

# Nazis Play Fair in Prison Camps, Families Told

By Anne Hagner

The horrors of the "March of Death" that followed Bataan's surrender have not been inflicted on Allied captives in German prison camps—take it from a man who was in Berlin October 28, with full knowledge of conditions in Nazi POW quarters.

He is Henry Wasmer, director of POW relief of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland, now about to return to the neutral soil of his native land after several weeks in the United States with a twofold mission:

1. To discuss questions of relief shipments to Allied prisoners with the American Red Cross and the international delegation here;
2. To deliver the Red Cross ship, SS Saivo, to Philadelphia with supplies for 305,648 German prisoners in this country.

Every trip made by the Saivo and other ships in the Red Cross "fleet" of 12 to 14 vessels must be accompanied by an agent of the International Red Cross—hence Wasmer traveled from Berlin to Sweden by air and met the Saivo at Gothenburg for its 26-day voyage here.

## Human in Response

The Saivo's movements are no military secret, Germans, British and Americans are acquainted with the exact time of her departure, her route, and details of her cargo. In wartime she is unique, traveling brightly lighted and without disguise—floating proof that belligerent nations are capable of taking time out in their destructive efforts for the sake of humanity—to the enemy as well as to their own people.

But Wasmer's function for the International Red Cross is more

barbed wire behind which some particular, individual, beloved American is sweating out the duration. The daughter of Lieut. Gen. George S. Patton, jr.—her husband, Col. John Waters, has been a German prisoner for two years; the wife of a young Air Forces sergeant, tail gunner on a Liberator shot down somewhere over Germany; the mother of an artillery lieutenant, who has been behind that barbed wire since the African campaign.

To these people Dr. Marc Peter, delegate in the United States of the international committee of the Red Cross, also gave something of the background of the Geneva Convention, the "Swiss Foundation for Red Cross Transports" for buying and chartering relief vessels and the shipment of supplies.

## Strictly Neutral

Wasmer, who has spoken to many such groups in his three-year career with the international committee, fully realizes the importance of his words to the families of POW. His manner toward these anxious men and women is one of sensitive and intelligent understanding.

No question is too trivial to merit his attention.

Mostly they ask him: "What about Stalag number so-and-so?"

With the location and condition of every camp in Germany well established in his mind, Wasmer does not hesitate to answer. This has been found an excellent camp . . . is regarded as a country club among POW camps . . . there have been some complaints but our representative investigated and the matter is believed to be satisfactory now

Watching Wasmer's easy adaptation to the American public, it is difficult to believe that he was

but it did get there. We are hopeful, always."

Of food supplies getting into Germany, Wasmer was enthusiastic. Allied POW, he said, are better fed today than is the civilian populace of Germany. Red Cross parcels arrive each week, with special added delicacies for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

## Martins Beat Smiths

As a neutral surrounded by belligerent nations, Wasmer yearns occasionally, in his few spare moments, for the postwar era in which he plans to take on again the duties of Paris representative for an American chemical concern.

But for the present he feels that he is serving his country as a part of the "perpetual neutrality" of the Swiss, which he describes as "a fundamental pillar of our national life and existence."

Much of Geneva today is occupied with the work of the international committee, he says. Warehouses alone are as vast as an American war industry; they number 14 and must store 75,000 tons of supplies for all belligerents. In the headquarters of the committee are files with 20 million index cards; the task is further complicated by similarities of names, such as the 30,000 Martins in the French section—of whom 2000 have the same Christian name of Jean.

The same is true in the American files of Jackson, Johnson, Smith and Scott . . . but the Martins of France cause the most trouble.

The cargo which Wasmer accompanied from Sweden on Saivo contained about 500 tons Christmas bundles sent by Germans to their prisoners here. There were small ers Christmas trees and candles; the were razor blades and shoe lac and shaving gear—they even included foot powder and foot cream.

All were presents from the German army, with cards reading "Christmas greetings from the Fuehrer and the High Command of the Army."

Wasmer has no illusions about the size of the International Red Cross' gigantic task dwindling when peace comes.

## No End in Sight

"We shall put the organization at the disposal of the authorities to help in the repatriation of POW and civilian internees," he said simply.

"They must be fed and clothed for some time after the war—a such great numbers of people can be moved in a short time."

From the Official Information Bureau of Switzerland in New York, comes additional facts on the international committee—its services in the course of exchanges of gravely wounded prisoners, who Red Cross representatives serve as escorts on hospital trains and ships and as arbitrators during the exchanges; its special missions for particularly delicate negotiations or for the solutions to difficult technical missions, its distribution of foodstuffs in different parts of the world suffering from famine.