VIII.

Dusk is falling. The second roll-call is just over. The æroplanes, which we had been seeing in the air since morning, are returning to the nearby ærodrome. There are the powerful four-engined machines as yet unknown to

us by name, which were to appear over the Atlantic as Focke-Wulf Kuriers, the familiar Stukas, Messerschmitts, Heinkels and a big training Dornier of the National Socialist Party, with a big swastika, which always flies very low.

The prisoners return to the huts for dinner. As postal officer of our group I wait for the evening mail. The first letters from Poland arrived in the beginning of October. They brought news from home after a very long interval of silence. The possibility of direct correspondence with Poland is probably the only advantage we are enjoying in our present situation

There were about a dozen letters from Poland to-day. It is more than the usual ration, which is mostly less than ten. On my way to the hut I glance at the addresses, to see whether there are any letters for those of us who had not received any so far. I put them in the right order, so that everybody gets his at once. I am greeted by eager voices: " Is there anything for me? And for me? "

The letters are distributed. There are some happy and some disappointed faces, while others are interested and excited by news received by their friends. Some of the letters contain sad messages. Major K. learned that his young wife had been deported to Siberia nearly a year ago. Some one else had news of a death in the family.

After dinner there is the traditional walk. It's perhaps the most characteristic scene in our prisoners' life. Hundreds of officers walk quickly along the half-kilometre length of the block. They go in small groups, sometimes alone. Some talk excitedly and others are silent. But they all have the same rapid, nervous step, suggestive of anxiety and unrest. It's the only exercise they can afford to take and they need it badly.

The day is over. The loudspeakers on the tower near the hospital finished their hoarse music, and the " traitor of Stuttgart " began his daily speech.

Everybody stopped and listened in silence to his lies, which are our only link with the outside world and the

war. We know how to listen to his broadcasts, and we have learned to discover or guess truth even in the most grossly distorted reports.

Ferdonnet's voice dies down. It is quite dark. We return to the huts, which are blacked out, but brightly lit inside. In our hut we enforce the rule of non-smoking in the main room, leaving the small ante-room to the smokers. Thanks to this measure we enjoy much cleaner air than our French colleagues in their huts.

## IX.

It's lecture day to-day. Our "university," started by Captain H., is very successful. Every one is asked to prepare a lecture on the subject which he knows best. It has to be short, one hour at most. After the lecture there is always a lively debate. The lectures are held on Sundays and Thursdays, at 8 p.m.

The series was opened by one of the cadets, in peace time a diplomatist, who spoke about the National Socialist Party. Every one was keenly interested, especially as we are making an involuntary and intimate acquaintance with the hated system.

Then there were lectures about Japan, about modern Polish literature, and—a scarcely topical subject—about saving. A young historian-artilleryman told us about new methods of historical research.

On an evening when the Germans switched off light in the whole block by way of reprisal for some individual offence, we heard in darkness the original talk of Lieutenant G., former police superintendent in Sosnowiec, who told us about his experience of criminals and detection.

On another evening we had a speaking contest. Each of the five competitors was given five to ten minutes in which to make a speech on any subject he liked to choose. The competition was a success, although its initiator proved to be easily the worst speaker of all. Lieutenant January gave us a surprise when he performed a sketch called "Visit

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to the Camp Doctor," impersonating all the characters with great skill. Nobody had suspected him of such talent. He won the second place. The winner, by universal consent, was Lieutenant G., who told a simple, moving story of the first days of the war, when he was in command of a cyclists' patrol in Silesia.

The prize was an extra ladle of soup at next day's lunch. It was a prize of great value, though it was hardly in proportion to the literary merit of the story.

After proclaiming the result of the contest, our chairman requested officially our master of the ladle, who happens to be the police superintendent of Sosnowiec, to carry out the decision of the assembly. The police officer has held this responsible position ever since our arrival to the camp and discharged it to the general public satisfaction.

## X.

At ten all lights have to be turned off. Another day is over, a day like all the others that went by and all those that are to come. Nobody even tries to count them. There is no date, however remote, to which we could look forward. We don't like to realise that three months have already passed and the time of deliverance is no nearer than before.

It's dark in the hut, but the day's programme is not yet finished. We are all waiting for the evening news. Conversation dies down, and in the darkness we hear the calm voice of our colleague Marian, before the war one of the foreign correspondents of the Polish Telegraphic Agency, who gives a political commentary of the day's news.

Ferdonnet would be disappointed if he knew what use we make of his broadcasts, which are our only source of information about world events. Every item of news, whether from the African front or from Japan, and particularly the suggestive denials, provide us with material for conjecture and forecast. The obstinate optimism with which we view the situation helps us to form a picture

radically different from the one presented by the traitor of Stuttgart.

Though its editor has only meagre sources of news at his disposal, the evening news is always interesting. A good journalist knows how to make a thrilling story out of apparently insignificant reports. We sometimes laugh when our newspaperman gives free rein to his rich imagination and political perspicacity, but we enjoy listening to him, for he talks well and knows international affairs thoroughly. After he had finished, Lieutenant S., ex-member of our Foreign Office, often adds a few words. A postscript is usually supplied by Major S., of the General Staff, who invariably takes part in all debates, delivering speeches at least as long as the lecture itself. His scope seems unlimited, for he never missed a lecture yet, whatever its subject. His postscripts became a recognised institution, and our chairman, Captain H., now solemnly announces: " On Thursday we are going to have a lecture about . . ., by Captain X and Major S."

The news is finished. Some of us are already asleep. The officer charged with keeping order sees that no one is smoking in bed, and then opens some of the windows and all the blinds.

But it was not all for that day. There is a sound outside. It comes on, grows and vibrates . . . a long howl. Screaming sirens! Every one jumps up. It's the first air-raid warning since we had been here. It's Nuremberg! The best item in our evening news.

Unfortunately, the regulations compel us to keep the blinds down, with windows open to save the glass from possible blast. Of course we are not allowed to go out.

We listen for distant explosions. We did not hear any æroplanes, but then our camp is about seven miles from the city of Nuremberg.

What is the meaning of that visit of the R.A.F. to this remote corner of Germany? Suddenly we saw light: It's the 9th of November to-day. Hitler is speaking at the Munich Buerguerbrau. We had no doubt that the British

bombers were on their way there, merely passing over Nuremberg. Last year Hitler was nearly blown up by a bomb in his beer cellar. May he get more this time!

We were happy like children. The all-clear was given about midnight, but that did not worry us, for we knew that we were not near the target of that night.

On the following day the radio news confirmed our guess. Munich had been bombed. There was no damage and no casualties . . . added Ferdonnet. Of course. What else could he say? Who would believe it anyway?

As to Nuremberg, we sometimes question the civilians who occasionally appear in the camp to carry out some repairs. We learned from them that the R.A.F. bombed the Siemens electric works situated on the other side of the town. We were glad to hear about it.

## XI.

Once a week, on a different day for each block, we have the so-called " sports." We heard at first magnificent promises. The camp authorities even drew up lists of tennis players, swimmers, fencers. . . . It all sounded too good to be true. Our scepticism proved later to have been justified.

The weekly " sports " consist of a walk to a field about two kilometres away from the camp. We spend there an hour, mostly just lying on the grass. Some people play a short game of football.

Nobody minds this little walk. Its destination is invariably the same, but it at least takes us out of the usual surroundings and allows us to see something other than the forest in the east, the administrative building in the north, barbed wire and the next block in the west and the open fields in the south.

During roll-call we always stand in five rows. When, at the end of the ceremony, it is announced that this is " sports day," we turn about towards the gate and we march out in fives, in a long column.

The Frenchmen stroll along as they like. We, Poles, always keep step and march in formation, although there are no special orders to that effect.

We go out on the tarred road running between our blocks, on which officers are allowed to take their constitutional five hundred metres walk on very wet days. Then we march towards the administrative building, passing in turn the bath house, the office, the censorship rooms and the post office. They are all wooden huts. On the left-hand side there is a row of identical blocks. This is our only opportunity for learning whether any new Poles have arrived. If we chance to see a friend across the barbed wire, a few words are enough to make a date for the next day in the camp infirmary, which is the best meeting-place for inmates of different blocks.

But here is the camp gate. The platoon charged with escorting us is waiting there, for we are leaving the area enclosed by barbed wire.

The soldiers fix bayonets on their rifles and they form a double file on each side of our column, spaced at fifty metres' intervals. They are obviously annoyed. While we are supposed to play happily in the open-air, they will have no rest. They will be drilled by a sergeant for a whole hour. We never know whether they do it as a matter of principle and to keep up the traditions of the German army, or whether it is merely a propaganda effort for our benefit. The drilling consists almost exclusively of the order: " Turn about, run! "—after a few seconds: " Halt! " and then " Attention! "—at which the soldiers must instantly face the officer. And then it starts all over again. It's hardly fun, and the soldiers don't seem to enjoy it very much. Most of them are from the Sudeten. They are middle-aged men, neither morally nor physically fit for war. They do not seen particularly enthusiastic about it.

We have already passed the camp and the last of the watch towers, the highest of them, from which the voice of Ferdonnet speaks to us every night. As we were passing it, the soldiers guarding the whole camp with their machine

guns switched on their loudspeaker again and we heard the harshly spoken afternoon war communique.

The camp proper is now behind us. We are marching across the open field which, as a board on a rather grotesque gateway informs us, was used by the summer camps of the "Hitlerjugend." For two years already the field has been empty. No more carefree holidays in the midst of fragrant pine forests. The Hitlerjugend are dying on other fields, in the war for which they had been clamouring for years.

We are herded into a large meadow surrounded by barbed wire. On the other side of the fence, in the next field, there is a flock of sheep. The analogy is as obvious as it is poignant.

But we have to make the best of that hour. Its most attractive feature is a sense of open space, which we lack so badly in the rest of the week.

The green plain stretches for miles and the equally green roofs of our huts, about a mile away, are no longer in the foreground. Behind them are vast forests of pine and fir. Beyond them are hills. Hundreds of miles farther east there is Poland.

## XII.

We are leaving the Oflag. The news came suddenly. At midday we were told that all the Polish cadets were to be ready for departure at 6 o'clock in the morning on the following day. Our destination is unknown. We are going as "voluntary workers" . . .

Of course we are not volunteers at all. But that does not worry the Germans very much. They like to talk about respecting the international law with regard to prisoners of war, but they actually apply it only when convenient.

For some weeks the interpreter Storch, acting under orders from Bruening, tried to persuade cadets to enlist voluntarily as agricultural labourers. He pointed out that

the cadets get no pay in prisoners' camps, in accordance with German regulations. He promised much better food and praised the hygienic advantages of rural life.

Some fifty French aspirants volunteered. The Polish cadets remained indifferent to enticing prospects as well as to threats.

Our point of view was that we would not work for the Germans unless forcibly compelled. Under no circumstances would we volunteer for such work. As to the pay, it did not matter much to us, for our senior colleagues shared their salaries with us with the strictest fairness.

Nobody said anything about agricultural labour for some time, and then it was suddenly announced that the volunteers would leave in a few days' time. The Germans had lost the original list, and they appealed to those who had volunteered before to step forward. They did, but the number was much smaller than before. On second thoughts, many aspirants decided that the prospects of farm labour were not as attractive as Storch had suggested. This infuriated the Germans. They were 28 men short—and they had promised to some labour camp the number of prisoners who had originally volunteered. The missing 28 had to be found. Bruening, who hated the Poles, conceived an idea which both solved his problem and offered an opportunity for victimising the Poles. There were exactly thirty Polish cadets. They would be sent to work and the gap would be filled.

Major K., the leader of the Polish group, protested in vain. Bruening accepted with a leer the written complaint addressed to the General Commanding the Camp, and said that he would deliver it on the following day. And our party was to leave at four in the morning.

We realised that there was nothing to be done about it. We prisoners have practically no rights. In any case, what does law mean to a German?

Our helpless anger against our persecutor Bruening slowly turned into resignation and even a kind of satisfaction mixed with curiosity. After three months in the

camp we would at last see something different.

We did not know what lay in store for us. It seemed likely that the conditions would be much worse. But we did not worry. It will be a change, and anything is better than the horrible monotony of identical days.

## XIII.

In spite of our emotion, we slept soundly. We were awakened by a brutal glare of light. Two soldiers with rifles, ready for the journey, stood in the middle of the hut. It was four o'clock.

We jumped up quickly. Our meagre possessions had been packed last night. The soldiers urge us to hurry. We shake the hands which stretch out from all the bunks. Few words are said, but the parting moment is poignant. We had lived together through many hard moments and we spent together almost every hour of the last months.

We went out of the hut into a bleak, cold night. The farewells are over and we are in good spirits. We join the Frenchmen and march towards the Commandant's office. There will be a search, for which we are all well prepared, and then the long checking of the list.

Naturally there are too many of us. We realised already yesterday that, although the list was only twenty-eight short, Bruening in his vindictive frenzy ordered all the thirty Polish cadets to go. We did not say anything, for we wanted to stand together and suffer together. Now we also do not try to help to explain the whole matter. Besides, the embarrassment of the Germans is quite amusing to watch. They simply can't understand how there can be two " volunteers " too many. Their uneasiness borders on panic and we begin to revise our views of the much advertised organising talents of the Teutonic race. They seem to be completely overcome by this trifling mistake.

At last one of the officers decided on a solution: two of us can stay. This time there were plenty of genuine

volunteers. They pointed to the first two in the row and the problem was solved. We can go.

Within ten minutes we realised that now, outside the group of officers, we would be treated in quite a different way. No train was waiting at the nearest station, at which we had arrived three months ago. We passed the station and our group was directed towards the town, nine kilometres away. The Frenchmen, mostly loaded down with luggage, did not enjoy the prospect of this long ramble.

At one of the suburban stations we found the goods trucks waiting for us. The train moved off almost immediately. We used again the method of finding our bearings which we had tested three months before. Our direction is obviously north-east. We are glad, especially as the initiated declare that our destination is Dusseldorf. This might be better. We knew from the Stuttgart radio news that Dusseldorf was frequently visited by the R.A.F. And it is much nearer to the frontiers. . . .

Unfortunately, our journey ended too soon, after a hundred kilometres or so. We stepped out on the platform of a small station, contemplating with interest our new environment. We were in a small town, situated in a picturesque valley. On one of the mountains surrounding the town we saw, outlined in the glow of sunset, the fantastic silhouette of an old castle. After the flat, monotonous landscape of our first camp, this seemed incredibly romantic. But the camp was far away, somewhere in the mountains, and we had a long march ahead of us.

It was quite dark and we were still marching, dragging our feet with effort, for we were by then very tired. The last six kilometres were far more exhausting than the first nine in the morning. We had spent the whole day in the train, without either food or water.

## XIV.

At last we saw the gates of the new camp. It was encircled by barbed wire, just as the Oflag had been, but even in the dark we realised that it was much smaller. The huts were also small.

We waited in deep mud, while the Germans were dealing with some new administrative complications. Our Polish group stood apart, in close, straight ranks. Although we had been treated in the Oflag as Frenchmen, we tried to stress on the new ground our national individuality. We did it mainly in the hope of meeting some Polish prisoners from the September campaign, whom we were very anxious to see.

Our wish was fulfilled. The Germans soon realised that this was the simplest way, and even before dealing with the dishevelled French crowd, they sent us to the Polish hut.

So there are Poles here. We guessed that they must be men of September. After several months in Germany we had not yet met any of our comrades who had been captured in 1939.

Our first impression was a pleasant one. The brief orders of the sergeant, invisible in the darkness, sounded very familiar and recalled the Polish army vividly.

Then we walked into a fairly small room, hardly lit by a single oil lamp. In the dim light we saw figures in Polish uniforms. Some of them were wearing Polish forage caps. They were " September " people.

The curiosity was mutual. We were the first Poles from the French campaign they had seen, and we were interested to know the thoughts and feelings of our unfortunate comrades after a year and a half of captivity.

They greeted us with cordial hospitality, and in spite of our fatigue we soon exchanged much information, in short, crisp sentences. We heard now and again the word " Arbeitskommando," which was to become for us one of

the most important in the language. Arbeitskommandos are labour squads of prisoners working in villages. The " September men " gave us plenty of advice and warning. They knew everything there was to know about conditions in German prisoners' camps.

Many of them had been captured by the Russians first. After a few months the Bolsheviks took them to Brzesc and handed them over to the Germans. They were supposed to be set free and allowed to return to their homes. They were put into railway trucks, which were then carefully locked. After four days the trucks were opened and the Poles discovered they were in Germany.

We were struck by the remarkable amount of political information possessed by these simple soldiers. In spite of their year and a half of captivity they knew well the elements of the world situation. Their faith and confidence in the final defeat of Germany were unshakeable.

It was a heartening conversation. We respect those men, whose spirit remained unbroken after such a long period of enslavement.

The next day was a Sunday. It brought with it new, pleasant impressions, perhaps more superficial, but not without a deeper significance.

The day in the Polish hut began exactly like in ordinary barracks. The order and discipline are, however, voluntary, and the example of the French huts proves that they are not imposed by the Germans.

The orderlies dealt with the breakfast and they saw to it that everybody lined up in front of the hut at 10 a.m., in clean, though well-worn uniforms and scrupulously polished boots. Then we marched off to church, to attend the " Polish " service. The sergeant commanding the hut barked the order in the approved manner and the detachment smartly marched to church. The " church " is one of the empty huts and the " Polish service " is celebrated by a French priest. But the soldiers marching to that service are real soldiers. We were proud of them. How different they were from the remaining inmates of the Stalag, some

two thousand Frenchmen, completely demoralised and broken down by defeat. And yet the Poles were all men from the ranks, without the leadership of their officers for a year. Nevertheless, they understood the need for discipline. They knew that the fighting was not all over.

During the three months I spent with the " September men " I had no opportunity to revise my original estimate of their character. Almost every day I discovered new evidence to prove that long captivity cannot break the spirit of Polish soldiers.

Even the Germans have a certain kind of respect for those men. Sometimes they give vent to their hate for a nation which they like to call " barbarian," but they frequently have to admit that these " barbarians " compare rather well with most other nationalities. There are in the Stalag many opportunities for comparison. The Poles lead the field not only in military training—which is the quality most appreciated by Germans—but also in other respects. Sometimes a German N.C.O., driven to desperation by the filth and disorder among the Frenchmen—or the Flamands, who are even less particular in their way of life—has to point to the simple peasants in the Polish hut as an example of personal cleanliness and good order.

The only other nationality respected by the Germans are the British. There are about a dozen of them in the camp. We have not met them yet. Our colleagues told us that they are their best friends and frequent visitors in the Polish hut. Although neither side knows the other's language, they seem to get along splendidly. Our boys have learnt " good morning " and " good-bye," while the Tommies know " Dziendobry " and " dobranoc." This seems to be quite satisfactory for every one concerned.

## XV.

The camp is really quite small. One passes through a gate, at which there is a sentry, into the other half, composed of four huts, housing the administration. That

is all. That is the strip of land on which we are to live for God knows how many months. The Oflag, built on a large scale on the vast plain, seemed a palace by comparison with our new prison.

The new camp is far from clean. In spite of drainage ditches, the lanes of the Stalag are permanently filled with liquid mud. The camp is situated on a slope, and built in contradiction to the most elementary dictates of hygiene. We never realised until then that mud could be so dirty, and that almost any mud would be clean compared to the mud of the Stalag. The small wooden huts, built below the hill, are invariably damp. It is hard to keep them clean, but the Poles somehow manage to do it. The Germans advise the Frenchmen in vain to follow this example, but the conditions in the French huts remain disgusting. All the Frenchmen and Belgians, including the N.C.O.'s have long become resigned to vermin, and they don't even try to fight it. It is a mystery for them how the Poles and Britons manage to get rid of it. There are in the camp no facilities for disinfection. The prisoners are allowed to bath once a month—and not always then—in the bath-house of the nearby military camp.

Generally speaking, everything is quite different than it was in the Oflag. Although the camp is small and holds only two thousand prisoners, it is a much larger organisation than the Oflag with its fifteen thousand officers. The name Stalag is an abbreviation of the German word " Stammlager," which means more or less base camp. Most of the prisoners on the lists of the Stalag are scattered in the district, working on farms. Our Stalag has about forty thousand such dependants. All the administrative, postal and other matters concerning these prisoners are dealt with by the camp administration. In the village in which they are working, the prisoners are guarded by only one soldier. Such a group is known as an Arbeitskommando. At every change of employment a prisoner returns to the camp. He is also sent back to the camp in case of sickness or for punishment in the so-called penitentiary company. The

men in the camp are the sick, those undergoing punishment, those employed by the central office of the Stalag, and a certain number of prisoners forming a labour pool available for farmers and firms.

The commandant of the camp did not know very well what to do with our group of cadets. Before our arrival we had been announced as volunteers for agricultural labour, so that the colonel greeted us with a cordial speech. After talking to the local men, however, even the Frenchmen lost interest in the "hygienic" work on the land.

We are still treated as N.C.O.'s. We cannot therefore, under the German regulations, be compelled to labour. Later, of course, these reservations will be forgotten. In the meantime, nevertheless, agents recruited among the prisoners themselves are employed for persuading us to work. Our hosts, as we had occasion to find out, have an unending store of tricks for dealing with all such situations.

The Frenchmen gave way fairly soon. All sorts of clerks, professors, engineers, students enlisted for the work on the land, trying mutually to convince each other that it will be healthy and pleasant.

We Poles resisted as long as possible.

## XVI.

The small group of Polish cadets was quartered in one of the rooms in the "September" hut. We were in permanent contact with the inmates of the two other rooms. The liaison officer was a young corporal, the brother of one of our friends. He had been in many Arbeitskommandos, but he is now working in the camp postal office. We learnt that this was the best method of avoiding agricultural labour.

The administration of the Stalag is mainly in the hands of the prisoners themselves. There are no officials and clerks, as in the Oflag. Everything is done by the prisoners, under the supervision of a few German N.C.O.'s.

The lucky employees of the camp administration are,

however, only a minority. Far more numerous are those who have to work in farms or small factories belonging to the administrative region of our camp.

Work in the "ochs," that is farms, is very strenuous. The Bavarian peasants work very hard themselves, and they usually demand from the prisoners, working under armed guard, efforts beyond the capacity of normal men. The working day on a farm begins at six in the morning and lasts until ten in the evening. The morning and evening are spent attending to the cows, of which there are many in every Bavarian farm (that is why the prisoners call this work "ochs"). The whole day is filled with work in the field, without any break for lunch. The lunch consists of bread and lard, which the prisoner may eat without interrupting his work. The farmers themselves work in the same way.

Our men, mostly peasants themselves, were astonished by the low cultural level of the Bavarian farmers, whose wants are very limited, although most of them are prosperous. Their food is rich, but it is composed exclusively of their own products. Better food is the prisoners' only compensation for toil on the land.

In the camp itself the food is not so good, but all prisoners like to return to the Stalag. They get there the same dishes as we did in the Oflag, but in slightly larger quantities. After all, the prisoners in the Stalag have some work to do, and they could not be expected to stand up to it on the meagre rations of the officers.

Work in a factory is the worst thing that can happen to a prisoner. The working hours are somewhat shorter than on a farm, but the work is as hard, and there is no compensation in better food. The prisoners are employed mainly in small workshops, such as tanneries or furniture works. Sometimes the hygienic conditions are bad, on account of fumes and chemical reactions. The prisoners from our Stalag were never employed in large factories and certainly not in any armament factories.

Such were the facts which we learned soon from our

more experienced colleagues. Their advice was invariably to dodge work on the land by all available means.

This, however, was becoming increasingly difficult. Apart from warm appeals at roll-call, we had many visits from German N.C.O.'s, who endeavoured to recruit labour, using both threats and promises.

Finally some of us gave way, and our little group grew smaller every day. Many of our comrades, worn out by the tedious life in the camp, preferred anything—even a change for the worse — to the endless waiting and uncertainty.

## XVII.

There is continuous movement in the Stalag. Parties of prisoners are sent off to work every day and other parties return from a term of labour. Sometimes batches of prisoners from other camps are sent to our Stalag.

We were not long alone in our room, especially as our number decreased almost every day. First of all some Frenchmen, sent up to the camp to be tried for some offence, were quartered in our room. Their case was to be investigated by the camp's judiciary officer, and they were almost certain to be sent to the penitentiary company. On the following day we had new guests—two Belgians and six Russians. The latter had belonged to the French army, which they joined in the last months before the disaster, when the French Government called up all foreigners.

Very soon our room became even more international. The Germans put in six British prisoners—a sergeant and five soldiers. They came to our Stalag directly from northern France, from the camp of Lens, which was liquidated.

All the bunks in our small room were occupied. Its area of 25 square metres held the regulation number of forty-two men. This would appear almost impossible, but the three-tier bunks were much smaller than those of the Oflag. There was practically no free space left between the bunks, which filled the room completely. One could

sit only on one of the lower bunks and then in a very uncomfortable position, for the tiers were closely spaced.

The forty-two men represent five different nationalities. So far we had not met any British soldiers. We knew from the stories of the " September men " that there was about a dozen of them in the camp and that they lived on friendly terms with the Poles. We had not met them, because there was a case of dysentery in the British hut, and the Germans applied a simple form of quarantine—they locked the hut and kept the poor British there for three weeks. Food was handed to them through the window.

Our acquaintance with the new British arrivals was not made in a day. The confined space, although it certainly brings people near to each other in a purely physical sense, does not particularly assist social relations. For some time we looked at each other with reserve.

We gathered from their conversation that they were all Scots. Their spirits were excellent and their morale high.

We were rather amused by their language, especially by the regular repetition of an obviously censurable word, which occurred at two or three words' intervals. We even organised sweeps on the Britons' conversation. When they started talking, we assigned to each of us a three-minute period and we carefully noted how many times the said word was used in each of the three-minute runs. The highest score wins and some of our scores were incredibly high.

Later, when we had made friends with the Scots, we told them about our little game. They laughed a lot, but they never used that word again when talking to us.

Our friendship started when the young sergeant borrowed from one of us a mouth organ and played, first some Scottish tunes and then anything we asked him for. He had played bagpipes in his native town and he liked to talk about the band they had there. Since that day his concerts enlivened our evenings in the small, dark room.

The British soldiers locked in their hut had heard about the arrival of their comrades. They wanted to see them

and they somehow managed to sneak out at night, using the window. They came to our hut and this sealed our friendship, for they had known for months our "September men" and greeted us almost as cordially as their own compatriots.

Our most frequent visitor was the little jockey Mat, an old soldier from China and India, a charming fellow, who kept his wit and humour although he had lost an eye in Flanders in June, 1940. He and young Sergeant George became our best friends.

## XVIII.

Roll-call in the Stalag is unlike that in the Oflag. It takes place much earlier; in fact it is held before dawn, in complete darkness. We assemble in the muddy lane between huts for what is really nothing but a daily slave market. We wait for a long time, shivering with cold. The distant glitter of the torch carried by the group of German N.C.O.s walking along the line sometimes does not come any closer for half an hour or so. At last they reach us. We see in the dim light the figure of our lord and master—feldfebel Loesch. His authority is practically undisputed, for the commandant of the camp, a colonel, is hardly ever seen by the prisoners. Loesch is a dry little man, with a bony face exactly like a death's head. He has a reputation for "kindness." He is followed by some N.C.O.s, some French interpreters and a group of farmers and artisans who have applied to the camp for labour.

Loesch wants forty more men. Only a few of the "September Poles" are left and these are sick. He therefore turns towards us cadets, with a bitter reproach for our unwillingness to work. He has a barking and rasping voice. We refuse to be intimidated. We know that there is still in force an order of the commandant's according to which we are to be used only as volunteers. Loesch finally turned away, muttering something. He went to the group of French priests, standing next to us. They are protected

by the same regulation as ourselves, and the eloquence of Loesch is lost on them as it was on us.

" When your brothers have to work hard (indeed), you prefer to do nothing? " he cried. " Und das nennen Sie Christentum? " he asked dramatically.

This preaching of Christianity to priests was a grim farce. On the preceding day the same Loesch had interrupted the *appel* before coming to our group. He had stopped at the hut of the penitentiary company. It seemed to him that too few of its men were present. The French commander of the hut reported the remaining prisoners were ill and confined to bed.

" You're cheating me! " yelled Loesch. " There can't be so many sick men. You don't know me yet! Every one out for punishment! "

The prisoners at first failed to understand what Loesch meant. But we soon saw it for ourselves. The roll-call was interrupted, and every one returned to their huts. Only the penitentiary company was called out. All its members had to go out, without any exception. We heard for a long time the hoarse shouting of " raus! " " raus! " and at last they all went out. Some of them were actually seriously ill. Loesch and his assistant, a fat corporal with a butcher's face, looked at them with sarcastic smiles. Then they started :—

" About turn! "

" Run! "

" Flat down! "

" Get up! "

" Run fast! "

The fat Corporal yelled in French the orders issued by Loesch. He had lived in Paris before the war and he even apparently belonged to a very special crowd in the international underworld. He spoke good French, and he liked to serve as interpreter, especially in such cases.

The penitentiary company was then driven out into the fields outside the camp. There, on rough frozen ground barely covered with snow, they had to perform all kinds of

exercises. Somersaults, falling face downwards or backwards, running on bended knees and crawling on all fours succeeded each other in endless sequence. When any one lost his balance and fell, Loesch or the Corporal leaped towards him, kicking hard with their hobnailed boots. They mostly aimed for the face. Some of the victims could not get up. When, after an hour, Loesch concluded the exercise, several of the prisoners were unable to return. They were brought back on stretchers. Most of them were the ill ones. When the commander of the hut, a French aspirant, attempted to complain to the camp's doctor, he received an unexpected reply:—

"A physician in our army," said the German, "is merely an adviser. He has not—as your doctors have—any authority for making decisions which would be binding for the commanding officers. In this case feldfebel Loesch was acting as your commanding officer and, therefore, I could not countermand his orders. Neither can I make any criticism of his actions. He was fully entitled to do what he has done."

## XIX.

For a few days Marian and I have been in the camp office. Some N.C.O.'s came into our hut one afternoon and asked whether any of us knew German, French and Polish, as well as typing. We realised that this might be a good chance of avoiding work on the land, and we followed the advice of the old hands, who said that work in the central office was the best job available for a prisoner.

Besides, we wanted to learn more about the complicated machinery of the Stalag. Such knowledge might be useful. Marian did not get the job at once, for he was too modest about his typewriting. Loesch dismissed him with a contemptuous shrug, but he asked, to make sure: "What was your civilian profession?" The poor journalist hardly knew what to answer, but he had a brain wave and he replied with one German word: "*Iurist.*"

Loesch repeated it solemnly and looked at Marian with respect. When some other candidates turned up, he nevertheless engaged the " lawyer."

He recruited five of us in all, two Poles and three French interpreters. We had a small office. Marian and I sat at typewriters and the French aspirants had a bench under the wall. Their only duty was the recruitment of prisoners for labour squads. It was not an easy, nor a pleasant task. There was also one Belgian and one Polish interpreter—the latter our sergeant in command of the hut. Our chief was Loesch.

Now I do not attend *appel* any more. During the morning roll-call I have to prepare work for the day. My first job is drawing up the " Arbeitseinsatz," the list of all the prisoners detailed for various duties. There are scores of headings, which provide a comprehensive view of the different activities in the camp. The list is headed by the central office—the one in which we are employed. Then there are other offices: files, book-keeping, accounts of sums due for the work done by Arbeitskommandos and the post office. There are various workshops—tailoring, bootmaking, joinery, kitchen, canteen and many others. The camp chaplains are included under a separate heading. The total number of persons thus employed in our Stalag of 2000 prisoners is 300 to 350.

It seemed to me at first that I should keep the list up to date by taking account of all the changes which came to my knowledge. Soon, however, I discovered that many of those changes were made without the approval of the office, and that Loesch neither cared for the accuracy of the lists presented by him, nor realised any need for current revision. I soon got rid of my zeal, for I did not propose to improve German methods of administration, but I conceived some doubt as to the wisdom of elevating a man of Loesch's type, hitherto a corporal, to such a responsible position. Later I was to discover unsuspected German virtues, which made Loesch eminently suitable for his job, in spite of all his limitations.

Marian and I spent the day writing out the papers necessary for each prisoner leaving the camp for a period of work, or returning from an Arbeitskommando. The papers are always identical, but the routine wording conceals a mass of human misery.

I have never regretted the few weeks spent in the Stalag office. I learnt there many things and I saw the working of a prisoners' camp. But the most important lesson I learnt there was one on the German character.

## XX.

The guards begin to call at the office since early morning, with requests for labourers. They carry out the duties of escorts and also of employment agents. Most of them are privates and "Gefreiters." There are only a few Corporals.

Although there are in our camp representatives of almost all the Allied nations, only soldiers of one nationality are sent to a particular Arbeitskommando. Frenchmen, Poles and Belgians can be sent only to localities designated for those nationalities. When a Pole returns from a job, another Pole has to be sent there instead. The British prisoners, of whom there are only 22 in the camp, have no Arbeitskommandos of their own. Some of them are employed in the daily cleaning of the Stalag. The others are N.C.O.s and are therefore exempt from compulsory labour.

All the sentries (that is the official title of the guards) report at the office in full field kit. Most of them stand to attention on entering and others prefer the Nazi salute. This is one of the symptoms of the duality introduced by the Party into the army. Loesch, a militant Nazi, invariably replies with the Party "Heil Hitler!" His behaviour is typical of the new customs in the German army, once famed for its iron discipline.

The Colonel in command of the camp called at the office. He is about sixty, very stiff, always in patent-

leather boots, with a big cigar in his mouth. He carries out an inspection of the office every fortnight, and the only matter of any interest to him is the æration of the room. He insists on keeping the windows open. He generally makes a long speech about the hygienic value of fresh air, shouting at the top of his voice, as is the habit of German speakers. Loesch listens to the speech, completely unperturbed. The colonel, after a few minutes' shouting, puts his cigar back into his mouth and walks out stiffly. He has hardly turned his back when the feldfebel shrugs his shoulders, taps his finger significantly on the forehead and sits down before the colonel has had time to leave the room. Such manners would not be tolerated in the old German army. But Loesch has too good a standing in the Party to be worried by such trifles. He is the actual commandant of the camp.

The soldiers coming from the neighbouring villages report their requirements to Loesch. One of them brought back yesterday three prisoners who could not stand the strain and fell ill—he wants new ones. Another has been asked by the farmers for more labour.

Depending on the nationality assigned to the Arbeitskommando claiming labour, Loesch sends out into the camp an interpreter speaking the language. His job is not an easy one. The prisoners know that when they turn up in front of the office with the interpreter, they are as good as sent to a labour squad. They prefer to discuss the matter first with their compatriot and find out what conditions prevail in the particular Arbeitskommando. They have always plenty of dodges and the poor interpreter often cannot find a single available man in a whole hut. The Poles are probably the best organised group. The commander of the Polish hut, who is employed together with us in the office, always knows by heart how many men he has available and how many are in no position to shirk the labour squad. When some Poles are required, he can tell Loesch off-hand how many men can go. If there are none available, he says so. Loesch found out that the

sergeant's word does not have to be checked, for he is always right.

The candidates for the Arbeitskommando turn up after a while. Sometimes, when several guards are waiting for their turn, they quarrel among themselves and haggle over the men to be assigned to each of them. It's a real slave market. When a decision is finally reached, I have to make out a convoy sheet. I make them almost automatically. Scores of such documents leave our office every day. Each of them is typed with five copies : one for the guard, another for the office, a third for the files and a fourth for the post office, to change the address. Another carbon copy is kept as spare.

At the top of the convoy sheet I write out the nationality of the prisoners : Poles, Frenchmen or Belgians. The Flemings have been lately insisting to be described as such. They always ask me to put down "Flamen," instead of "Belgier." This separatist movement has, of course, no political foundation. It has been recently rumoured that the Flemings would be released. When they go out to work, they are anxious to have their origin put on record, so that they might be traced in case the promise of liberation ever materialised.

After the nationality I write out a list of the prisoners. There are usually five to ten of them in a squad. I write the prisoner's name and number, his place of birth and profession. This last item of information is quite superfluous. Some of the guards were quite worried when, after asking for agricultural labour, they saw on the list professions like book-keeper, teacher, or civil servant. They don't like it, and the farmers also dislike intellectuals.

At the bottom of the sheet I write out the name of the guard. Although there are several hundred of them, I already know by heart many of their names. They change their prisoners so often that I have to write out new lists every few days.

## XXI.

The soldiers are men of all types. Some of them are very stupid. Others, good natured, like to boast of their good treatment of prisoners.

"With me, it's like in a family. Yesterday I brought them a tin of marmalade, to let them have something better," said a rubicund guard.

Almost everything depends on the escort's character. The prisoners don't sleep in the farms on which they work. They have to return for the night to the village or small town, generally the seat of the borough, where they spend the nights, as well as the Sundays, in a special building converted into a jail. The escorting soldier makes a tour of the farms on which the prisoners are working. He prevents escapes, listens to the complaints of the farmers and intervenes when he thinks fit.

One of the "September" cadets told me the following story. A farmer complained that he did not attend to the cows with sufficient zeal. The guard admonished him sharply. As this did not seem to impress the cadet, he struck him several times. Then he cried, "Now I will teach you a lesson!" and he seized his rifle. He ordered the cadet to walk towards a barn, facing the wall. Then he slipped some cartridges into the magazine and said: "You may say your last prayers if you like."

This lasted about a minute, and after that the guard laughed heartily and allowed the prisoner to turn back. "Well, I will let you live this time. But if it happens again, I will shoot. Remember that."

I am sure the Polish cadet remembered.

To-day a short, stout gefreiter with a brutish face brought in a tall young Frenchman.

"Judiciary officer. Insubordination," he reported.

Marian had to write down the particulars. The Frenchman, an intelligent, lively native of Marseilles, realised that the Germans cannot understand us, and he talked in rapid

whispers. " Help me against this man. C'est une brute. He comes to our cell every night and bullies us. Because I am an N.C.O. he always tells me to clean the latrines. When we resist, he stabs us with his bayonet."

The gefreiter did not pay the slightest attention to his victim. He looked at us with a glassy stare. " I want a new prisoner. He has to start work to-morrow. I want to leave within an hour."

In the afternoon they brought in a Pole. He had a bandage on his neck and blood was trickling through the gauze. The German who escorted him presented a written report.

The prisoner, on leaving his prison quarters in the morning, did not go towards the farm where he was supposed to work, but in the opposite direction. About midday he was caught, after a chase. He had only gone about fifteen kilometres when he was captured again. As he was escorted back to the camp, something unpleasant—as the guard said—happened. The Pole had concealed on his person a safety razor blade. When the soldier was looking the other way, he slashed his throat. After having an emergency bandage put on by a doctor, he was sufficiently well to be sent back to the camp for punishment. The report ended with a request to send the prisoner—after he had been treated for his wound and punished—back to the same Arbeitskommando, " for pedagogical reasons."

And this was the Pole's story:

" It was a very bad job. The farmer was sweating us to death. I wanted to change it for something else. I applied to the doctor, but I was not ill enough to be sent back. When I could not bear it any more, I decided to attempt escape. Then they would catch me and send me back to the camp. Afterwards I could try to get some better work. They did catch me all right. My escort was taking me back to the camp. He was furious, for I had given him a bad fright. If I had really escaped, he would have been responsible. So he ordered me to run into the field and drop, then to run again with frog leaps. This

went on the whole time, until I was quite exhausted. Then he struck me on the head with the butt of his rifle. I did not know what to do. I had a razor blade. So when I fell and I saw him approaching, I cut my throat. This scared him thoroughly. Some people were passing by and he sent one of them on a bicycle to fetch a doctor. The others assembled around waving their fists and shouting at me, " Verfluchter Polack! " It was all for the fright I gave the guard. Blood was dripping from my neck, and they just shouted and abused me. When the doctor bandaged me and said that I could go on, the guard put me in wooden hand stocks, so that I could not hurt myself any more. That's how I came here. But I am glad I won't be with that devil any more. I will not return there. . . ."

" Of course you won't," I said. " Do you know that the swine asked in the report to send you back there? But don't worry. We will try to help you."

I looked with hate and disgust at the German soldier who had treated my comrade in this way. He was a skinny, fair-headed man with a meek, melancholy face. One could hardly believe him capable, by his looks. . . .

But I know what to think of German soldiers, no matter how they look or what they seem to be.

## XXII.

For a few days there has been more gossip about the proposed release of the Flemings. Finally things began to happen. A commission charged with testing the knowledge of the Flemish language of the Belgians professing to be Flemings came to the camp.

A circular has been sent to all the Belgian Arbeitskommandos belonging to the camp and new candidates for examination come every day. Eventually all the Belgian Arbeitskommandos were practically liquidated. There were apparently hardly any Walloons among the Belgians.

Loesch was rather embarrassed. Most of the candidates passed the examination. " Herr Professor," as Loesch

respectfully calls the chairman of the examining board, decided that they speak Flemish fluently. The farmers and small manufacturers called daily at the office, clamouring for more labour. The camp was overcrowded, for the several hundred Flemings were all there and they could not be sent out to work, for they were awaiting their promised release.

Loesch tried persuasion. He promised that as soon as orders for the release of the Flemings arrive, he would summon back all the men employed outside the camp. In the meantime, he advised them to volunteer for work " in their own interest." But nobody volunteered.

In the last few days Loesch was quite worried. We know that he was asked again for large numbers of workmen and he could not supply them for there are no prisoners left in the camp, except the sick and . . . the Flemings.

At last the whole camp was thrilled by sensational news. The Flemings are leaving. They will go in two batches, the first to leave on the same day.

The Belgians went mad with joy. Some of them, employed in the central office, used their influence to get on the list of the first party. The name of Harry L., our colleague from the office and for several months chief Belgian interpreter, was of course at the head of the list. He sat down and typed a long string of difficult Flemish names of his friends.

The fortunate ones whose names are included in the first list, were told to be ready for departure at noon. Although they were given little time, nobody was late. They all turned up punctually at twelve o'clock. They waited, with joy in their hearts.

Then Loesch came with a mysterious, sarcastic scowl on his face. He was followed by a contractor who had been asking for a large group of workmen for many days, but did not get any so far. A shiver of anxiety went through the ranks.

" All those inscribed on the first list," said Loesch,

" will leave to-day for labour in L. They will start within an hour. Now dry provisions for the journey will be issued in the kitchen. The second party will leave to-morrow . . . also to work."

The poor Flemings were completely stunned. Those who had begged their German superiors to get them on the first list and now realised that they were losing good, soft office jobs to be sent to slave in a factory, were frantic with despair. They could hardly believe it. They thought that it was only a hoax. Their leaders asked Loesch for some explanation. The Flemings were good clerks and their services were needed in the office.

But Loesch was pitiless.

" Did you not tell me this morning that you want to go, that they will manage in the office without you?" he jeered.

Every one will go to work. Even Harry, so far reputed to be Loesch's favourite. The German hardly looked at him when Harry begged him to be allowed to stay.

Poor Harry did not stay long in the factory. He returned after a week. But he did not come back to the office. I saw him in the ranks of the penitentiary company.

Loesch is in fine spirits. He and his friend the Corporal with the beefy face laughed heartily. What a practical joke! The feelings of the wretched prisoners who thought that they would be released and then were sent to hard labour struck Loesch and his comrade as extremely funny.

I began to understand why Loesch was regarded by his superiors as the ideal camp commandant. Such clever tricks as the one he played on the Flemings amply compensate for the shortcomings of his education and upbringing.

I knew that Loesch was a sadist, for I had never forgotten his treatment of the sick prisoners, but I discovered that he was capable of moral cruelty as well.

He was so far pleased with my work. My speed at the

typewriter compared favourably with that of Marian, who, on the other hand, was protected by the miraculous word " Iurist."

But lately Loesch began to look at me with disapproval. I think that my expression told him plainly enough what I thought of his marvellous " joke." In the evening he said to me, unexpectedly: " Mir scheint, Sie sind viel zu frech fuer uns."

I realised that I was being fired.

## XXIII.

This sudden dismissal suits me very well. The damp and cold hut had damaged my health. My successor, a young French aspirant, was embarrassed to appear to be taking a job from me. I told him that I did not mind it at all, and that I was even quite glad to hand over.

I had seen enough during these few weeks. I did not require the security of an office job any more. With my thorough knowledge of Stalag secrets I could dodge farm work for ever and avoid working for the Germans.

The small room in the hut was to become my permanent residence for many months. This had its advantages. I hardly saw any Germans. Sometimes I did not see them for several days at a time. The cadets who remained in the camp were already sufficiently expert in its routine to avoid attending roll-call. We saw our jailers only when they came to carry out some inspection or to bring new prisoners to our hut.

We had a joke we liked to play on new German N.C.O.s who did not know our hut. The indifference with which we greeted their arrival resulted invariably in a long speech, in which we were ordered to stand to attention on seeing the Sergeant or Corporal. As I knew German better than the others, it was my duty to explain gently that we, as cadets, did not feel compelled to salute N.C.O.s. This, of course, merely infuriated the German, and this was the point of my kind explanation. Every German N.C.O. replied

by shouting that we were prisoners and that we should abide by the regulations of the Stalag, no matter whether we were cadets or privates. I would calmly listen to such a harangue, and then I would point silently to the rules and regulations, a sheet hanging on the wall of the hut and signed by the Colonel himself. One of the points states that all prisoners should salute *officers* entering the huts. We know perfectly well that this point is contrary to the general practice of the camp. Every German N.C.O. is regarded as superior to all prisoners, and in all the other huts the N.C.O.s receive smart salutes. But the regulation is there and our trick always works. It never occurred to any of the N.C.O.s on whom I tried this trick that the regulation was meant for the whole camp and not for our hut alone— and that there was really no reason why it should be applied to us if it was not respected elsewhere. The N.C.O.s nearly stood to attention themselves on seeing the Colonel's signature, and they withdrew in sullen silence. We were greatly amused by this display of automatic discipline.

But this German discipline is not universal—as I noticed in the case of Loesch. We had in our hut an example of limited respect for officers.

One of the French aspirants, a good portrait painter, was asked by a German N.C.O. to paint his picture. "I want to send it home to my wife at Christmas," he said.

As he made this request politely and rather timidly, the Frenchman agreed and started work on the picture. It happened that a German officer walked in soon afterwards. This was a very rare occurrence, for the officers on the staff of the camp avoided the part inhabited by the prisoners and they hardly ever set foot in the huts. Both model and artist jumped up and stood to attention. The officer glanced at the sketch of the portrait, asked the Frenchman a few questions about where he got his painting colours and whether he had a permission to buy them. Then he muttered to the German: "You should not do this," and walked out.

The artist looked questioningly at the N.C.O., who hesitated for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders and resumed posing for the portrait. " Don't worry," he said to the Frenchman, " just carry on."

Most of the N.C.O.s are men over forty and mostly reservists. The Germans cannot afford to keep at home any better personnel. Even the ranks of those third-rate soldiers are periodically raked for men fit for the fighting line. Lately one of the postal N.C.O.s has been ordered to depart to a fighting unit, and he does not seem to enjoy the prospect at all. He is a man of about fifty, well preserved. But he had belonged during the last war to the crew of a submarine. The Germans are short of submarine crews and they use everybody who has had any experience in that kind of work.

## XXIV.

Throughout my long illness I was visited daily by our British colleagues, mainly by Mat and George. The little jockey, with whom we became great friends, told me about his tragic experience in Flanders and also about pleasanter memories of India and China. He was one of the few who had not yet established contact with their families and this worried him a good deal. His wife lived in York, and she had a baby which he had never seen.

Young Sergeant George C. had not travelled as much as the old vagabond Mat. In the twenty-three years of his life he hardly ever left his native Scottish town. He never even went to London. His journey to the Continent with the B.E.F. was the first he had ever undertaken. In spite of his youth and inexperience, he earned general respect by his tact and good manners.

The boys in his platoon were almost all friends from the same town. Tom S., a merry fellow, always ready to sing, was our favourite. He and young Jim, who had lost in France a bit of his lung, but not his voice, acquainted us with all the British soldiers' songs. There was always " Good night, Sergeant-Major," " Quartermaster's Stores "

and " Springtime in the Rockies." I usually asked them to sing for me " Mexico Way."

Jim was not the only seriously wounded British prisoner. There was poor Mat with his one eye, and Harry W., an old friend of our " September " comrades. He was a Sergeant Pilot shot down over Berlin and he limped, leaning heavily on his stick.

There were two other airmen. One of them was an eighteen-year-old gunner called Duncan. He had been shot down over France, but he baled out and saved his life. This happened at the time when the country was already half overrun by the enemy. He tried to dodge the Germans, but he was wounded in an encounter with them and finally captured.

Duncan is not the youngest of the Britons. The baby among the six Scotsmen is Bill B., who is seventeen and looks like a girl.

The taciturn, quiet Steve is a complete invalid—he lost a leg during the French campaign. Really most of them should be released, for they are obviously unfit for fighting. But the Germans care little for international conventions on the treatment of prisoners.

The daily visits of our British friends are profitable, for we learn a good deal of English. Bob K., a Londoner, is the teacher of my friend Peter of the reconnaissance squadron, and they have regular lessons.

Our guests do not seem to like the French very much. But they get on with us very well. They always ask us about the latest war news, for they don't understand German, and they cannot follow the communiques broadcast by loudspeakers in the huts. When we translate the news, they invariably dismiss everything that is to our disadvantage with one contemptuous word : " Propaganda."

Their morale is splendid. The fact that they are prisoners does not affect in the least their complete confidence in final victory. If any one asks them whether Britain will win, they just shrug their shoulders indulgently. They don't even take the trouble to answer such silly questions.

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## XXV.

As far as political opinions are concerned, our " September men " are as firm as the Britons. They are as certain about the final outcome, and they probably have better all-round information.

They discuss the development of the war with shrewd judgment. I was struck by one thing—they all believed that the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia was inevitable. This view was founded on hints in letters from Poland.

" Just wait till the winter is over and then you'll see," they used to say.

Events proved them right. They admit that France disappointed them bitterly. They had been looking forward with hope to the first spring of the war. They could hardly believe the news of the fall of Paris, announced by the tolling of bells.

But when Frenchmen began to arrive at the camp, they realised that nothing else could have happened. " They are not soldiers."

Their attitude towards the French was not one of contempt, but rather of tactfully concealed superiority. These simple Polish peasants, most of whom had never been outside their country, realised that they had a moral strength which the Frenchmen, broken and dispirited by defeat, did not possess. They realised that they had qualities which may in the future mean more for defining the respective importance of nations than mere numbers or wealth.

The Belgians, who are also quite numerous in the camp, are as undisciplined and unkempt as the Frenchmen. There is a sharp dividing line between the " aristocracy " of the camp—the Britons and Poles—and the remaining nationalities, with which they have practically no dealings.

Even the Germans have a certain respect for the Poles. They hate them, but they have to admit that they are real

soldiers. The attitude of the civilian population towards the Polish prisoners was also influenced by this fact. The German authorities had to issue special orders, reminding all Germans that the Poles were enemies and should be treated as such. The press reported cases like that of a peasant who was condemned to two weeks' arrest for having summoned a doctor to attend a Polish prisoner. The court regarded this as an act of excessive kindness to a prisoner. The medical care of the prisoner was the business of the guard. Such offences as taking a photograph of Poles working at a farm together with Germans are punished by heavier sentences.

But the real attitude of the population is illustrated by the following incident:—

A lad from a neighbouring village calls at the camp every week to collect sewage from the latrines, which is used as a fertiliser in the fields. The unpleasant work of loading it is always carried out by the penitentiary company, largely composed of Poles punished for attempted escapes. Looking at them, the village boy once said: " Yes, you are having a hard time. I can see that. But when Britain wins, you Poles will be big bosses."

## XXVI.

Even after the departure of the British, our room remained quite international. Apart from the three main nationalities of the camp—Frenchmen, Poles and Belgians —there are many exotic visitors of all kinds.

The Germans decided to use the vast human reserves they had accumulated in their prisoners' camps for the realisation of various complicated separatist and minority schemes. They picked out of the ranks of the Polish, French and Belgian armies representatives of the most fantastic " minorities," who were to be released and sent to some unknown destination, to carry out some mysterious activities.

After the protracted search for Flemings, which was—

as the end has proved—of hardly any benefit to them, the Germans began to look for French minorities. Already the registration of the Flemings had been carried out regardless of whether they were Belgian or French citizens. Inhabitants of Picardy and Artois were also encouraged to declare Flemish nationality. This was an evidence of the far-reaching character of the German plans.

Before our arrival at the camp the Germans released and sent home all the Bretons, who were charged with supporting the frail separatist movement of Brittany, sponsored by the Reich. The results were not entirely satisfactory. Frenchmen in the camp received reports of a large anti-German demonstration at Rennes. Many of its participants were arrested, and they all proved to be " separatists " released from camps.

Now we have in our room some Corsicans and Armenians, waiting for further instructions.

The Armenians, who had been fairly numerous in the French army, were to be sent on to a camp in eastern Germany and then set free. They were themselves at a loss to guess where they might be sent. It might be Turkey or perhaps Russia, but this seems unlikely, for most of them had not the slightest connection with Russia.

The Corsicans had other worries. They were asked to declare themselves in favour of Italian nationality. Although they speak an Italian dialect, they were shocked by the suggestion. In spite of their language, they are French patriots. But many of them wonder whether it would not be better to pretend to agree, for it would certainly bring them a step nearer to freedom. Finally most of them signed the declaration and they left, assuring us that they were still good Frenchmen and that they would cheat the " macaronis " in the end.

The most entertaining of the French minorities was the Russian one. The six Russians in our room were all émigrés, or descendants of émigrés, of 1917. We like them, for they are cultured men, and their attitude towards the Poles is very correct. Deprived of a country for twenty

years, they no longer bear any grudge against Poland, and they even treat us with some respect and a melancholy envy for people who still have something to fight for. As far as they are concerned, the present war and its issue are a matter of indifference, though they certainly have no love for the Germans.

Suddenly they were also promoted to the rank of a "national minority." It all happened in a very odd way. The White Ruthenians had been picked out of the ranks of the Poles for several months. All the White Ruthenians had to pass an examination in the language and then they were sent somewhere, presumably to be released. Nobody knew whether they were handed over to Russia, with which Germany was then still on ostensibly good terms, or whether they were used for stirring unrest in the "friendly" Russia. They just vanished and were heard of no more.

But on some occasion or other the Germans noticed the Russians in our hut. They were asked what sort of Russians they were. They answered, "Whites"—for they were used to describing themselves in this way, to stress the fact that they were not Reds, that is bolsheviks.

"Ah! Weisse Russen. Then you should be released."

They were glad to hear that they would be set free on account of their political convictions. What had actually happened was that the stupid German officer mixed up the political with the racial classification. When he heard about "White" Russians, he thought that they were White Ruthenians. The White Ruthenians are, of course, people living on the borderland of Poland and Russia, who speak the White Ruthenian dialect. They have absolutely nothing in common with "White" Russians, who are the exiled opponents of the Bolshevik regime.

The German officer's involuntary pun had far-reaching and altogether comic consequences. When it was rumoured in the camp that the Russians would be released because they were "Whites," their little-known tribe was miraculously multiplied in numbers. Many French soldiers with

such sonorous names as Rosenblum, Loewenfisch and so on, suddenly remembered that they had been born in Minsk or Kiev, and that the fact that they had never seen Russia at all could only be due to their " White " convictions, which compelled them to leave the country in their childhood.

This was grotesque, but the official machinery of the camp, once set in motion, could not be stopped. Eventually we had to say good-bye to our six Russians. We were sorry to see them leave, for they had an invaluable knack of securing wood and all sorts of fuel when no one else could find any. They went to an unknown destination and a mysterious fate.

With them went Rosenblum and Loewenfisch, as well as my friend Zotow, the son of one of Wrangel's colonels. They were all supposed to be White Ruthenians. . . .

## XXVII.

There is another class of prisoners who are being released, but they are not popular, and we do not talk to them. They are the " Volksdeutsche."

Any Pole, Belgian, Frenchman or even Englishman can declare himself a " Volksdeutsche," simply because he had a German aunt, or even only a German wife. He is immediately accepted as a member of the German national community. The ease with which one may join the German nation seems a peculiar illustration of Hitler's racial theory.

The result of such a declaration is, of course, liberation. But we find some comfort in the thought that the renegates are in for the " feldgrau "—that is for service in the German army. No doubt the unexpected hospitality of the German nation is due mainly to a desire for getting as many recruits as possible for the armed forces.

The Alsatians make a practice of declaring themselves as " Volksdeutsche." Some of them don't even speak German well, but they always manage to find an excuse.

Their only motive is a desire for returning home. They hope to be able to wangle matters afterwards.

This was more difficult than they had believed. After a few months of freedom some of them began to come back to the same camp. They refused to sign declarations accepting German citizenship. They did not want to assist in the illegal annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, carried out before the conclusion of a peace treaty.

The Germans discovered many " Volksdeutsche " among the Belgians—among the Walloons as well as among the Flemings. Many of them don't know German at all. They are rather pleased, and think that they had cheated the Germans; but I suspect that they may be cheated themselves before the game is over.

The departure of the Belgian and French " Germans " was elaborately staged by the camp authorities. A prisoners' band played until the new " Germans " passed the gate. Feldfebel Loesch made a great speech. The highlight of the ceremony was a lesson in giving the Nazi salute—a comic performance. Then they went off, but nobody envied them their doubtful freedom.

The recruitment of " Volksdeutche " among the Poles was quite difficult and unsuccessful. At last a stupid lad with a purely Polish name, who had nothing to do with Germany, consented to become a " Volksdeutsche." He did not understand the glances of his comrades, and he failed to realise the absurdity of his decision. The Germans ignored it too, and they ordered him to make an application in writing. The boy had heard that some of the cadets knew German and could write it. Eventually he asked me to write for him an application for admission to the ranks of the " Volksdeutsche." He was quite surprised when I refused to do it. Nobody wanted to write his application and every one looked at him in such a way that he finally gave up his pathetic plan.

There was in our group of cadets a young aspirant who had taken part in the Polish campaign and then fought in the ranks of the Polish 1st Division in France. He was

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The Germans discovered many " Volksdeutsche " among the Belgians—among the Walloons as well as among the Flemings. Many of them don't know German at all. They are rather pleased, and think that they had cheated the Germans; but I suspect that they may be cheated themselves before the game is over.

The departure of the Belgian and French " Germans " was elaborately staged by the camp authorities. A prisoners' band played until the new " Germans " passed the gate. Feldfebel Loesch made a great speech. The highlight of the ceremony was a lesson in giving the Nazi salute—a comic performance. Then they went off, but nobody envied them their doubtful freedom.

The recruitment of " Volksdeutche " among the Poles was quite difficult and unsuccessful. At last a stupid lad with a purely Polish name, who had nothing to do with Germany, consented to become a " Volksdeutsche." He did not understand the glances of his comrades, and he failed to realise the absurdity of his decision. The Germans ignored it too, and they ordered him to make an application in writing. The boy had heard that some of the cadets knew German and could write it. Eventually he asked me to write for him an application for admission to the ranks of the " Volksdeutsche." He was quite surprised when I refused to do it. Nobody wanted to write his application and every one looked at him in such a way that he finally gave up his pathetic plan.

There was in our group of cadets a young aspirant who had taken part in the Polish campaign and then fought in the ranks of the Polish 1st Division in France. He was

born in Pomorze, and his family had probably once been German. His Christian name was Wilhelm and his surname was also purely German.

Lieutenant Lemke, the Gestapo Officer of the camp, once summoned aspirant Wilhelm for a long talk. He appealed and persuaded.

" Isn't your family of German origin? " he suggested.

" Yes, but I am a Pole."

" Well, but in the present altered circumstances you surely might . . ."

" Could you Germans welcome as one of you some one who had betrayed his country? " said aspirant Wilhelm, looking in the eyes of Lieutenant Lemke (a name of obviously Slavonic origin).

There was no reply.

## XXVIII.

The Frenchmen seem to have an unlimited supply of various rumours about the " liberation " which they constantly expect. It is in fact their only subject of conversation, and, although they had spent many months in Germany, they still look upon their captivity as something quite temporary and transitory.

The defeat itself is of little interest to them. They prefer not to think about it. Their attitude towards Pétain's policy of collaboration is also mainly practical—that is they think of it only in terms of its immediate effect on their personal fortunes. The hopes which they had placed in the effects of collaboration were sadly disappointed.

It is to be admitted, however, that the general attitude towards Pétain is hostile, in spite of the hopes connected with his negotiations. There are practically no opponents of General de Gaulle among the Frenchmen in the camp. Not one of them would dare to say anything against de Gaulle, even using the authority of Pétain. In our international hut the Poles invented a new form of salute which

they impose on all Frenchmen entering the room. They have to say: " Heil " and then add—" de Gaulle."

There is only one way for the Frenchmen to get back home, and that is the " repatriement sanitaire." Under the terms of the Armistice the Germans undertook to send back all the sick and unfit, known as " inaptes au travail." This is in the interest of the Germans themselves, for they do not want to feed men who cannot be compelled to work.

Some weeks before our arrival at the Stalag a party of sick Frenchmen had been sent home. It was a major sensation. Ever since the French have been talking only of the next transport. There is no end of conjecture as to its date and composition.

Of course every one is ill. The camp is full of invalids dragging their feet wearily with the help of sticks. They are a sight to bring tears into the eyes of any human being, but it remains to be seen whether their misery will impress German doctors, whose word is the only one that counts. They alone can dispense freedom.

To get on the D.U. (Dienstunfähig) list is every prisoner's dream. To be on the list is not necessarily equivalent to being a candidate for liberation. The list of the prisoners to be set free is checked and revised many times before the departure of every batch. But the D.U. men are generally not sent to Arbeitskommandos, and they can be used only for light work within the camp.

There are, however, moments when the camp is almost empty and requests for labour continue to come in. When only D.U. prisoners are available, the Germans send them to hard labour, making no bones about their own regulations. Such prisoners usually return after a few weeks, mostly in a much worse condition than before, sometimes on the point of death.

The patients are first diagnosed by prisoner physicians, of whom there are three. They endeavour to assist their comrades as much as possible. They can give temporary certificates of unfitness, and propose candidates for repat-

riation. But their influence is limited, for the last word rests always with a German doctor.

The small sick bay could never hold all the prisoners declared unfit for work. It is used only by the seriously ill.

## XXIX.

I once happened to be a visitor in that sad little world. After my summary dismissal from the office, I had a long bout of flu'. It lasted for several weeks, but nobody took the slightest interest in my condition, and I was not attended by any of the camp physicians. I did not care much, for the prisoner doctors had told me that they had no medicaments in any case. The sick bay, with a staff of five doctors and several orderlies, dispensed only two kinds of pills. One was supposed to cure all stomach ailments, and the other colds. They were not even Bayer products, just another ersatz.

The unattended flu' lasted much longer than it should have done. My friends eventually brought to the hut a Polish Lieutenant-Doctor, who was usually very busy. He seemed somewhat alarmed by my condition, and he promised to send me to a military hospital for an X-ray.

I went there with a dozen Frenchmen, all of them dreaming of repatriation. Most of them were sent back to the camp with reports to the effect that there was nothing the matter with them. I was the only patient to impress the German doctor with the condition of my lungs.

This did not delight me at all. I knew that they would not release me in any case. I might at best be sent to a prison-sanatorium in Tyrol.

On the next day I was ordered to move to the sick quarters. What I saw there did not cheer me up very much. About fifty patients were lying in a large, dark room. Most of them had not left it for six months or more. The room had little in common with a hospital ward. The bunks were similar to those in the huts, except that they were made of metal and they were much smaller—

an almost impossible achievement. Only a contortionist could hope to get on to one of the lower bunks—and that was, of course, the kind I was assigned.

The atmosphere was indescribably gloomy; the room seemed a pit of resignation, despair and hopeless suffering. I understood why most of those who come there don't ever leave, unless they are carried past the camp gate for the last time and buried in the prisoners' cemetery. There were there already six white crosses. . . .

I did not relish the prospect of becoming one of the permanent melancholy inmates of that grim room. After two unpleasant nights spent in the sick room, I returned to my hut, without asking any one's leave. I was sufficiently well versed in camp routine by that time to know what I could do without risking too much. Besides, I was certain that it would never occur to the Germans that there could be a prisoner who did not want to be treated as a sick man.

After two weeks I had new troubles. One of the rooms in the sanitary hut was cleaned and turned into a quarantine room. I figured on the list of candidates for that establishment, for the X-ray examination suggested lung disease. This was more serious. The quarantine room would mean being locked up for weeks at a time—as the unfortunate Britons had been before. I would be cut off from my friends, and I would probably get really ill after living permanently in the company of serious T.B. cases.

I was feeling much better, and I did not want any of the belated cures of the Germans. I simply did not carry out the order. The Germans never knew anything about it. Whenever a German doctor inspected the quarantine room, my friends informed me in time, and I was there to be seen by him.

Such were the circumstances of my illness and doubtful cure in the Stalag. During this unpleasant period I had one amusing incident. We were waiting in a long, cold corridor in a German military hospital for our X-ray

examination. We already knew about General Wavell's brilliant offensive in Libya. There were in the waiting-room about a dozen prisoners, and as many German soldiers, also waiting for their turn at the X-ray. We had been waiting for hours and every one was thoroughly bored. One of the Frenchmen, a small and lively lad from Marseilles, tried to start a conversation with the Germans, speaking broken German :—

"Ich krank," he said, pointing at himself, with a pained expression.

"Hmm," grunted the Germans.

"Auch krank?" asked the Frenchman.

"Ja," muttered some of the Germans.

"Nein, nein!" the Marius chuckled mischievously. "Ich nicht krank. Ich nicht arbeiten wollen. Sie auch nicht krank. Nicht nach Italien wollen. . . ."

The Germans did not seem to appreciate the joke very much.

## XXX.

There is no more important institution in our small camp than the post office. It is a large organisation, which handles the correspondence of a score of thousand of prisoners scattered throughout Franconia and Baden. The parcels for such a number of customers mean a great deal of work, and they have been coming regularly for a few months.

About forty prisoners are employed at the post office, which is directed by a German gefreiter. There are only three or four other German soldiers on the post office staff, and they are charged with checking the contents of the parcels delivered to prisoners. All the remaining work is done by the prisoners themselves. The post office works smoothly and efficiently.

We established some records of speed. There have been cases of replies received from Poland within six days of the dispatch of a letter. Such a speed can be attained thanks to the help of our "September" colleagues, who

had been working at the post office for a year and know all its secrets. They all do their utmost to speed up the handling of our mails.

The principal thing is to slip a letter to the censor out of turn. The rest is in the hands of the prisoners themselves. As to incoming letters, the speed of their delivery also depends mainly on the censor.

There are several censors, all of them civilians. The chief censor, and at the same time the expert in the Polish language, is a Ukrainian, who used to be well known before the war in Lwow. Nobody suspected at the time that he was a fifth columnist. Now he threw off his mask.

The postal department dealing with parcels is the busiest of all. The French had been getting parcels from their families regularly since October. The parcels they get are copious and full of valuable delicacies, with nothing to suggest a shortage of food in conquered France.

We also get parcels. They come from Poland. The first of them, received while we were still in the Oflag, impressed us very much. After half a year of semi-starvation anything eatable was very welcome indeed. We were ashamed of our reluctance to offer food to our comrades. In the Stalag, however, although food is still poor, conditions are better than in the Oflag. We are beginning to be harried by our conscience, for we realise that our families must find it extremely hard to get the provisions they send to us, but that they spare nothing for those whom they had already thought lost and who turned out to be alive, though prisoners of war. But we feel that they may be going short themselves. We think that they should send us nothing, for they are, after all, prisoners too—even though in their own country. In spite of the protests in our letters, our relatives continue to send parcels with food.

The Belgians get the largest and the most numerous parcels. They get them both from their families and from the Belgian Red Cross. Even the latter are always addressed to individuals. Such parcels are never lost in

our camp. There are too many prisoners on the job to allow the Germans to slip them away.

The non-individual parcels are less safe. Some such parcels come from time to time from the French Red Cross, and they are handed to the so-called leaders of particular huts. But when a small parcel has to be shared by fifty prisoners or more, the share of each is insignificant. Larger consignments of food sent by the Red Cross, such as barrels of jam or dried fruit, are handed directly to the German commissariat of the camp, who distributes them in microscopic rations added to meals. We suspect that only a fraction of the supply is distributed in such a way. The unfortunate British prisoners, who get only such unaddressed parcels from the London Red Cross, know something about it. These parcels do not come often, and they are not all delivered by the Germans.

## XXXI.

There is a kind of voluntary communism within our small band, which means that any provisions coming for one of us are shared by all. Nevertheless I was glad to hear the words of one of our friends working at the post office, who said, returning in the evening to the hut: " You, Stefan, should call for your parcel to-morrow at eleven."

The delivery of a parcel provides one of the fairly rare opportunities for leaving the quadrangle, a hundred metres square, of the prisoners' huts. Since I lost my job at the central office, I have no pass allowing entrance to the other part of the camp, which I can visit only when going to the post office.

There is a queue in front of the parcels counter. The delivery is made by a French aspirant, assisted by a German soldier, whose duty it is to check the contents of the parcel. I was one of the last to get to the counter, and the Frenchman, who knows me well, handed the parcel to me before I even had time to say my name. Then the German checked my identity disc, which is a small leaden plaque

carried by each of us. It contains only the number of the camp and the prisoners' individual number. I have been No. 7739 for half a year. The identity disc should be always carried on the neck, but few prisoners actually wear it in accordance with regulations.

The parcel is opened in my presence. I will get only its contents, and I had to bring with me a haversack in which to put it. The wrapping, in which it would be easy to smuggle some uncensored news, is thrown away. The sending of letters in food parcels is prohibited. The German inspects everything in turn. He takes a loaf of bread—the only article for which we ask in our letters home—and slices it in four, to see whether there is nothing concealed inside. The other provisions are quickly inspected.

As I was packing my provisions into the haversack, a young, tall, fair boy appeared in the doorway. " Hullo, Dick ! " I said, " There are seven parcels for your gang, get them quickly."

Dick T. was the leader of the British group. Only twenty, he was very energetic and spoke good French and German. He also knew Arabic, for he had been a policeman in Palestine before the war. His war experiences had been varied. He was a German prisoner in France, but he escaped and obtained a small boat in which he set sail for England from a Channel port. The winds, however, were unfavourable, and after a few days of drifting and battling with storms he landed in France again. He was captured and sent to the Stalag, where he made friends with our " September men." He also used to come from time to time to our international hut.

He scowled and said, " I know there are seven. The Poles told me. But I was informed by the authorities about two only. They probably think seven is too many for twenty-two men. Anyhow, it's better than nothing, and we did not have anything for a long time."

The parcels sent by the British Red Cross are invariably very good. They are mostly made up of tinned stuff.

Unfortunately the Germans tear off all labels, as something might have been written on their under side. In consequence all the tins look alike. Poor Dick will have a hard job remembering which is which.

"Where does this parcel come from?" asked the German.

"What do you mean?" said Dick, annoyed by the mix up. He was just wondering whether the tin he held contained jam or pork and beans. It would have to be found out by the taste.

"Where did they send it from?" insisted the German. He was a private soldier, an elderly, quiet man.

".Can't you see it's from the Red Cross?"

"Yes, but from what town?" asked the soldier.

"From London, of course," replied Dick.

The German shrugged his shoulders and said with an ironical smile: "Stupid propaganda. Do you think we'll be taken in? We know London has been wiped out. There is no London."

We stared at the German, dumbfounded. He was obviously speaking in earnest.

The poor fellow, reading in his daily "Voelkischer Beobachter" for many months reports about the destruction of various parts of London, believed them all literally. Goebbels, you can be proud of your work! A remarkable, though not enviable, result.

## XXXII.

The Stalag can well be proud of its theatre. It's no longer an amateur affair, like in the officers' camp. There are many professional actors in the crowd of French prisoners. The theatre is flourishing, for the young German cadet who acts as camp welfare officer gives it much of his attention. There are special funds for the entertainment of prisoners, and every camp wants to have its show piece. The band has instruments, and the actors are treated as administrative employees and even paid for their work.

The theatre plays only revues. There are performances on every Saturday—a première every two weeks. The performances are usually long—three hours or more—for every artiste wants to show all he can do.

Both the directors and the leading stars of the theatre are obviously members of the underworld. Some of them, however, have genuine talent. The best artiste is probably Batista, the splendid specialist in southern local colour, well known to the port quarter of Marseilles. There are also some good singers and dancers from the cabarets of Paris, and the programme is quite varied.

The band, directed by a young Belgian, a taciturn, young, red-headed boy, with the strange eyes of an albino, plays in the intervals between show numbers. The red-headed maestro plays the accordion with a verve that nothing in his appearance would suggest. Another Belgian plays the piano, and the music is probably one of the best items in the show.

The revues are international in language. There are all sorts of French dialects, as well as Flemish and the dialect of the Walloons. The Poles sometimes sing their songs, and they even produced a pastoral before Christmas. The Britons presented a humorous sketch of the life of soldiers in the B.E.F. It was staged in an estaminet, and the closing scene was a free fight. The British actors played this part so realistically that they thoroughly demolished the stage set at the first rehearsal.

One of the Saturdays was reserved for a show produced by the priests, of whom there are about twenty in the camp. They arranged a revue without any outside assistance, and it was not a bit less amusing or more solemn than the others. We all enjoyed it very much.

Every performance is closed with the "Madelon," and we all rise when it is played. The old French soldiers' song does duty for the national anthems which are, of course, banned in the camp. The Germans even prohibited "Tipperary" on the ground that it might move the British soldiers to tears.

## XXXIII.

New Year. We found the camp completely changed overnight. White snow covered our dirty lanes and gutters. It is a glorious, sunny day.

We take this to be a good omen for the new year, which we start as prisoners, but which we may finish as free men.

Our hut, the last in a row, is next to the barbed wire enclosure of the camp. Beyond it there is a fine winter landscape of white fields bordered by dark green forests. It is a pleasing contrast to the squalor of our small, overcrowded room.

The German troops stationed nearby have been actively training on that field for several days. We had already seen these German soldiers on our rare visits to the bath-house, which is outside our camp. Waiting outside the bath-house in the cold we usually commented on the training of the troops and their efficiency. Their training started with ordinary drill and it was obvious that the soldiers were quite fresh and ignorant of military craft. The recruits were not of the finest quality. Many of them were over thirty-five, and others were quite young. Some were physically weak men who had probably been left over in the first call-up of the war. The fact that they were now drafted into the ranks suggested that our enemies were running short of reserves.

These second-rate recruits were obviously trained for fighting duties. The period of initial training was very short, and long before the soldiers had acquired any knowledge of drill and military routine they were coached in actual fighting methods.

We have in consequence ample opportunity for observing the training at very close quarters. We are a kind of foreign military attachés, except that it is not usual to have barbed wire between the field of manœuvre and the distinguished foreign observers. However, the barbed wire

does not obstruct our view, and we can see everything perfectly well.

We are severe critics—this machine gun nest is not properly concealed, these soldiers make too long dashes in attacking. They always run over fifty metres.

We noticed that the general idea of the training was the hardening of the soldiers and the strengthening of their physique and resistance to fatigue, rather than any instruction in fighting skill. It was simply an intensive course of physical exercise, using weapons instead of the usual gymnasium apparatus.

Next to our barbed wire they were learning to use anti-tank guns, and we could see this part of the training better than any other. The men were driven hard. The training of small units and field exercises did not take a lot of time. The daily exercise was carried out by larger formations. Although the anti-tank gun crews had to cover considerable distances over rough ground, they always pulled their guns themselves. When the exercise required a quick change of position, the officers urged the soldiers to pull their guns running and use every ounce of their strength.

It was clear that the Germans were approaching the limit of their resources of manpower. They had to use the least valuable classes of recruits, and they apparently did not think it possible to make of them really good soldiers—just tough cannon fodder. The subsequent campaigns of 1941 proved how much Hitler expected of his soldiers.

In the meantime, the future invaders of the Balkans and of Russia were training in our presence for the efforts which lay in store for them.

After a month the daily exercises expanded their scope. We even had full dress rehearsals. The Germans demonstrated a real defence barrage. All the guns, mortars and machine guns were giving all they had. We listened with pleasure to the almost forgotten sound of battle. The grim symphony thrilled us and brought melancholy reflections. When, if ever, would we hear it again in real fighting?

## XXXIV.

The British prisoners were finally also sent to work. It all happened rather quietly and almost amiably. One of the farmers asked for 15 men, and the camp administration courteously asked the Britons whether they would like to go there as a group.

They came to our hut to hold a consultation on this subject. Some favoured the idea of going, as they would not be separated. They decided to risk it. They were fed up with being in one place, and any change seemed welcome enough.

Only the five invalids were left in the camp. All the others, led by Dick, went off, after cordial farewells.

After a few days we had a letter from Tom, who said that they were pleased with the change. But it did not last long. After a week they were all back again.

The reason for their return was quite unexpected. All the Britons were to be moved to a different camp, somewhere in Silesia. The distribution of the prisoners in camps, which had at first been rather chaotic, was beginning to be organised in accordance with a master plan. The Poles were moved to the western provinces of Germany, while the Frenchmen and Britons were transferred to camps in eastern Germany or in Poland itself.

We had to part with our friends. They returned to the camp for only a short time, in high spirits and pleased with the few days they had spent at the farm. They refused to be exploited too much, and they had had quite a good time.

They told us with horror about the civilian Polish workers whom they met at the same farm. They were a few young boys and girls deported from Poland. They were working in the same conditions as the prisoners, also guarded by soldiers and also practically unpaid. The British soldiers were deeply shocked by this modern slavery. They bore their own burdens with equanimity, for they

knew that they were prisoners of war and they expected to be treated as such. But the extent of the oppression of the Polish population by the Germans came to them as a surprise.

There are " civilian " Poles in almost all the villages in which the prisoners' Arbeitskommandos are working. The difference between the treatment of these two classes of compulsory labourers is small. The " civilians " are not locked for the night in the village jail, but their freedom is as severely restricted as that of the prisoners. They are not allowed to leave the village in which they work. For purposes of control they have to wear a sewn-on armlet with a letter " P." Besides, they are forbidden to return home for five years.

Before our transportation from France to Germany we had read one of Hitler's speeches, in which he stated that most of the Polish prisoners from the September campaign had been released, and that they had volunteered for work on the land in Germany. As we found no Poles in the Oflag, we believed this statement to be true, but in the Stalag we discovered it to be another of his lies.

It was connected with one of the marvellous German schemes for the exploitation of Polish prisoners. At the beginning of 1940 it was announced in all camps that prisoners who would volunteer for farm work in Germany would be set free. They were tempted by prospects of higher pay. The prisoners get for their hard work only 12 marks a month (less than one pound sterling). This ridiculous wage is paid through the camp administration, and there is usually a delay of three months. The " civilians " were to be paid 25 marks monthly. Some prisoners, enticed by the extra money and the mirage of freedom, did volunteer. They soon realised that they had been cheated. They could not return home, and severe punishment awaited them even for going to the nearest village. The real motive of the whole scheme was economy of food and space in the prisoners' camps. At the same time Hitler was provided with a good propaganda point for

his speech. The response was not impressive. Most of the prisoners refused to be tricked into a new kind of slavery.

The hundreds of thousands of civilian Polish workers in Germany are therefore mostly young people deported from Poland. The Germans simply kidnap boys and girls from the streets of towns or villages. The relatives learn about their fate several weeks afterwards, on receiving a letter from Germany. Such letters are usually grim messages, for the life of the deported workers is a hell, especially for the girls. There is a paragraph in the regulation concerning the treatment of civilian workers which orders the repatriation of pregnant women. The miserable girls, knowing no other way of escape, except death, usually try to become pregnant—and this gives a measure of their agony.

## XXXV.

We read in the camp weekly sheet that the Germans themselves admit having " enlisted " 600,000 " voluntary workers " from Poland. This means that they are probably far more numerous.

The " Illustrated Gazette," published specially for the prisoners, contains selected political news of the week, and some distorted reports from occupied Poland. There is relatively little open propaganda.

We are interested only in the last page, with personal advertisements of people trying to trace each other. Prisoners give the number of their Stalag, and try to get in touch with friends. Some of them also communicate by that method with their families in Poland. We often find in that column names of friends and acquaintances. This is, however, of little practical use, for the prisoners are not allowed to write letters to each other, unless they are brothers.

Among the long lists of soldiers' names and camp numbers there are sometimes items concealing tragedies

more poignant than our own: "Mary L. informs her parents in Warsaw that she is well and employed at M., near Hamburg."

One of the girls kidnapped by the S.S. and deported to Germany used the medium of the prisoners' newspaper to tell her parents about her misfortune. The German management of the weekly inserted the advertisement as though it was perfectly normal. Thus we learn that our captivity is shared also by Polish girls and women.

The Frenchmen's newspaper is called "Trait d'Union." It is not quite clear whether it refers to communication between prisoners, or whether it is another attempt at "collaboration." There is much more propaganda in the French weekly. It consists mostly of quotations from the Vichy press.

The third edition of the illustrated weekly is printed in English and called "The Camp." It contains little propaganda apart from doctored political news. Anxious to please the British soldiers, "The Camp" gives in every issue the results of all the Saturday League matches played in Britain. As a trick designed to win over the Britons, this idea is of doubtful value. The confirmation of the fact that football is being played every Saturday in all the British towns is in obvious contradiction to the official reports on the alleged razing of these towns to the ground.

But we do not even try to get our information about the outside world from the camp press. We find more facts in the Warsaw newspapers, which sometimes get smuggled in food parcels.

The "Nowy Kurjer Warszawski" is actually also controlled by the Germans, but we don't read its news or articles in any case. We are interested in the long advertisement columns. The advertisements tell their own tale, far more revealing than the faked-up reports and articles. We can visualise a new, grim life in the Warsaw we knew so well. In almost every issue there are eight or ten obituary notices, mostly of young boys. The average age of the deceased is twenty-two, sometimes less. In all

the notices we see the same, probably agreed, phrase: " Suddenly deceased." In one of the obituary notices, more explicit than the rest, we read: " The funeral service will take place after the delivery of the ashes."

We do not require such hints to guess the meaning of this. Even the most scrupulously censored letters bring some news. One of our friends wrote recently from Warsaw: " . . . there is an epidemic of flu' among our friends. The germ seems particularly virulent. The mortality is as high as during the epidemic of ' Spanish influenza ' in 1920. D. went recently to hospital, and we hardly expect to see him again. . . ."

We know then we can hardly complain when those left in the country are suffering far more. Only the enforced idleness weighs heavily on our minds.

## XXXVI.

It is increasingly difficult to dodge work and stay in the camp. The demand for labour is growing rapidly in connection with the approach of spring. The Germans disregard all rules and send to work non-commissioned officers and even priests.

Loesch decided to have the camp practically empty. He wants more room for the new groups of prisoners sent on from France. Collaboration does not seem very successful. All the camps in France itself, known as " Frontstalags " are being liquidated. The two million French prisoners will be sent to Germany, and will work for the Reich. We understood that Hitler wanted to have in hand some means of blackmailing Pétain, especially after the help of Laval became doubtful.

We are expecting the arrival of a transport of seven thousand prisoners from France. We cannot imagine where Loesch proposes to put them, even assuming that all the present inmates of the camp would be sent out. The camp's total capacity is two and a half thousand men.

Loesch is tireless. He sends out to work everybody,

including the invalids and the sick. He shouts and threatens, raves and curses.

The same scene is enacted every day at the morning call. Loesch walks up to a group of prisoners unfit for work and calls for volunteers. He knows that there won't be any, but he wants six or seven more men. He picks some suitable candidates and kicks them out of the row, forcing them forward with heavy blows of his boots. Once they step forward out of the line they are regarded as having volunteered for the job.

Our room is getting empty. Every day some one goes away, urged by the invariable yell of the German Sergeant " Raus ! " Finally the long-awaited transport from France arrived, seven thousand strong. But Loesch dealt with it masterfully. Work assignments were ready for all. The long column of the freshly arrived prisoners waited in front of the office. Their arrival was registered and their names were immediately entered on the lists of Arbeitskommandos, after which they were dispatched to work without further delay.

But even this accelerated procedure took several days. The prisoners spend them standing in the mud in the main street of the camp. They eat their meals out of doors, and sleep on their luggage. On the second day rain poured down, and the Germans decided that some sort of shelter should be found for the prisoners camping out. All the huts were crammed with men. Two slept on each of the narrow bunks, and the floors were covered with sleeping prisoners. Sixty men were packed into our small room. It was overcrowded beyond reason. Nevertheless, the door was opened at a few minutes' intervals by a German N.C.O., followed by a group of wet and miserable Frenchmen.

" Let them in," begged the Sergeant, " Be kind. They are your comrades."

This appeal to kindness was rather strange, coming from a German N.C.O. But he realised that he was asking for the impossible. The newcomers saw for themselves that there was no standing room left, to say nothing of sleeping

accommodation, and they sadly turned back. All the kindness in the world could not deal with this case of German absurdity. It was absurd to send seven thousand prisoners to a camp with a capacity of two and a half thousand, already half-filled. There was no particular intention to punish the prisoners. It was sheer mismanagement, which caused the Germans themselves a good deal of trouble. As to the prisoners, they had already suffered worse.

We questioned the newly arrived Frenchmen about conditions in France, but it seemed that during the half-year they had spent as prisoners in their own country they were far more isolated from the outside world than were we in the middle of the enemy country.

We were interested to hear about the R.A.F. raids on some French aerodromes, and about the low morale of the German occupation army.

What little news they brought was rather comforting. They also brought with them something infinitely valuable: a copy of the leaflet dropped by the R.A.F. over France and containing Churchill's November speech to the French nation. It did reach us after all.

## XXXVII.

Only about a dozen of the seven thousand prisoners sent from France were not sent out to work. The rest were absorbed within a few days by the insatiable labour market of our district. The few exempt men were an odd group. They were actors. They had conducted in the camp in France a theatre similar to the one we had in the Stalag. Before Loesch had time to send them out they managed to get in touch with our welfare officer, and they presented to him rosy pictures of marvellous shows. He enrolled them as members of the camp's artistic staff.

They lived in our room, which was again half-empty after the departure of the members of the various selected nationalities.

They were a queer band. Their leader was a well-

known Paris actor, a specialist in horror dramas. Although he was at his best in really grisly tragedies, he liked to play French classics. His ambition was to recite the longest tirade in one breath, and the result was more like a machine gun than like Coquelin. Another good artiste was Michel R., a dancer from the Folies Bergère. The Stalag theatre did not offer much scope for his talent. He had no tails and no lovely partner. He had to dance alone and in grey sweater, but his tap dancing was perfect. The third star was a singer, a famous baritone, who was also the composer of one of the latest hits of Danielle Darrieux. He liked to sing, and we could hear almost every evening " Dans mon cœur " performed by the author himself. There was applause in all the neighbouring huts.

The new company started work enthusiastically, and the camp theatre was flourishing.

But the theatrical idyll did not last for ever. Spring was coming, and the Franconian countryside, which had already absorbed seven thousand extra workers, was clamouring for more hands.

The artistes were just rehearsing a new revue when they were summoned to the office, from which they returned in a gloomy mood. They were put down as labourers for an Arbeitskommando due to leave on the following day. Even the help of the art loving, but not particularly influential, Fæhnrich was of no avail. On the following day they all started packing, resigned to their fate.

Only the director of the company refused to give in. He dashed out of the office before they had time to register him for work. He kept hiding for two days. Nobody knew where he went, although Loesch sent some of his men to look for him in the hut and elsewhere.

When things quietened down a bit and some one else was sent instead, he appeared from nowhere, declared himself sick and went to bed. Since that day we had a daily performance of the most hair-raising horror play imaginable. The great actor, perfectly fit, played a dying

man with consummate artistry. Even people in the know were sometimes almost deceived. Beautifully made up to look like a man in the last stages of consumption, he was left alone by the Germans. Even Loesch did not harry any more that tragic, ghost-like figure of doom.

This was the last performance of the splendid French actors in our camp.

## XXXVIII.

" Attention! Attention! Fire has broken out in one of the huts. All the prisoners should pack their belongings and leave the huts within five minutes. Five minutes to leave! Attention! "

Some of us lifted our eyes from the books we were reading, others interrupted their game of chess.

The voice of the German announcer repeated again through the loudspeakers the warning which had broken the peace of our Sunday afternoon rest. Later it was repeated in Polish and in French.

We were very annoyed. Nobody cared much about the fire, if there was one. We were not at all sure there was. No one likes to upset everything and break the habits of many months. It did not seem to be a nice way of spending Sunday.

Some one looked out of the window, but he could not see any smoke. The loudspeakers repeated their warning and order. We had no alternative but to carry it out.

Amidst the yells of N.C.O.s the prisoners, laden with their belongings, finally assembled in front of the hut. Of course there was no fire, and we knew that it had all been a clumsy hoax, designed to make us leave the huts in a hurry.

It was obviously done for the purpose of carrying out some search. Our persecutors, headed by Loesch, the fat corporal and the Ukrainian from the Post Office were already coming. Their presence could not augur anything pleasant.

We were told to surrender all our money. The Germans advised us to do it voluntarily. In the meantime the huts would be searched and then there would be a personal search.

It was disappointing. We had expected something more thrilling and more dangerous. Naturally no one wanted to give his money to the Germans. We wanted to make it as difficult as possible for them. Let them have a spoilt Sunday, too.

All of us had, apart from francs smuggled in on arriving, some Reichsmarks. Life in the Stalag would be impossible without money, and nobody heeds the regulation forbidding the use of any currency other than the paper vouchers for labour, with which we are paid for work and which have no practical value. This is not the Oflag, where we had been cut off from the world and could not use even Reichsmarks. The prisoners in the Stalag have a permanent contact with the outer world, since they spend most of their time working outside the camp.

The so-called " hard " marks are the only money that has currency among the prisoners. Without it I could not have purchased the British battle dress which I have been wearing for two months. One can also get such a battle-dress from the Germans, by exchanging at the store an old and worn uniform. The Germans have a large supply of them, probably the stock left by the British at Rennes. When my uniform, with its bullet holes, became impossible to use, I bought a battle dress from one of the " September Poles " instead of asking the Germans for a favour. Many of us manage to cheat the Germans and have several uniforms.

Although we probably had between us a considerable sum of money, the amounts surrendered " voluntarily " were ridiculous. Those who had some loose pfennigs gave them to the hut leader, who handed them over solemnly to the Germans. We collected one mark and a half. Similar sums were also collected in other huts.

The Germans realised that their surprise trick had not

worked. We did not take fright, and the search in the huts yielded no results. The Germans were not anxious to search all of us individually. They merely marched off a dozen men or so, chosen at random. They really gave up the idea of finding any money.

All that they did accomplish was to spoil our Sunday. I did not know at the time that it was my last Sunday in captivity. . . .

## XXXIX.

We seldom play cards in our hut. There is plenty of time for any game, but no one seems to care to play. There are, on the other hand, many men who spend hours over patience. The question we expect the cards to answer is not whether we would be free within a year or six months. It happens that we are practically all machine gun specialists. Our query is invariably: " Will we be able, before the year is out, to press the trigger of a machine gun facing the Germans? "

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My story is nearing its end. After the war I shall be able to add to it some interesting details. Now I unfortunately have to keep them to myself.

I cannot write at present about my long journey towards freedom, which took me across seven frontiers and seven different countries.

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Four o'clock in the morning of June 18th, 1941. We had just crossed the last river which stood between us and freedom. I turned back. Behind me, among the hills above which a huge red moon was rising, I had left the last country over which Hitler's hand had power. Exactly 365 days ago the first German troops had entered the hospital at Epinal in which I had been recovering from my wounds. I have been living for a full year in the

nightmare of the horrible daily realisation of being in the hands of the enemy. The nightmare was over. . . .

. . . . . . . .

Some time later, looking at the fantastic outline of the Rock, I felt elation as I stepped for the first time for a year on the soil of a country at war with Germany.

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Night was falling. Gibraltar's lights were glittering in the distance. We were due to sail on the following day. The crew had organised on the foredeck an improvised concert. Swinging slowly, sailors sang " Mexico Way."

Where are you, Tom and Jim, who sang it such a long time ago in the grim German camp of Grabenburg?

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