

A M E R I C A N F R I E N D S S E R V I C E C O M M I T T E E

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FOREIGN SERVICE SECTION

News from Germany

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IN AACHEN

Perhaps the most revealing picture of how dark life in Germany is and of how greatly your help and friendship is needed there comes in parenthetical paragraphs from the reports of workers in the field and in the stories told by returned workers. Following are some paragraphs from the reports of the Quaker team in Aachen and a report made by Betty Bowen upon her return in December from work there.

In Aachen, the British Friends Relief Service has had a team working for over a year. The work is with youth groups, old people, prisoners of war, transport, and the distribution of supplies. The American Friends Service Committee's contribution has been in supplies and personnel. (From March 1946 through December 1947 we shipped approximately 1,182 tons of food, clothing and other relief supplies to the British Zone. Of these, about 760 tons were distributed through the British Red Cross under which the Friends Relief Service operates.)

One of the chief concerns of the Aachen team has been for the youth and the high rate of juvenile delinquency there. Olive Goodykoontz reported a year ago:

"The situation seems to be as follows. Parents are often in complete sympathy with their children in the things which they do. In cases where they do not actually send their children on nefarious expeditions they turn a blind eye to the methods by which food or other stolen goods are obtained. Mothers are often glad when their children are taken into remand homes for their well-being is assured. In the case of boys, fathers are often prisoners of war and the mothers have no power over their sons who can get more money in one hour by black market transactions than they would earn in a month from an honest job. The law is such that if nothing is found on the delinquents and their papers are in order, the police cannot detain them unless the Juvenile Court asks that they be detained by reason of their being endangered."

In another report she wrote:

"Late one night four weeks ago a Section member came across two boys, aged about seventeen on the road between Cologne and Julich. They were hungry, exhausted and terribly dirty from six months of wandering -- from Vienna to Schleswig Holstein and all over the British Zone. One had lost both parents in the war, the other's parents were divorced and both remarried, the father having only recently returned from a Russian P.O.W. Camp. The boys were on their way to an aunt some 200-300 miles away where they hoped to make their home. After looking after them for a couple of days, we helped them on their way with food and money. When they arrived at their aunt's home, however, they found that she had long been dead, so there was nothing for them to do but return to us. We again cared for them until we were able to find suitable work in the district, one as a coal miner and the other with a farmer in the country, where we hope they will be able to settle down to a normal sort of life. Although we are convinced that these boys are honest by character, we were not terribly surprised to discover that they had not completely resisted the temptation to steal from our house. After talking with them after the incident we believe an impression was made upon them which will now help to keep them straight, but we are only too aware that there are thousands of such boys wandering over Europe, having no alternative but to live on their wits, creating a moral problem which demands the greatest

possible effort on the part of all authorities to face and attempt to meet what appears to be an impossible situation."

Another concern is for the old people.

The October report tells us:

"Several more needy old people have been put on the list this month, utterly bombed out, with no resources, no furniture, almost no cooking facilities and almost no clothing. The great joy for the old people this month was bacon, which brought a look of unbelief to every old face. Several parcels have arrived lately, from English people who are glad to hear that their Save Europe Now parcels had been received by needy people, and who were sending a second or third parcel to the recipients."

The November report continues:

"One or two fresh cases of hardship were discovered this month. For instance one old couple of over seventy, the wife seriously ill, having undergone five operations, lives in one room salvaged at the bottom of an utterly burned-out house. They celebrated their silver wedding there about two months ago. The rest of the house is open to the sky, and as their room lies at the back of the house they have to pass under the ruins every time they return home, a very dangerous proceeding during the storms and high winds of autumn. In the past month three houses have caved in and buried their occupants. One of the first old ladies to receive regular help in the way of extra food died probably of privation in spite of it."

In order to help the old people and the families of the prisoners of war and others, a system of family visiting was started. A report of a year ago tells us:

"A plan was worked out before Christmas whereby parcels from friends and relatives in England and the USA would be given personally to the neediest families in Aachen.

"A total of 38 families have been aided to date, many of them ill and apathetic in the face of needs so desperate and yet so hopeless. In one filthy room all the children were in bed at 11:00 a.m. lying not under blankets but under every available scrap of clothing. There was no fire in the stove, no furniture except a bookcase and bed and chairs made of crates. The mother, widowed, has lost her right hand in a factory accident, and she and her five children live on the 85 marks a month supplied by Wohlfahrt.

"In another family a child one year old has a frozen hand. The mother has not cooked for two weeks, because she is ill, and because she has no potatoes, flour, or vegetables of any kind, and no fuel. She and her five children have been living on bread.

"Fathers who are returned P.O.W.'s are too ill to work; expectant mothers have no clothing for their babies; an old woman has had to sell her stove to get money for rent; families are tubercular, a girl of 14 who lost both legs in her flight from Aachen in 1945 has T.B. in one lung. She cannot be cured because she is not critically ill enough to go to a hospital, and cannot get away to a better climate.

"Everywhere we have been there has been a gratefulness for the little help we have been able to give. In a period of two weeks one woman knit socks for each of her five children from the wool we left her. It is hoped that even after the two hundred families on our list are visited this project can be continued so that some of the poorest families can be helped regularly."

Betty Bowen of East Orange, New Jersey, who was in charge of Family Visiting in Aachen and who returned to the United States in December writes:

"It is the people I can never forget, the people our team came to know best over the months of relief work in Germany, and they are the reason that all the questions

asked me since I came home -- 'Did you know any Nazis?' 'Do the Germans admit the War was their fault?' 'Do they want another war?' -- mean so little to me. It is impossible to think in terms of theories when I remember Germany, because behind the theories are faces. They are children's faces and the faces of the returning prisoners of war, old people and the mothers fighting not to give up. These are the people I can never forget. To every question about Germany they give the answer:

"'Help us or we shall die!'" Here are some of them:

#### The Family in the Cellar

"Herr H. came to us in desperation. He said very little, but he kept tearing the bandage from his hand to show us his fingers. He had chopped off all the fingertips while collecting wood. Since he had come back from prisoner-of-war camp in France, he, his wife and a son with advanced T.B. had been sleeping together in the family's one single bed. The other six children his wife had half given away; he didn't even seem clear about where they were. His room was in the cellar of a bombed house. It was damp, and had only one tiny window. There was no way to send his son to be cured, no way to find a better room, and they had nothing left to exchange for food. The man was crying like a baby when he told us his story. He kept repeating, 'It is too much; too much for one man to bear!'"

#### The Old Man in the Air Raid Shelter

"When we brought Kurt T. home from the Hospital we found there was no light bulb in his bunker cabin, there was nothing for him to do but lie there in the dark. He had a bad rupture, had fallen and lost consciousness one day in the bunker. He had been taken to the Hospital but the doctors had not operated because there was little chance of his pulling through. He was deaf and had suffered a series of shocks which had left him unable to speak.

"Kurt T. had been a fine sculptor before the War. His work had been exhibited in museums all over Germany and he had made the First World War memorial which had stood in the center of Munchen Gladbach. But his work is destroyed, his family dead, and the family home, one of the finest in Aachen, leveled to the ground. He has no one to care for him except the people of the shelter who take pity on him and sometimes bring him hot soup or ersatz coffee."

#### The Little Black Marketeer Who Screams in the Night

"The boy at the door had a huge deep hole in his forehead. He turned his head to show the scar over his eyelid and began to speak very quickly and excitedly.

"'You must give me something to eat. We haven't eaten anything but bread for three days.' We explained we couldn't give out food at the door, and he tried to make us promise to come to his family.

"'You had better come, you had better come and not lie to me or I shall do some thing terrible!' he threatened. He is only twelve years old.

"Matthias R. lives with his mother and six brothers and sisters in two rooms. He is one of the army of children who help their families by begging, bartering and stealing. As many as a hundred of these children are caught each day sneaking back and forth over the border into Belgium and Holland. There are no reform schools so the children are simply searched and set free to try again the next day.

"The doctors had told Frau R. she must keep Matthias in the house and quiet till his wounds healed, but she explained.

"'He can't sit still a minute. He runs away. Sometimes he wakes up in the night and jumps out of bed screaming, 'They're coming! They're coming!'"

The Man Who Jumped on a Mine

Herr W. jumped from the front seat of a truck directly onto one of the thousands of buried mines still lying hidden in the gullies and woods around Aachen. He was rushed five miles to the hospital but both legs had to be amputated at the hip. Herr W. is the father of three small children."

The Woman Who Lost Hope

"In order to keep her five children alive Frau S. had starved herself till she lost her hearing and had frequent fainting spells. Sometimes she was found lying on the floor and had to be carried to bed. She had had no word of her husband in more than four years.

"One day she was sitting by her window when a neighbor came in with a photograph. It was the neighbor's son in prisoner of war camp in France, with a group of his friends. Frau S. jumped up suddenly, shouting,

"There's my husband!" She was so sure it was he that the neighbor wrote immediately to the camp to let Frau S's husband know, and Frau S. kept pointing to the picture of the Virgin Mary on her wall and whispering,

"She did it, everything will be all right now!"

"But it was not Herr S. after all. When the letter came back, Frau S. suffered a shock, and when we called on her she lay with her face to the wall and could not even bring herself to look up."

She concludes:

"These are only a few. There is a blind man who lives in a bunker room with twenty others and yet spoke with such joy about the coming of spring; there is the family with the two little girls with the rasping T.B. voices; there are the families without food, without warm clothes or blankets...."

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world, yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good, and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now."

-- St. Theresa"