

War Record a Factor in Austrian's Release

Gestapo Finally Convinced Jew Would Leave Germany if Liberated From Hated Dachau Camp

Editor's Note—This is the last of three articles in which a Viennese Jew, an officer in the Austrian Army in the World War and now a refugee in Detroit, describes his experiences during and immediately after the anti-Semitic pogrom in Greater Germany last November. For obvious reasons, his name must be withheld.

As Told to PHILIP A. ADLER

Life at the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau was a continuous series of crimes and punishments. Both varied. The least breach in camp discipline was regarded as a crime subject to punishment. And camp regulations were so plentiful and most of them so devoid of reason that it was impossible not to violate them.

Among the many crimes subject to punishment were the following: Talking in the ranks, communication between Aryans and non-Aryans, a speck of dirt on a uniform or in the barracks, a damp towel or a toothbrush, keeping the hands in the pockets to keep warm, preventing a fellow prisoner from committing suicide, displaying concern when a fellow prisoner fainted or fell dead in the ranks, etc.

More serious offenses were occasional attacks on the guards by half-crazed prisoners who in doing so wished to put an end to their sufferings, and very rare attempts to escape.

The mildest penalty for a breach in discipline was forbidding the prisoner to enter the barracks at mealtimes. This sounds innocent. But the winter of 1938-39 was of unusual severity in Germany. For weeks the thermometer stood at about zero and Jewish prisoners, dressed in nothing but pajamas, spent about 10 hours a day outdoors.

DEPRIVED OF MEALS

Next in the line of penalties came depriving the prisoner of a meal; punitive calisthenics, usually bending and squatting exercises carried out in quick time, till the victims literally collapsed.

Strokes with the cane (Stockhiebe) was a form of punishment to which we were introduced immediately upon our arrival at the camp. It was carried out in public to instill terror in the spectators as well as to punish the offender. Twenty-five strokes usually brought a long period of illness, often terminating in the victim's death.

More diabolical were the forms of collective punishment of a squad of prisoners, a whole ward, a barrack or even the entire camp. In such cases the victims often did not even know the nature of the crime they had committed.

As a form of collective punishment, one Sunday, Jewish prisoners were held at attention outside the barracks for seven hours, from the noontime roll call till 7 p. m., in a heavy rain. No reason was given. It was just a whim of the Schutz Staffel, the elite Nazis in charge of our concentration camp.

SUSPENDED FROM TREES

News has reached me from uncontested sources that on Jan. 23-24, this year, shortly after I had been released from Dachau, the entire camp of about 20,000, Aryans and non-Aryans, was kept standing in line outdoors for 24 hours, from 6 p. m., to 6 p. m., with intermissions for breakfast and dinner. It resulted in about 40 deaths and several hundred cases of freezing of organs, usually followed by amputations. It all was because some Aryan prisoner escaped or tried to escape.

The most refined form of torture at Dachau was known as "Anbinden" (binding). The prisoner's arms and legs were tied with ropes. He was suspended by these ropes from a branch of a tree. Such suspensions lasted from two to eight hours, depending on the weather and on the prisoner's physical condition, and usually ended in the victim's death.

A milder form of punishment was isolation. The offender was not allowed to move and could have nothing but water.

Then came "collective isolation," applied to a squad, a ward or a barrack. The isolated men were not allowed to communicate with anyone outside their own group. From an Aryan prisoner I heard that collective isolation at one time was applied at Dachau for a whole year to an entire block of 1,600 prisoners.

DEATHS ARE FREQUENT

Death was a frequent visitor. Every new visit, however, brought a measure of excitement. We could see the S. S. men running excitedly hither and yon, their little hearse trundling in the camp street. Investigators investigated and secretaries scribbled, so that the Gestapo could inform the relatives of the deceased that he had been "shot in an attempt to escape" and that his "remains could be obtained," for a consideration, of course.

A case in point was that of Herr Sylvester, governor-general of Burgenland, Austria, under Chancellor Schuschnigg. He was a prisoner at Dachau. One day I had the occasion to exchange a few words with him. He impressed me as a man of about 40, in good health and of more than normal physical strength. About two weeks later we heard of his death.

For a "consideration," his body was sent to the family. It came in a sealed coffin, accompanied by strict order from the Gestapo that the casket was not to be opened and that no one was to attend the funeral.

Other Austrian celebrities I saw at work or exchanged words with at Dachau were: The eldest son of our former Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary; the Duke of Hohenberg—he was carting gravel; Burgermeister (mayor) Richard Schmitz, of Vienna, repairing streets; Col. Adam, the former publicity manager of the Vaterland front, holding some petty clerical job.

DOUBTS LIBERATION

Among the Aryans also were several Catholic representatives in the former German Reichstag.

The only hope for liberation for these Aryans was in the overthrow of the present government. I am inclined to think, however, that long before that day comes they will all be worked or tortured to death or brought to untimely graves by their Schutz Staffel overseers in some other manner.

Entertainment at Dachau, outside of the frequent funerals and public "Stockhiebe" (strokes with the

entering the United States. I had applied for it long before the November pogroms.

CAMP NEWS SUPPRESSED

While much has been written outside of Germany about the Nazi concentration camps, Germans themselves know nothing about them. The press publishes nothing but pictures of Christmas trees. People are afraid to speak.

The policy of the camp is to exterminate prisoners. Those, however, who could not be exterminated and for some reason had to be released are encouraged in every possible way to leave Germany.

The Nazi government fears more public opinion within Germany than outside. Public opinion abroad can always be dismissed with the phrases "Jewish, Catholic, Masonic or Communist propaganda." Discontent at home is a different story.

So, when the Gestapo became convinced of my intention to leave Germany, it took a liberal view.

The moment the ward secretary, a boy of 18, notified me of my release, I was surrounded by a mob of shouting, hand shaking humanity. The prisoners' communication with the outside world is limited. A couple of lines every two weeks stating that you are happy. They now wanted to make up for it.

MEMORIZED MESSAGES

All had requests for the world outside. Everyone tried to impress upon me his particular want by shouting his neighbors. Their petitions amounted to the same thing. They all were innocent men who had committed no wrong. Everybody thought that if his relatives would look up some Nazi high mogul with a reputation for a touch of humanity, they might be liberated from the hell of Dachau.

I wanted to do everything I could for them. The difficulty was I was not permitted to carry out from the camp anything in writing. So amidst all this chaos and excitement I tried to memorize long lists of names and addresses.

I carried out as many of these requests as I could, usually through unsigned letters or over the telephone, without revealing my identity. I distributed among my ward mates my personal belongings, a pair of socks, and a handkerchief, and went to answer the last roll call.

"Entlassene vor!" (Released forward) came the words of command. My eyes welled.

DAY-LONG FORMALITIES

Formalities of the release took up all day. My warden, an Aryan prisoner, threw his arms around me and kissed me. I was taken to the office.

"Any complaints? Injuries? Mistreatment?" came the questions. "No, no, no," were my replies.

Then came the medical inspection. Those to be released dreaded it above all. The least scratch or bruise that might suggest mistreatment at Dachau—and the man about to be released was sent back to camp. I passed it.

My civilian clothes were given back to me. What if my swollen

Promoted by GM



C. E. WILSON, general assistant to William S. Knudsen, president of General Motors Corp., was elected executive vice-president of the corporation at a board meeting Monday. B. D. Kunkle, director of manufacturing, and Ernest R. Breech, group executive in charge of home appliances and aviation, were elected vice-presidents and members of the administration committee, and Graeme K. Howard general manager of overseas operation, was named vice-president.

feet did not fit into my shoes? I forced them in anyhow. What if I had nothing to eat all day? I did not mind it. What if the S. S. men out of habit delivered a few more kicks and punches? I was used to them.

At 5 p. m., the tall camp gate, over which hung the inscription in

large characters, "Labor Brings Joy," was opened and we were out.

A FAREWELL SHUDDER

The recollection of my last glimpse at Dachau before passing through that gate still makes me shudder. It was near zero that day. Out on the gymnastic field stood a whole barrack of men, 800 of them, in various stages of undress, some completely naked, shivering with cold.

The reason of this was that that barrack became infested with vermin. This was a sanitary measure. The prisoners were changing clothes.

A batch of us, liberated ones, went to Munich by taxi. Although we were technically free men, we were taken to a special waiting room and not allowed to leave it. Our guards apparently did not want to frighten or nauseate other passengers with our appearance.

MET BY AID SOCIETY

At Munich we were met by some committee of some sort of a women's aid society, who offered us coffee and cake. While those women had been at this job for some time and met released Dachau prisoners every evening, they were continually brushing away tears from their eyes at the sight of us devouring, like wild beasts, their cake. That aid society, by the way, is made up of foreign women only. German women do not dare join it.

We were placed in a special car. As a final token of brotherly love, the Schutz Staffel shut off the heat from our car. The temperature that night was four below zero.

We reached Vienna the following day more dead than alive.