

LOCAL NEWS, 1100 HOURS, MAY 3rd, 1945

LUCKENWALDE
Am. Prison

Today and yesterday the battered and weary advance guard of the Norwegians, British and Americans at Joe's Place folded their monogrammed sheets, and with a last regretful look at the cinema to seat a thousand with its piles of tangled film, marched back to Stalag III A over yesterday's battlefield to the sound of desultory rifle shots from the woods. The American guard is due to arrive this morning. The Allies from the Stalag were defeated by the ever-increasing horde of refugees which poured into the Lager through the gate nearest the section allotted to the Stalag party. These refugees very naturally took up quarters in the nearest empty building. They were nice, clean quarters, though somewhat short of furniture and fittings, which had been removed by the earlier refugees who were successfully evicted and sent to their own portion of the camp. The cleaning party then cleaned up, and the rooms were ready for the main party of British, Americans and Norwegians, only to be filled by another influx of refugees.

The sad story began when the advance guard arrived to find refugees in possession. At a conference between Allied officers and Captain Medvedev, areas of the Lager were allotted to the various nations. Then came the problem of shepherding the refugees into their areas. Naturally, they were reluctant to leave, and there were some incidents; still, they left most of the buildings—but not so the beds and fittings. These they took with them, with the exception of the built-in wash basins, which in many cases they wantonly smashed.

Much wanton damage was done all over the Lager, apart from the chaos caused by the rifling of desks and cupboards for the odd bottle or box of cigars. The attitude to these who caused most of the damage was summed up by one youth—"The Germans smashed my country up, so I smash theirs". Unfortunately that particular property which was smashed does not now belong to Germans, but to Russians. For this reason, the Russians asked that a guard should be mounted over certain storehouses in which valuable material was not only being looted, but wantonly smashed. Brand-new typewriters were to be seen, hanging drunkenly half out of their packing cases after being swiped with a crowbar; thousands of coloured pencils scattered from their boxes made the floor difficult to walk on; movie projectors were torn from their cases and their lenses ripped away; delicate talkie apparatus was trodden underfoot. In response to the Russian request, a guard of 600 Americans was mounted, with 200 men on duty at a time. Keys and padlocks were found, and many of the buildings locked. The guard carried sticks after one or two incidents which occurred shortly after it was mounted. On Monday night the refugees began to turn ugly, and on several occasions war was only averted by the prompt action of Marushka, a Russian girl attached to the Red Army as, interpreter. Marushka would turn out in the middle of the night, sling a tommy gun over her shoulder, run down to the stores and quell the trouble by sticking her gun into some infuriated refugee's stomach and clearing him off in a language which nobody else understood.

In the end one of the refugees drew an automatic, and after that it became clear that four out of five of them were armed. Batons are no good against guns and to the regret of the American guard, they had to withdraw.

In order to prevent the refugees looting in the area allotted to the Americans, British and Norwegians, it was found necessary to patrol it, and the refugees followed suit with a patrol round their area. An order was issued by the Russians that all firearms should be handed in, and a certain number were collected, but obviously not all.

On Tuesday Captain Medvedev reduced the area allotted to the Stalag party by accommodation for 1,600 men, and also stated that the officers mess would be taken over as Russian headquarters. It was pointed out that this change left inadequate room for our numbers, apart from the insufficiency of beds. The removal of the officers' mess reduced the accommodation and also took ~~away~~ the only available kitchens and dining rooms for the use of the officers. Captain Medvedev returned to the Stalag, and the Lager advance party continued their unequal struggle with the refugees.

The situation for the British, Americans and Norwegians was further complicated by the failure of the authorities at Lickenwalde to turn the electricity on. A Russian officer assured the British Officer i/c Detachment on Monday that the burgomaster's life depended on the power coming on the next day. Presumably the burgomaster is dead for there was no power in the camp up to Wednesday evening. As far as the technicians were able to tell, the lighting, water, sewage and telephone systems had not been sabotaged, and all that was necessary for a final check was the throwing of the main switch at Lickenwalde. The Germans must have left ~~the~~ the Adolf Hitler Lager at a moment's notice for there were half-eaten meals on the tables in the mess and unfinished cups of coffee in the ante-rooms, Tear-off calendars in the offices showed the date April 2nd.

An auxiliary pumping plant was found and got to work, and it was possible to keep mains water on for a period during the day. The staff from the Stalag operating this plant did very good work to supply just under half a million gallons a day to those in the Lager.

A number of auxiliary petrol plants for lighting were found in the stores, and one of these was installed to supply light to the temporary headquarters. The refugees rapidly caught on to the idea and now there are generators running all over the Lager with stolen petrol.

Two incidents which occurred on Wednesday brought the situation to the danger mark; one of the Stalag party was shot at by a refugee as he was cycling through the Lager behind a lorry, and certain of the refugees were observed removing a stock of tear gas from the armoury to their part of camp. So on Wednesday evening the advance party, with the exception of eight technicians to keep the essential services going and the American guard returned on foot to the Stalag. The refugees, among their loot, glanced up and stared at their departing Allies.