

WAR PRISONERS GET FAIR DEAL IN NAZI CAMPS

By Nat A. Barrows.

STOCKHOLM, May 13 (CDN).--For hours on end, they talk only of what they will do when they get out from behind the barbed wire, and home to their families . . . how they will deliberately arise in the middle of the night and walk around the block, merely to satisfy their lust for freedom . . . how they will relive every treasured memory of happiness with their loved ones... how they will drink in deep gulps of free air, revisit childhood scenes and just sit in the sun, exuding peace and contentment.

These are the Allied prisoners trapped now inside Germany's Atlantic Wall, the men of Dieppe and Crete and North Africa and Italy, the soldiers, airmen and sailors, who wait through eons of bleakness and boredom for deliverance after General Eisenhower's D-Day.

Americans, Britishers, Frenchmen, Lowlanders, Norwegians, Poles, Russians--all the nationalities fighting to remove the evil scourge of Nazi brutality and domination, linger there inside German prison camps, thinking only of freedom, thinking only of life on the other side of the Atlantic Wall.

TAKE ROUTINE IN STRIDE.

They accept the indifferent food philosophically, and they take prison camp routine in their stride. Their great obsession is freedom, the sense of coming and going when they please, the joy of being home again.

These prisoners represent the war for many thousands of wives, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts back home. What they are doing inside Germany during one single day is more important to their loved ones than the activities of Himmler, Bormann and Speer for a lifetime.

As part of this closeup study about what is going on on the Nazi side of the Atlantic Wall it has been possible to get firsthand reports of life inside the prison camps and to reconstruct a typical day's routine.

Take one American camp in East Prussia for example.

It is a medium-large camp with about 1,500 Americans in one section by themselves and a slightly larger number of Britishers in the other half, all living in a wooden barracks inside electrically charged barbed wire fences.

ALL ATTEND PARADE

The day begins at 6:30 a. m. Then they must get up and prepare to stand inspection at 7. The morning parade is one of the few formalities that the Germans insist all must attend.

The men are never very conversational or cheerful when arising. Another bleak, dreary day of imprisonment faces them...an other day of waiting and hoping and dreaming of freedom.

Breakfast is the worst meal of the day, both for food and for the spirits of the men. They often get through the meal with hardly a word spoken along all the rows of tables.

Imprisoned officers are not permitted to do labor but enlisted men can accept working party duties if they wish. Most of the prisoners do volunteer; it is one way of making the time pass faster.

International laws forbid prisoners working on war jobs and the Germans appear to have followed this ruling with few violations. Wood chopping, road repairing in the countryside, odd jobs for enlisted men.

GO IN FOR STUDY

It is spiritually harder for the officers. Each day for them is like an eternity. They pick up scattered bits of gossip from the German guards and find out how the war is going--and they ache as with malarial fever to get a chance to get back in there slugging.

They throw themselves into study programs with a violent attempt to keep their minds occupied. They study languages and subjects as if cramming for exams. They form classes and teach fellow prisoners out of their own background and, in turn, attend student classes in some other subjects.

At the moment, Spanish is the most popular language in this particular camp. Then comes French.

Curiously enough, about a score of these Americans are assiduously struggling with the Chinese language.

They have some textbooks, but they badly need more technical books for men who are trying to keep up their college studies on specialized subjects.

BASEBALL FAVORITE SPORT

Chess, bridge and checkers are other indoor diversions for these Americans. They have not reached the stage of their British companions on the other side of the prison camp, however. There the Britishers have kept a bridge tournament running for a full year with 500 players. It was still going strong two weeks ago.

Football and baseball games with makeshift equipment are always a source of the greatest interest to the German guards, most of them former soldiers recovering from wounds or otherwise not fit to return to the front. The guards at first turned in an alarm thinking an riot had broken out, when the Americans began cheering, heckling and jeering. Now they understand the Yankee games and always find an excuse to watch.

Theatricals by the prisoners are permitted weekly, and much hard work goes into the production of them. The German censors listen to each play for impromptu dialogue.

MORALE IS HIGH

Each man is permitted to write two letters and four postcards each month. He may receive any number. One American holds all records in this camp and perhaps for all Germany: His poorest influx of mail was 37 letters in one batch.

Morale is high, although inevitably some men now and then get what other prisoners call "high spirited" from boredom and the desire for freedom. They talk irrationally about "going to the war", the electrically charged fence, and trying to make a dash for it or getting it over with quickly.

But such understandable outbursts from highly trained, healthy young men come only rarely, and then briefly.

The families of these prisoners can accept my word that there is no evidence of anything but fair and decent treatment, taking it all in all. The guards are showing more consideration each day--as if aware that they may soon change places with their prisoners.

DREAM OF FREEDOM.

Thus the day drags along. They talk about everything they have done and what they have seen but two subjects lead all the rest: the women in their lives and their chances of getting free. How to escape. . . what they will do the first few months when they are home again . . . how they will make up a million times over to their wives and sweethearts for all these terrible months of separation and loneliness.

"Prisoners talk of freedom, freedom, freedom until it haunts them and drives them nearly mad with nightmares," a man who was there told me. "They wake up at night and their brains whirl with the sheer delight of it."

Inside the French section of the Atlantic Wall alone, 52 German divisions wait for their last greatest battle. Inside the German prison camps the Allied war captives wait for that same day . . . and dream their long sweet dreams of freedom.