

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

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"UNSER AUSFLUG"

Saint Paul concluded his letter to the Phillipians with the words, "Finally brethren, whatever is true - whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, - think about these things".

In days when even the thought of Spring in Germany is fraught with the certainty of mounting death rolls from privation, it is good to turn to an assignment which the transport team in Ludwigshafen set for itself and began during the sunshine of last fall. It was to give a Sunday "Ausflug" - a Sunday's excursion to the school children of Ludwigshafen.

Ludwigshafen is a huge industrial city. It is, in Harry Pfund's phrase, "the most melancholy of cities". But it is on the Rhine and the surrounding country is some of the most beautiful in Germany. For a large number of the children, it was their first "Ausflug" - their first trip out of the city.

Lou Neuman wrote last Fall about it:

"It was Ike Rehert's idea. He wanted to get the children out of the rubble for at least a short time, during the fine summer and autumn weather. He suggested to Ernst Kern, our German liaison man, that our trucks be used for such a purpose. Kern was enthusiastic. He showed unusual energy in following out the idea, arranging for city insurance coverage on the children, seeing the superintendent of schools and discussing the idea with him, etc.

"Four Sunday trips have been made now, and close to a thousand children have had the opportunity to go on such an outing. The children are taken by classes - school classes - first from one section of the city and then from another. Five of our trucks are fitted with school benches, designed to seat 250 youngsters and their herdsmen (Individual attention is hardly possible.), but just TRY to keep 250 excited youngsters seated! A wooded area, generally one with an old castle, is chosen as the scene of the outing. Bad Durkheim and Limburg Castle have been visited twice, and twice the trucks made the much longer trip to Trifels, in the vicinity of Anweiler. Our regular drivers drive the trucks, getting all dolled up in their Lederhosen, and taking their families with them. Teachers ride on the back with the children, and keep them somewhat in check. You may imagine what such a trip means to children who have had practically no recreational travel since before the war - which means never before for most of them.

"For food, we have arranged with the bakery of the local consumers co-operative to bake rolls for us. We provide white flour, margarine, sugar; and the bakery turns out truly delicious rolls, sufficient to give each child 200 grams or a little more.

"We have been flooded with essays and pictures expressing the children's (or perhaps the teachers') appreciation for the outings. The subject is obviously assigned as a school exercise, but the results still show a real enthusiasm and imaginativeness on the part of the children."

Huldah Randell, who headed our clothing distribution there, went on one of the trips, She writes:

"Sunday morning I went with Wendell Willimas to the Stadische Fuhrpark (city garage) to hop aboard one of the five trucks which were being prepared to take the Stadtteil Friesenheim children on their picnic. A couple of tires had to be fixed, wives and children of the drivers picked up, and we were off to the central meeting place of the school children. When we drove up the children shouted and screamed and ran helter skelter out of the neat, orderly arrangement by classrooms! After getting them back into line again, they were "loaded" on the trucks and we were off.

"We were hardly started when they began to sing many of the gay little songs they learn in school particularly appropriate to 'wandern' -- their little throats were so bursting with song that it sure gave a tug at one's heart-strings. The few that still had hankies waved them wildly for at least 15 minutes after we started (one blew away -- a major catastrophe).

"After about an hour's ride we got off and hit a lovely wooded trail up to the Hard nburg, an old castle-fortress ruin. The children immediately climbed to the top of the various remnant walls and then sat down here and there and ate their bits of lunch -- most of what I saw was plain dark bread, and when I say plain, it's just that -- no spread of any kind. Naturally they were thirsty but except for a few children who carried canteens, there was not water. I heard one of the teachers say to one of the children who complained of thirst, that any good wanderer could go for 4 hours without drink, and that seemed to clinch the argument! After a very interesting account of the history of the castle, we began the trek to another old ruin, Kloster Limburg -- an old cloister, beautiful, from which their poet Jost wrote the words to the most loved song of the Pfalz (Palatinat):

"Am deutschen Strom am grünen Rheine ziebst du dich hin, o Pfälzerland wie lächelst du im Frühlingssschucke wie winkt des Stromes Silberband Da steh' ich auf dem Gips des Berges Gipfel und schau' auf dich in süßem Ruh' Und jubelnd raufst in meinem Herzen: 'O Pfälzerland, wie schön bist du!

"There is a monument to his memory here on the Limburg and one feels in perfect harmony with these words as one looks over the surrounding countryside.

"From there we followed a rather steep and winding path downhill, at the bottom of which our trucks had come to meet us. The children formed a line -- in twos -- and each one received 2 rolls which we'd had baked for them, with white bread -- next to the ride itself, this seemed the biggest thrill to the children -- their beaming faces were wonderful to see. There was not a crumb left, although I did see a few of the children taking one home for the rest of the family -- a very common occurrence in spite of the fact that a child is still hungry.

"The teachers still wanted to walk a bit further with the children, but we felt they had enough in view of the bare and aching feet (a number were barefoot to begin with and others took off shoes that were too small. I noticed several pretty bad blisters as we walked along). So we asked the drivers to take them, rather, on a bit more of a ride. We all piled in and after a ride over lovely country, we came back at 6:30, tired but happy. Two little girls came up to me then and in unison told me how much they appreciated the outing, in the name of their class. I wish I could have had a recording of their little speech, done with a handshake and courtsey before and after. I believe all the children were about 4th or 5th grade pupils."

And here are some bad translations of the "Compositions" that the children wrote for their class afterwards:

Roland wrote: "It made me very happy that you invited me to the wonderful Sunday picnic. I have not had such a nice Sunday in a long time. I liked the auto ride especially, but unfortunately it was very windy. It was very nice when we had the two hours in the woods and went to Madenburg. From the Trifels we had a beautiful view. When we received the fine rolls, I was very happy. I have not had anything so good in a long time. I wanted to bring my mother some of my rolls but when I tasted one it tasted so good that I also ate the other. For this great treat, I say my heartiest thanks."

Karl wrote: "I was sick and could not go along on Sunday. When I am well again I wonder if there will be another Sunday. I thought I could go but my mother said no. Fraulein Kreiselmaier brought me a roll. Thank you very much for this."

Walter wrote: "We had a wonderful picnic, after we left Wittelsbachstrasse. We waved to our parents. Then we went riding over Neustadt Landau to Annweiler. From the Trifels we saw the Burgverlis and the Tower. From here we wandered to Madenburg. We had a very nice view there. Unfortunately, the time went too fast and we had to go to Eschbach from where we started the journey home. During the journey we sang: always, always and again."

'Halli, Hallo, we go - we go, out in the wide world without money.'

"It has been a long time since we have had such a wonderful picnic with two white rolls to think about."

Frandel wrote: "You made a very nice Sunday for us. I like the auto journey best. We saw the Trifels of the Burgverlis. Then we hiked to Madenburg to the Speyer Cathedral. We stopped. We went through the old gates. Thank you."

Klaus wrote: "The journey to the Trifels near Annweiler made me very happy. We went by auto. From the Trifels we saw the Burgverlis. There Richard-the-Lion-hearted was imprisoned a year. The Minstrel, Blondel, had freed him through his song. From the Tower we saw the valley. At the foot of the Trifels we received two fine rolls. Then we wandered about two hours to the Madenburg. There we had a glimpse of the Rhine. We went to Eschbach with its beautiful blocks. On the journey home we went through the Speyer. We thank you for the nice Sunday."

Brigitte wrote: "On Sunday I had a wonderful experience. When the three autos came to the Wittelsbachstrasse, we stormed into the autos. We all had a good seat. When all was ready we started on the journey. My mama and lots of other mamas waved to us until we could not see them any more. The autos went very fast. When our auto passed another auto, we shouted over our victory. Our goal was the mountain, Trifels and the Madenburg and everything lay beautiful. A man took us to the Burgverlis where Richard-the-Lion-hearted of England was imprisoned. I was awfully happy when I got two rolls. I am thankful about that because I have never seen such rolls before. Then we went through the woods to the Madenburg. When we had seen the Madenburg, we went to Eschbach where the autos were waiting. We got in them and went back through Speyer. It was very good of you that you used the autos for us and gave us so much pleasure. In the evening we came home with great shouting to the Wittelsbachstrasse. It was a wonderful Sunday. I greet you very heartily."

Renate wrote: "In the auto it was very nice. We were to go to the Trifels. When we came to the Trifels we received two fine rolls. Then we went to the Madenburg. There we sang a wonderful song. Then we went over to the wine cellar. When we came out we were counted and marched to Eschbach. There we got into the autos and journeyed back through the Speyer, home."

Dan Force, a transport worker who returned from Ludwigshafen this week, adds this remark:

"I wish we could only put the joy of these kids down on paper and some of the magic of that countryside. The kids squealed with delight all the way out -- and even on the way back. German teachers are hard on kids. They really made them walk, and coming home they were a little quieter - but I never saw kids so happy."

Spring has come again to Europe. The countryside is once more gay with flowers and the transport trucks are rolling again over the mountain roads with a cargo of children. Spring and the joy of children are gracious and lovely things to think about - even when the little ones are hungry and have no shoes for their feet - and it is heartening to think that there are more lasting things than the passing tragedies of our time.