

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

20 South Twelfth Street
Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania

FOREIGN SERVICE SECTION

News from Germany

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ABOUT THE CLOTHING YOU GIVE

British Zone:

We asked our workers in Germany to tell us a little more about the men and women to whom the clothing which we have sent to Germany is given. In the British Zone the clothing is distributed through the British Red Cross. Here are a few of the stories collected by a British Red Cross worker in Hagen. They are of simple men and women like ourselves, neighbors in need of food, clothing and the knowledge that someone does care:

A Homely Family Without a Proper Home

"This man is nearly 60 years old. They are bombed out. His wife found refuge for a time in an Evangelical Girls' Home and the husband slept in a cellar because he could not find anywhere else. At last they got a room which they share with their son who has recently returned from a P.O.W. camp.

"For a long time the family had to lie on wire mattresses only as they could not get any others. Until the British Red Cross stepped in the two men had only one blanket between them and that was in the bitter cold of last winter. The woman had only a small German eiderdown.

"Now the family has a stove, table, chairs and an old kitchen cupboard.

"In spite of their poverty there is a certain homeliness and warmth in this modest household."

From Forest to Tenement Dwelling

"A forest worker's family has had a very bad time. They were forced to leave their home in the Sudetenland where they owned a small estate in the middle of a large forest. After their forced evacuation the wife was taken to one camp and their child aged four to another.

"For over a year they tried to get news of each other and eventually managed to do so and the child joined her mother. After his discharge from a P.O.W. camp, the husband could not naturally return to his former home and came to his sister in Hagen in the hope of finding his wife and child there. His sole possession was his soldier's uniform which he had to wear as he had no other clothes.

"After a year had gone by came news first of his wife from a Refugee Camp in Bavaria and then his eldest son returned from a P.O.W. camp. After a time the family were united once again.

"The Health Office in the town was able to help them to find a room, but there were other things to be done before a home could be got together. First an old table and a small stove had to be brought in, then some Bunker (Air Raid Shelter) beds.

"How tired they were and how sad when I met them at their work. At the beginning it seemed hopeless. They were used to the freedom of living in the forest; living in a small room in a tenement house was to them like living in gaol.

"At first the four year old child suffered from the complete change of living conditions. Physically she rapidly deteriorated so much that she was given some of the extra nourishment provided by the British Red Cross for such cases. Now she is slowly recovering due partly to the extra nourishment and partly to the more settled state of the parents.

"This unpretentious household has already a homely character, iron bedsteads have now taken the place of the former 'Bunker' beds. The man, who has heavy work tree felling has sufficient rest on a decent bed. His wife and child also have a bed.

"The wife was able to sew very well and was particularly good at making bedroom slippers out of old material so that with the money she earned or by the process of exchanging she was able to get some furniture. She also managed to get some old material with which she made her husband suitable clothing so that he no longer had to stay at home on Sundays because of his disreputable clothes.

"This family has not lost its sense of orderliness, cleanliness and decency of feeling in spite of its present poverty. But the insufficient nourishment makes life difficult for them. The man no longer feels that he can do hard work in the forest with only dry bread to eat. He has already had such severe indigestion that he has not been able to work at all. They had few potatoes as they were unable to save them from frost damage."

The Children Who Could Not Go To School

"This family lived outside the town. The day we visited them was bitterly cold. The children were sitting alone in the house beside a stove in which a small wood fire flickered. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The mother had been out since morning trying to get bread and had not yet returned. She had probably had to queue for several hours to get any at all.

"The children that day had not yet had a warm meal. For a fortnight they had only had dry bread and thin watery soup to eat.

"When asked the reason for their absence from school they said that they had no clothes and shoes. I noticed when I looked at the clothing of each child that they had no vests on. The ten year old boy wore no underwear - only his jacket and trousers.

"On this bitterly cold day he had no stockings and no shoes. His three sisters are in the same state.

"Outside the roads were slippery and a snow storm was raging. Under these conditions it is impossible to traverse the long road to school.

"The mother is a widow, her husband having been killed in the war. All her efforts to try to get shoes for her children were without avail. Eventually the British Red Cross came to her assistance with some shoes and warm clothes from America."

The Story of Katy

"The family Thurn consists of a father and ten children. The mother died in 1944. The family lives in a railway signal box after they lost their home through air attacks.

"Since the death of the mother the home has been looked after by the 17 year old daughter, Katy; naturally she was unable to do this very well.

"The children had no clothes and shoes to enable them to go to school. There were no sheets for their beds. The children looked pale and undernourished. Because of their scant clothing they had to remain indoors and were not able to get out into the fresh air.

"Through the help of the gifts from America it was possible to provide them with the absolutely essential clothing and shoes which they urgently needed. Conditions now began to take a better turn.

"Katy, who formerly was not fond of taking advice from anyone, now became more amenable. She was so thankful for the help that she brought the whole family to the Jugendamt (Town Youth Office) to show them how marvellous the children looked. She said she was proud to be seen with such well dressed children!"

Five Stories From the Innere Mission (Protestant Welfare Organization)

1. "A Welfare Worker from the Innere Mission brought some clothing to a bombed out family in great need. The twelve year old girl got a pullover, this was a gift from America through the British Red Cross.

"Some time later she saw the Welfare Worker in the street and called out 'That pullover has brought us luck.' An address from America was sewn inside and the girl had written a letter of thanks for the garment and a large food parcel arrived some time later."

2. "A Welfare Worker found an old married couple in a cellar during one of her visits. They were formerly wealthy, having been in the hotel business. Their house was destroyed by bombing. Their son was until recently in a Russian P.O.W. camp.

"The old couple were too weak to help themselves and too proud to ask for help.

"Now came the time for their Golden Wedding! They could not think of celebrating such an important day without some decent clothes.

"With the help of the British Red Cross we were able to give them some pleasure by giving them clothes so that they could have a real celebration."

3. "Now we meet a doctor's family living in a temporary dwelling. Not even the doctor, who was often called up in the night to patients, had a bed to himself. They are refugees, poor and miserable.

"One of their children died during their forced evacuation. The children have T.B. The doctor was given a coat, underwear and a suit so that he was able to resume his profession properly once again. His wife and children were also given clothing. Beds were provided and then they received some good warm woollen blankets. They now realize that better times are bound to come."

4. "We visited a 60 year old woman who with her children and grandchildren was living in an attic. For some weeks the old woman had slept on two chairs. She is a refugee and once possessed a big estate.

"What the good new dress we gave her meant to her cannot be written. This family never complains. They have no words but they suffer in silence. Their thanks even can find now words but their eyes beam in thankfulness."

5. "Each day come returned prisoners from a P.O.W. camp. They are often in rags; their shoes are held together by string. They cannot find their families or their homes and there is no one able to help them. They may no longer wear their uniform - that is forbidden. We can give them a decent suit, underwear and shoes from the gifts which we receive from the British Red Cross. This gives them confidence in themselves. Not everything has been destroyed, perhaps there may be HOPE once again."

To the British Zone AFSC shipments of supplies have totaled 150 tons from March, 1946 through September, 1947.

THE FRENCH ZONE

In the French Zone the clothing is distributed by American Friends Service Committee teams in Freiburg, Ludwigshafen and Koblenz.

From Ludwigshafen Joan Murphy who was formerly on the German Desk in Philadelphia writes in a letter to the Members of the American Relief for Germany:

"Dear members of the American Relief for Germany, Inc.

"Today I have come across something that I know will interest you. In our clothing room here in Ludwigshafen, I have just unpacked several large boxes of men's, women's and children's shoes in preparation for our clothing distribution this winter. And I have found several cards which indicate beyond any doubt that you are the giver of these shoes.

"Having worked for a time at the German Desk in Philadelphia, I know that it is very satisfying for you to know where the shoes and clothing that you send through the American Friends Service actually get into Germany. They do get here, and if our reaction is indicative of the reception by the people themselves, there will be happy feet this winter in Ludwigshafen.

"Some of these shoes are newly soled; there were also a few extra shoestrings, bits of leather for repair, and one pair of shoetrees. To know the conditions here is to know that yours is a labor of love. There is no way of getting a pair of shoes repaired. There is simply no material and no shoelaces. If one were so fortunate as to have a leather bag left after the terrible bombings of Ludwigshafen, some part of it would find its way for shoe repair material. I can't tell you how wonderful it is for Germans today to get a pair of shoes with new soles and shoelaces.

"And what will happen to these shoes? All that are suitable are going to school age boys and girls and young men and women. The rest will be distributed this winter to the neediest men and women in Ludwigshafen.

"As a worker in the field, I urge you to keep on sending in to the Service Committee Centers. With a new winter there is a new emergency. There are so few signs of reconstruction and no hope of personal help except for the very few."

Hilda Ives reports from Freiburg:

"The statistic number of shoes and clothes that were distributed for July, was 1461. But to the staff of four workers in the Clothing Distribution room, each garment signifies a face, a story, a need that must be met. Many faces are wan and worn - many are pale but lightened with friendliness and gratitude. There is hardly a face that does not show the marks of strain and suffering. Baby faces screw up in disgust as new coats and caps are tried on by auslanders, or crow in delight to find themselves in warm and pretty clothes. Some people ask for help in hushed voices - others explain their need clearly, but with a dignity that can come with the realization that in a badly bombed city all are in need, and that the rich and the poor are one in their inability to buy the necessities of life. The clothing room is life in all its phases and is a Godsend to the German people."

The August report from Ludwigshafen tells a story by Hulda Randall of shoes for school teachers, dresses for little girls sent in by a New England Friends Meeting and clothing for some little triplets whose birth caused little rejoicing.

Teachers

"We had a very small supply of summer shoes - women's white and spectator-type and tennis shoes for men. After some thought we decided it might be a real morale-booster

(as well as dire necessity) to give them to the school teachers of Ludwigshafen. There are about 80 women teachers and 60 men teachers.

"The hours were set from 4 to 6 to give the teachers of afternoon classes a chance to come. The Stadtschulrat (like our superintendent of schools) shrugged his shoulders when I suggested giving the shoes to the teachers. There is a great deal of professional dignity here, and he felt that they would feel it beneath them to come and get shoes. But they came through about 100% - there were about 5 women teachers and 10 men teachers who could not be fitted and will have to come back in the fall.

"They were self-respecting and dignified - but so driven by desperate need that pride was put aside, reluctantly. It seemed almost unreal that purveyors of education, morals, and religion should not even have decent foot-covering. One teacher whom we couldn't even fit, particularly pulled at my heart strings, for she had on a pair of bedroom slippers, very much worn-out - and she would have slipped by on her way out without a word, had I not been watching her. She will get a pair as soon as I can get at the boxes of shoes for fall distribution. Because of the feeling of the Stadtschulrat, we put a box for voluntary contributions at the door - and found 185 marks in the box!

"Teachers have been asked to do so much in getting children lined up for food, clothing, etc., that we felt we should at least once do something for them. Their lot is a hard one, most of them not having enough to eat, salaries are low, there's no equipment, not even books, and they have classes which sometimes go up to 68 or 70. All of the schools are to a great extent in ruins so that the few rooms left partially intact are overworked - the lighting, heating (practically none) and the paneless windows make a shambles of any school system."

Gift of New England Meeting

The report continues:

"On July 30th we distributed about 100 bundles of clothing. These bundles went to people who could not be fitted or came too late for the big clothing distribution, and also those who have wandered into our Sprechstunde to ask for clothing. Instead of putting out on a table everything we have and letting people choose ad infinitum, I bundled up the particular article of clothing desired and anything else which I felt would be useful in a given situation. This system is a lot more work in the preparation but a whole lot easier at distribution! Many of the things in these bundles included clothing from boxes sent to our personnel, particularly wonderful boxes of clothing sent to the Hunt's from a Friends Church in New England and from their families. Many of them were like an answer to a prayer for they included clothes for girls in the 11 - 15 age group of which we had very few in our bales from the AFSC, also a number of women's dresses - particularly larger dresses for older women, and men's clothing, always a pressing problem."

Baby Clothing

"Our largest number of bundles is for infants - one of our city doctors, a woman, came begging for clothing for a new-born group of triplets. A calamity in these days in this poor country! The word Dr. Laehr kept repeating was 'katastrophal' - catastrophic."

In the French Zone our supplies since March, 1946 have totaled 72 tons.

American Zone

In the American Zone clothing distribution is done through CRALOG. From March of 1946, AFSC shipments have totaled 143 tons.

A letter received from a German child tells a story from Pirmasens in the American Zone:

"Dear Donors:

"Because Mummie is sick in bed she cannot write. So she said I should write, because I am already old enough. But I thought the people in America who have sent us the beautiful clothes for the children could not read German. But Mummie said, that does not matter, I should go ahead and write, our teacher or the pastor or someone else will translate the letter into American.

"So I am writing you now. My name is Hilde and I am nine years old. I live in Pirmasens, a city which is all destroyed. The airmen have made it all kaput in the war, and our apartment has burned. Everything in the rooms burned, even my doll by the name of Renate and all my toys. But we could move into the apartment of Aunt Anneliese, there nothing is destroyed by the many bombs. But now eight people live in two rooms and I must sleep with Hannelore in one bed, and Mummie and Aunt Anneliese sleep in the other bed.

"Mummie asks me if I have written about the baby clothes. Oh yes, that was fine. When the man came with the sacks and panties and with the sweet dress for Ingelein, Mummie cried, but she said that was only for joy, and I was also very happy and at once told it to Aunt Anneliese when she came home. She had again not received any potatoes, but that day we were not unhappy about it, because we had the beautiful baby clothes. Aunt Anneliese at once dressed Ingelein with all the clothes. She looks so sweet. Mummie said Aunt Anneliese should write a letter right away, so that you may know in America that everything fits and that we are so happy about it. But Auntie was so tired and this morning she has gone again because she wants to try to get some flour in the country. Mummie says I should write that Ingelein is three years old and she does not know our Daddy, because Daddy has been a prisoner-of-war so long. I remember Daddy, his picture is on Mummie's bedside table. He is tall and used to call me 'my Haschen,' when he was with us. But he has been away so long. Now you know everything I know, and I finish my letter and I am very happy and Mummie and Ingelein and Aunt Anneliese are very happy.

"Greetings to all of you from

Hilde"

We have sent 10 tons of bedding into the Russian Zone.