

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

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FOREIGN SERVICE SECTION

News from Germany

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A COLOGNE DIARY

During the past six months the American Friends Service Committee has opened six Neighborhood Centers in Germany. They are in Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Freiburg, Berlin, Brunswick and Cologne. The centers at Brunswick and Cologne are under the administration of the British Friends Relief Service. Each Center follows a different pattern of self-help. The Center at Cologne, which opened on June 20, has two principal activities. During the day it offers day care and supplementary feeding to a group of children who are certified by the Department of Public Health to be in need of care. In the evening it turns its facilities over to Youth Groups.

The Center is housed in a barrack which was purchased in Sweden and erected with the help of volunteer German youth. At the present time it is being enlarged by a Nissen Hut.

The diary has to do with the erection of the Hut, saying goodbye to a group of children who have completed their two months at the Center, preparing for a new group, and working with "teen agers." The writer of the diary is Roger Craven, an American member of the British team there. It begins:

"Monday, October 13. Here begins an attempt to provide some sort of account of what is going on in the Quaker Jugendheim in Cologne. I am baffled at the thought of trying to write any kind of report of progress, or of trying to describe the condition of the German people as I know them, and explain how our program fits into the picture.

"Work on the Nissen Hut has now reached the point where progress seems to be rapid. Weeks of preparatory work, assembling of materials, building the foundation, etc. have not been very exciting, but today we actually began setting the corrugated steel sheets in place, on the frames, and the thing is rapidly taking on the appearance of a building. When I say 'we' I mean the one or two or three workmen from the construction company which has the contract for constructing the building. These men plus myself and any number of teen-age youth who help as volunteers. Work done by the volunteers constitutes most of the work done, and it includes shoveling ashes for the foundation, mixing and carrying cement, and now-a-days scraping and painting some two hundred steel sheets. The Nissen Hut is located just a few yards from the barrack, and when completed it will house a carpentry shop and a sewing room, the latter to be run formally as a vocational training program for girls.

"As usual the small children were here all day, the 8 to 11 year olds designated by the Public Health office as in need of extra nourishment. It is a day-long kindergarten program with games, singing, hand-work, two long naps, and food in the form of cereal-soup in the morning, thick vegetables and meat soup (made from dehydrated preparation) at noon and a cup of cocoa in the afternoon. Children are practicing for a play and entertainment which they are to give on Wednesday, before an audience of parents.

"I usually eat lunch with the children. If you get me started on what I think of children, I'll write a whole book. So I'll try to be brief. At my table today one of the children was Margaret, twelve years old, large rather sad eyes, blond hair in pig-tails over her shoulders. Her legs and arms are skinny and she looks as though a gust of wind would blow her away. Margaret's father is still a prisoner in Russia. That is what the war means to Margaret -- her papa is away. She knows nothing of inter-

national politics or the United Nations. All she knows is that her papa has been away from home during all the life that she can remember. She wishes her papa would come back.

"Monday evening there was folk dancing for the 'un-organized' youth, as usual. The accordion player was late so for the first half hour or so I substituted, playing my recorder. During most of the summer, my recorder was all we had for music, for we had not yet found an accordion player. I showed the crowd a simple little dance that I had learned from Lucille Day at the Detmold conference two weeks ago. Also I tried to teach the assembly to sing 'You Are My Sunshine' in English. They want to learn all the words.

"Tuesday, October 14. Work on the Nissen Hut continued to show results.

"At lunch I sat next to Heinz Klaus, six years old, cross-eyed, skinny and small for his age, very friendly. He took hold of my arm firmly and said 'Onkel Roger, I am going to be here for just two more days, then I cannot come any more. And I am unhappy about it. But I have been here for two periods already (i.e. four months) and I cannot come any more.' That was just one of the many times I wished so much that I could do something, or at least say something encouraging, but could not. Heinz has not put on weight as we had hoped. Several of the children have failed to gain as they should have, and so far we do not have an explanation. I do not know what the plans are for inquiring into this. Aside from the matter of gaining weight (or not) the children seem all very happy to come to the barrack, - they do have a good time and are sorry when their period is over. Paradoxical that those consider themselves lucky whose physical condition requires that they come for a second period!

"Folk dancing in the evening - the regular weekly evening given to the 'Naturfreunde.' They are entirely responsible for the program.

"Wednesday, October 15. Nissen Hut continues to look more like what it ought to. The children put on their 'Abschiedsfest' (Departure festival) and all the mamas and papas were present. In the evening, the play-acting group met as usual for rehearsal.

"Thursday, October 16. Thursday evening is the informal game-evening, when the young people come in and pass the time at whatever pleases them, but there are usually no 'Gemeinsamspiele.' This evening some of them attended a discussion led by Bunty Harmon on Quakerism. Ping-pong was going on all evening, each pair of players being allowed a fifteen-minute period. Hildegard the Hausmutter led a group in singing folk songs over in one corner of the room. There was about one chess game going and one game of Chinese checkers. I spent a good deal of the evening chattering with Felix, a former S.S. man and once trained as a Hitler Youth leader. He is one of our most constant attenders, a likable fellow, friendly, sometimes a bit trying because of his loudness and his propensity to try to attract attention to himself. Felix was in the army at the age of 14. He is now 17. Last July I went on an overnight camping trip with Felix and two others. We had a great time and these 'Nazi' boys carried on and talked and giggled and sang at all hours of the night, exactly as I have seen so many American boys do on similar occasions.

"Friday, October 17. We needed some iron brackets to fasten the inner partitions of the Nissen Hut. They could not be bought nor could strips of iron be bought, new, without the 'Eisenscheins' or coupons, which are to be had if at all only after much red tape and delay. So, at the suggestion of a friend, I went to a part of town about a half a mile from the Cathedral where absolutely no houses are left standing, searched among the rubble for a number of pieces of old iron strips, took them to a blacksmith who fashioned them according to my specifications. Time came to pay. He

did not accept an offer of cigarettes, the only real currency in Germany, for he did not smoke, he said. As we were puzzling over what the price might be, I asked how many children he had. He had two. I took from my pocket one chocolate bar and one package of life saver fruit drops and gave them to the blacksmith for his children. He almost was speechless. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Never mind the price. Let's call it square.' He was overjoyed at receiving the candy for his children who had never in their lives had any such. He considered it a bargain to receive this as payment for his services, more than an hour and a half of work, including some done on an electric drill machine. We talked for a few minutes about the condition of Germany and the world. His parting remark was 'Hoffentlich geht's bald wieder besser.' (Let's hope things will soon get better.)

"Saturday, October 18. I worked on the Nissen Hut as usual, and was joined in the afternoon by Bunty Harmon and about six young fellows who have helped a great deal in recent weeks. We scraped and wire-brushed the corrugated sheets and painted them with anti-rust tar paint. In Cologne where buildings are at such a premium, a Nissen Hut worth building is worth building so it will last as long as possible.

"Monday, October 20. No children at the barrack for feeding this week - it is an interval between two periods, a chance to get the place cleaned up a bit, rest for the Hausmutter, etc.

"Tuesday, October 21. In the evening we had the regular weekly team meeting. Here are some of the points Bunty remarked on in connection with the second 8-week period of child feeding which ended last Friday. According to the figures of weight gains (or otherwise) by the children the picture seems to be rather confused for most have gained 2 to 4 pounds, some have just held their own and some have actually lost. The doctors say that immediate weight increase is not necessarily the first step in improved health, and that many of the children show definite improvement in their general condition - a statement seconded by a number of the mothers who told Bunty their children had shown great improvement in their nerve condition, ability to sleep quietly, to concentrate, and in general disposition. The doctors are content with the food we are serving and no change is contemplated by us at the present time.

"Wednesday, October 22. No children in the barrack this week, it being an interim period between 'terms.' So I had a chance to do some repair work on the floor of the barrack. In several places the ends of floor boards were left dangling with no cross-piece support under them.

"Thursday, October 23. New feature of the evening's game program for the older group was the presence of Heinz Sefarth, expert chess player and prominent person in local chess playing circles. He spent most of the evening with a group of six or eight of the young people interested in chess. With characteristic German thoroughness he began with a long dissertation on the history of chess and the leading persons in the world of chess today. He demonstrated some strategy.

"Friday, October 24. I took a 25 mile trip out into the country to fetch a load of some sort of beets which are used among other things, as sheep fodder. I did this as a personal favor for Herr Eichorn, the building contractor three of whose men are building our Nissen Hut. Herr Eichorn finds his employees among returning prisoners of war. He provides them with food and lodging, and the above-mentioned sheep are part of the arrangements for feeding these workmen. Sounds a bit strange but stranger things than that are happening around here.

"Saturday, October 25. More scraping and painting of corrugated iron sheets for the Nissen Hut. A number of boys were on hand to help in the afternoon, as usual. But when I have to go off somewhere in my truck to fetch something, it is hard for the boys to resist the desire to go along just for the ride.

"Sunday, October 26. The work we are doing with the young people at the barrack does not provide a sensational story. The building of fellowship between us and them and among themselves, is going on slowly and now after four months of activity organization is not even yet in the recognizable stages. But there is clear evidence of a constant growth and focusing of interest among the young people, as to what the barrack program is, its shortcomings, and its potentialities.

"Monday, October 27. A new batch of children for the feeding. They behave rather timidly at first in these strange surroundings. Meal time is rather quiet now, which it will not be a little later on. I wish I could convey somehow just what it looks like - a group of small children sitting around the table eating this thick soup. The problem often met in American homes never occurs here. The children never refuse to eat. They gladly eat all their soup and after the first plate is gone they eat a second. Then some of them slow down a bit, shift restlessly in their chairs and utter with a sort of sigh of contentment 'ich bin satt.' But there are always some whose eating of a third plate will drain the kettle, and the privileged boy chosen to lick the kettle is always eager in his task. 'Es schmeckt immer gut' is the only comment I have ever heard the children make about the noon-day soup."