

WAR PRISONERS AID COMMITTEE

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THE WORLD'S COMMITTEE OF YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS
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March 21, 1945

Mr. Amon G. Carter
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Fort Worth, Texas

Dear Mr. Carter:

At the suggestion of Mr. Paul S. Hayward, General Secretary of the Fort Worth Y.M.C.A., we have been glad to place your name upon our mailing list regularly to receive our Y.M.C.A. War Prisoners Aid "News". However, I am calling your attention to the fact that we are sending the paper monthly regularly to the editors of some 1600 papers, which I think includes your own.

Let me also enclose a copy of our booklet "Information for Next of Kin", which you may have seen for I find in our files correspondence between you and Dr. Tracy Strong our World's Secretary, who is now in Europe, and Mr. John E. Manley.

If my information is correct, your son was a prisoner of war in Oflag 64, where one of our secretaries visited with him. You will be interested to know that recently we have had a long interview with a Lieutenant Frank Maxwell who has returned from that camp and given us a most interesting statement concerning the services that were being rendered by our Association. As you doubtless know, the camp was over-run by the Russians. We understand that some of the prisoners were moved westward into German territory and have been distributed to other camps, although a few of the men managed to escape through Russia.

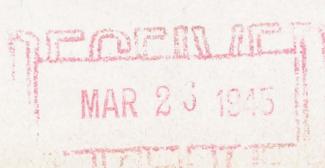
We have just received a cable from our Geneva, Switzerland office making a request for supplies for 374 Americans formerly in Oflag 64 but now in the officers section at Stalag III A, Luckenwalde. We understand this request is from Lt. Col. Walter M. Oakes, POW 4203, whose home address is 3919 W. Salinas Street, San Antonio, Texas.

I sincerely trust you have had recent and encouraging news about your son.

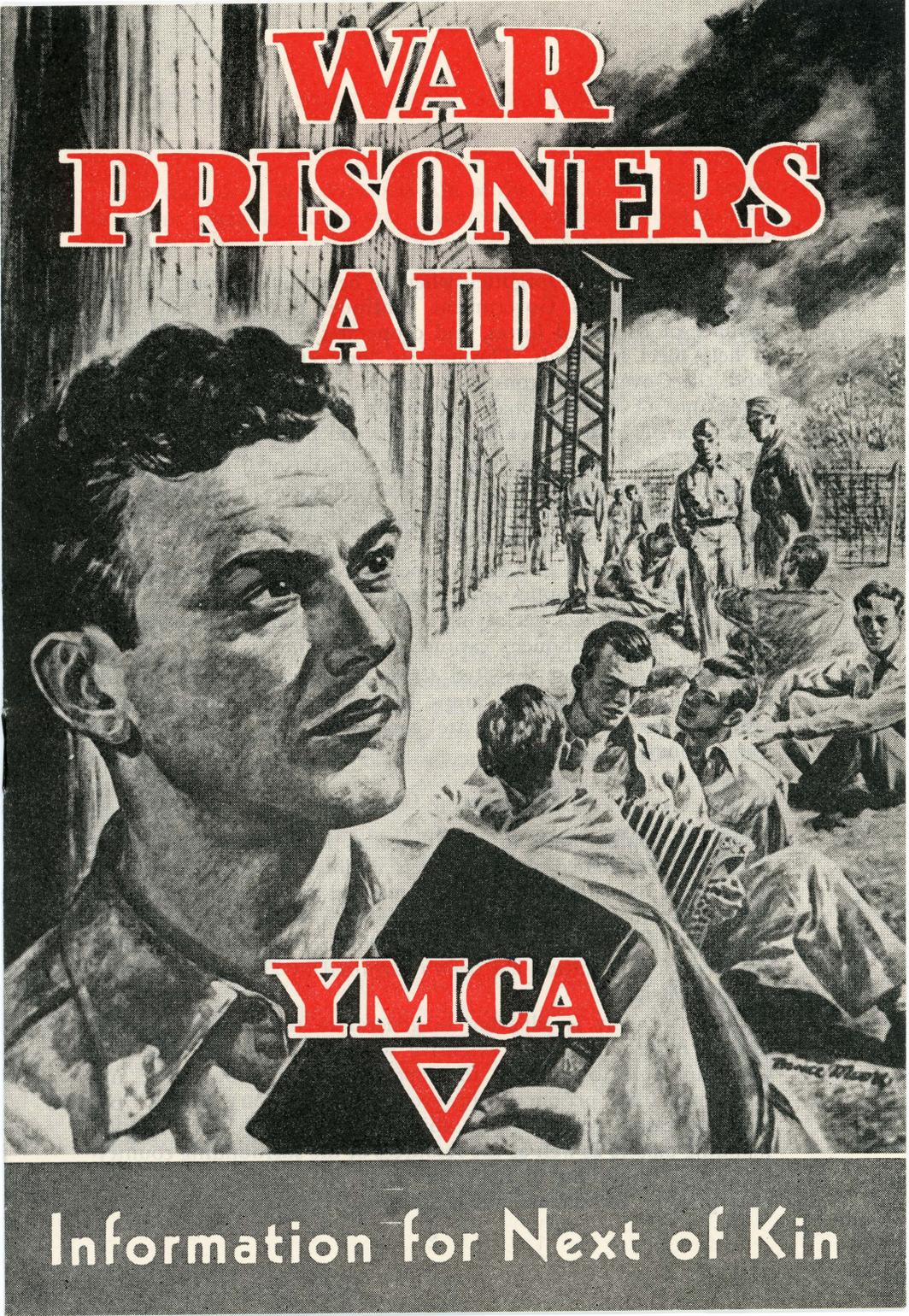
Very sincerely yours,

Arthur N. Cotton
Arthur N. Cotton

ANC:EH



WAR PRISONERS AID



YMCA



Information for Next of Kin

WAR PRISONERS

YOUR boy is not forgotten when he becomes a prisoner of war. The United States Government continues to regard him as a member of its armed forces, and cooperates with neutral agencies to help meet his needs. Through its "protecting power," Switzerland, the Government constantly exerts its influence to obtain full observance of international agreements relative to war prisoners. It also carries postage-free mail sent to and from prisoners of war.

The Young Men's Christian Association, through the War Prisoners Aid organization of its World's Committee in Geneva, provides for the educational, recreational, religious and other leisure time activities of war prisoners.

The International Red Cross supervises the distribution of food, clothing, medical supplies and comfort articles, inspects camps, and maintains in Geneva a clearing house by which governments are informed of the prisoner's capture and his address.

The Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross collaborate closely, in this country and in the prison camps. In addition, a number of other agencies, here and abroad, are concerned with the welfare of war prisoners.

The Geneva Convention

Of great importance to war prisoners is the Geneva Convention of 1929. Signed by forty-seven nations, it sets standards of food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, medical care, labor and other factors, together with freedom of worship and the encouragement of constructive leisure time activities. Work of the Y.M.C.A. under the Geneva Convention has been recognized by all the belligerents except Russia.

That Germany is adhering in general to the Geneva Convention is indicated by the extensive work the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross are able to conduct, the reports of neutral observers, and statements from prisoners. However, conditions vary widely from camp to camp, reflecting the abilities and attitudes of the commanding officers as well as the resources of the surrounding countryside. It is important to remember that the standards of comfort of a prisoner of war are not those of a civilian.

"Y" Workers Visit German Camps Regularly to Help War Prisoners

It is the job of War Prisoners Aid of the Y.M.C.A. to help make life more tolerable for the war prisoners by enabling them to have educational, recreational and religious activities to fill at least some of their dreary hours of idleness. Even prisoners who are put to work (a permissible practice followed by all nations) find that their greatest problem, next to food, is keeping their minds and hands busy. For officers, who are not required to work, the problem is even more acute.

Neutral representatives of the World's Committee of the Y.M.C.A. visit war prison camps in Germany regularly to learn the needs of the men and to stimulate educational, recreational and religious activities. On their visits the workers are able to talk freely with prisoners and the commanding officers of the camps. Usually the needs of the camps are discussed with the senior officer or leading prisoner who has been chosen to represent the men and who is familiar with their needs.

After visiting the camp, the workers report their findings to the World's Committee headquarters in Geneva, which then sends the required materials from stock piles accumulated since the beginning of the war. Geneva purchases as many supplies as possible in Europe, but as these are not sufficient to meet the needs, large shipments are sent regularly from the United States with particular emphasis being given to requirements of the increasing number of American prisoners. Our purchasing agents shop throughout the world. For example, large quantities of rubber and leather goods, not obtainable in the United States, are bought in South America where they are more plentiful, and shipped directly to Geneva.

Nothing in this booklet is meant to give an overly-optimistic picture of prison camp life, or to imply that it is pleasant. At best it is bleak and barren, even if the terms of the Geneva Convention should be met in their entirety. Worry over loved ones, problems of the future, the dull, monotonous routine of camp regimentation, lack of any privacy, the ignominy of working in the enemy's fields or on his roads—these are so great that the combined efforts of all welfare agencies can alleviate them only in part. But War Prisoners Aid can and does help vast numbers of captive men make the best of their lot, to the full extent of existing possibilities.

An interesting sidelight on the visits paid the camps by these "Y" men is the reception they receive from the prisoners, who are

happy just to see a person in civilian clothes. "As you walk up and down the streets of our camp," a prisoner told one of them, "the atmosphere of the camp changes. We know the outside world cares." Another prisoner put it this way: "All the little things that happen to you, you take very personally, so that impersonal aid, no matter how great, is never enough. Internment is 'when a feller needs a friend,' and above all when he wants somebody to consider him as an individual. You somehow did all of that: even those of us who never made any requests of you always knew they *could*."

First Months of Capture Are Hardest

The first months after a fighting man has been captured are the hardest for him. From the exciting life of soldier, sailor or airman, he is thrust behind barbed wire, cut off from news of his comrades, and generally feels himself to be a complete loss. With the passing of time this attitude is replaced by a determination not to let captivity get the better of him, and the prisoner then looks around to see how he can fit into the camp's activities. Until he reaches a permanent camp a prisoner will not have much opportunity for leisure time events, and it may take him a while to get on his feet again once he gets to his prison camp "home."

To help ease the first months of capture, the "Y" as soon as possible sends books and a recreational kit to American prisoners in Germany. There usually is an English-German dictionary to help him get along in his new surroundings, and a book of light reading to divert him. A booklet describes the Y.M.C.A. and its services, and cards are provided so he can designate the books he would like to receive.

The special recreational kit received by Americans contains a combination diary and photograph album, notebooks, pocket Testament, sports articles, games such as chess, checkers, pencils, crayons, a mouth organ or other simple musical instrument, plus other recreational items. These are packed in a box designed to serve as a portable locker to hold the prisoner's personal effects.

The American Senior Officer at Oflag 64, a prison camp in Germany, writes: "On behalf of American prisoners of war in my camp, I wish to state that we are very grateful to the Y.M.C.A. for what it has done in caring for our needs in books, equipment of all sorts, religious materials, aids in entertainment, and above all, the kind, sympathetic and understanding attitude in which the help has been extended."

Captured Americans usually find some "Y" activities in progress when they reach a permanent camp, for the Association has been serving prisoners since the war broke out in 1939. (Before that it worked with prisoners in the first World War, and even in the Civil War.) If there are only a comparatively small number of Americans in the camp, they fit in with activities of other prisoners, usually the British. When there are larger groups of Americans, they have their own classes, entertainment and sports.

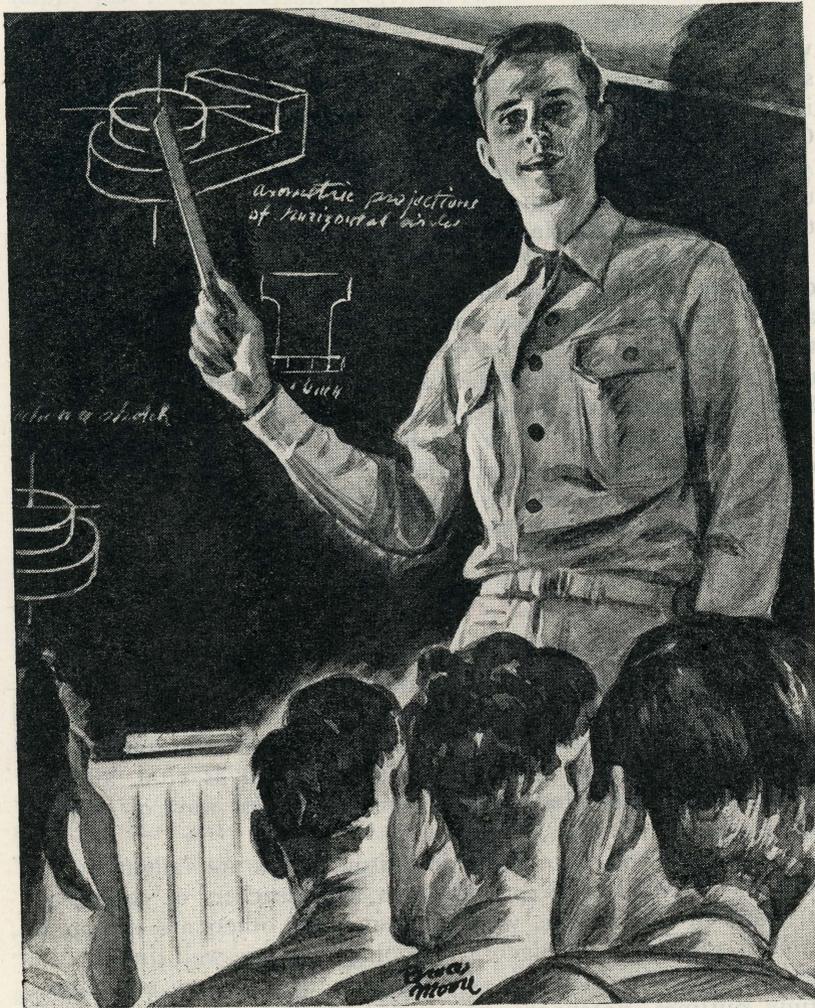
You will be glad to know that the actual programs within the camps are conducted by the prisoners themselves. Those who are athletes organize the sports activities, former teachers set up educational programs, and clergymen or theological students carry on religious observances of all faiths. Classes in all subjects are taught by prisoners who were experts in their fields in civilian life. Hobbies are directed by men whose talents run to woodworking, metalwork, leathercraft, model building, or the fine arts. Skilled musicians organize orchestras to entertain their fellow prisoners, and so it goes, each helping the other to weather the storm.

Studies Keep Minds Alert

Most relatives of American prisoners seem to be more interested in the educational opportunities than other leisure time activities in the German camps. This is understandable because many of the captives joined the army before completing their educations, some are professional men to whom continued study is vital, and for all it is recognized that study is one of the best ways of keeping minds alert.

As we told you, the classes in prison camps are taught by the prisoners themselves. Some prisoners were teachers or college instructors in civilian life, while a great many others are experts in subjects ranging from algebra to zoology and are well qualified to teach them. War Prisoners Aid supplies the necessary text books, study outlines, notebooks, paper, pencils and other educational materials. In addition to the more formal high school or college type of studies, many camps have "trade schools" at which prisoners may learn new skills to be better fitted to earn a living when the war ends. These courses are taught by prisoners who were welders, carpenters, mechanics, or other artisans in civilian life.

As might be expected, not all camps have the same educational opportunities, and in some, such as the smaller camps for working detachments, there generally is little chance for study. In others, however, the list of courses sounds like a university catalogue. From Stalag Luft III, the camp where most American airmen are



interned, and the best-equipped camp in Germany, the American Senior Officer writes: "New classes have begun in meteorology, elementary German, geology, geometry, differential calculus, mathematics, elementary algebra and sociology."

"On behalf of my comrades and myself I wish to express our gratitude for your kind consideration in forwarding the educational and interesting books to us, as they have proved very helpful in the study of different trades," states the American Senior Officer at Marlag Milag, the camp where seamen are interned.

The Armed Forces Institute

The hundreds of self-teaching and correspondence courses in high school, college, and technical subjects available to American fighting men through the Armed Forces Institute are being taken to Yankee prisoners of war in Germany and other countries by War Prisoners Aid. A letter and registration blank sent to each prisoner explains the educational courses available.

This opens a vast new field of educational opportunities for the men, and helps to make more certain that they will obtain post-war credit for their studies. The Armed Forces Institute courses, together with others offered in cooperation with many American universities will be provided in addition to long-established prison camp classroom work, for which the "Y" will continue to furnish educational supplies.

In connection with the office of the World's Committee of the Y.M.C.A. at Geneva, Switzerland, a branch of the United States Armed Forces Institute has been established. This branch will provide all USAFI educational facilities (subject to censors' judgment), make available lesson instruction, administer examinations and record all factors of a prisoner's studies which are educationally significant.

It is deemed likely that most schools will look with favor upon a student's prison camp work. As in the case of all other military personnel, the exact amount of academic credit will be determined by the institution concerned.

Books Are Popular in Prison Camps

"The library continues to be very popular and is undoubtedly the recreational activity rendering a real service to the greatest portion of our camp." So reads a letter from a German prison camp, pointing up one of the greatest needs of the men—books, and lots of books.

War Prisoners Aid sends great quantities of books to the prisoners, and many camps have both lending and reference libraries. Of course, it is not possible to meet the total needs of the men, because with so much time to read, they all want to do it. Even keeping up with the wear and tear on books is a chore. "Our records show that the more popular novels begin to show signs of wear after about 30 or 40 readings, and from that point on fail rapidly. It must be understood that our entire library changes hands every 10 days, due to the enormous interest in reading," a letter from an airmen's camp states.



FROM NEW YORK TO GERMANY

Because prisoners have as varied reading tastes as civilians, they must be sent a bit of everything. Each case of books contains a balanced reading diet. The cases serve as shelves after reaching the camps. A recent shipment contained over 200,000 books. To help keep books in repair, prisoners are supplied with bookbinding materials. The picture above shows books being packed in the New York warehouse of War Prisoners Aid, while the one below shows American and British airmen reading them in the library at Stalag Luft III, a war prison camp in Germany.



Through the Individual Book Service of War Prisoners Aid, Americans receive books they specially desire for personal use. Requests range from "How to Write Love Letters," to the most ponderous of scientific tomes. Many text books intended especially for college and university men are contributed by the World Student Service Fund. Bibles and Testaments are provided by the American Bible Society.

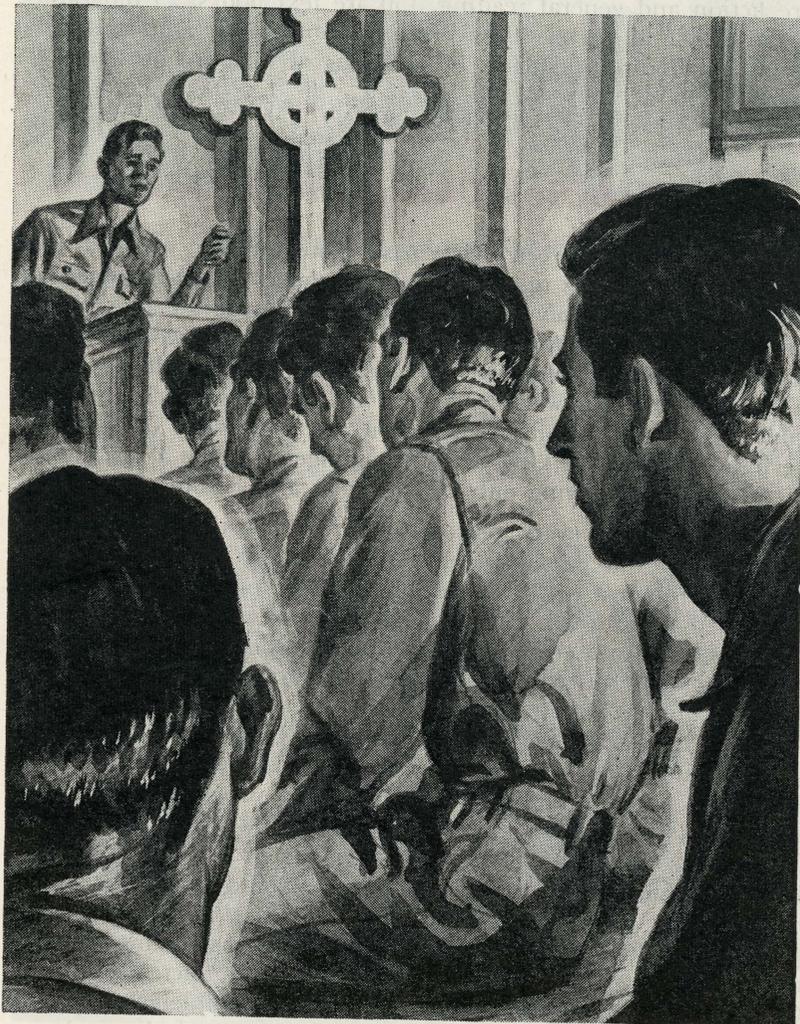
You will be interested in the composition of libraries now being prepared for units of 200 men. Out of a total of 1,050 books, 600 are fiction and general reading, 150 are text books, 25 biography, 50 history and travel, 100 vocations, professions and trades, 50 science, including medicine, 50 religious of various faiths, and 25 poetry and art.

Hobbies Chase the Blues

Hours behind barbed wire pass more quickly when a man can lose his thoughts in a hobby. To prisoners of war, hobbies and handicrafts are doubly valuable for they provide an activity that keeps hands and minds busy. A War Prisoners Aid worker reports seeing an unusual exhibition of handicraft work by the prisoners. Among the exhibits was a perfect model of a 24-gun frigate, whose guns moved out automatically when the ports were opened. But perhaps the most striking example of ingenuity was a clock made of tin cans and varying only two minutes a day from correct time.

Of course, not every person has great artistic or mechanical ability, but even the most inexpert find relief from prison camp tedium through a hobby. Naturally it is not possible for prisoners in more isolated work camps to have the same time or energy for a hobby, but even there men like to fill their odd moments by putting away at a hobby of one sort or another, however inconsequential it might seem to those of us in this country. Prisoners who never before worked with their hands develop amazing skills during their long hours of enforced idleness. Because there are nearly as many different hobbies as prisoners, we endeavor to provide as personal a service as possible, filling individual orders as requested by prisoners. Many of the men make use of their hobbies to provide entertainment for their fellow prisoners. Magicians' outfits and ventriloquists' dummies have been sent to the prison camps along with tools, paints, canvas, sculpturing supplies, model building outfits, and other hobby and handicraft materials. Gardening enthusiasts are furnished seeds and implements.

Requests for great quantities of toy lead soldiers by American seamen interned in Germany proved very puzzling until it was discovered that they were melting them down for use in building a working model of a steam boiler and turbine. "We wish to thank you for the many useful and entertaining gifts," a letter from an American prisoner in Germany says. "Your organization is doing a wonderful work for the American prisoners of war in sending us the materials we need to pursue our favorite hobbies."



Religion Gives Men Courage

"I have rediscovered my faith in Christianity."

That statement from a prisoner of war sums up the experience of many men confined behind barbed wire. "You can't kid yourself here," is the way one tough American top sergeant put it. Religion is one of the powerful, basic interests of prisoners of war. Many who gave but passing thought to it during the years of peace, find unexpected hope and comfort in religion in their captivity. War Prisoners Aid makes it possible for each man to worship according to his particular desire, by supplying the religious articles of all faiths. Nearly every camp has one or more chapels where the men can worship.

American prisoners in one camp in Germany constructed and decorated a camp chapel, using food parcel crates and whatever materials were at hand. The pulpit, altar, trellis-work railing dividing the altar from the rest of the chapel, and other interior fittings were made entirely by hand.

Whenever possible religious services for American prisoners are conducted by Army chaplains of the different faiths. When an American chaplain is not available, a chaplain of one of the other Allied armies may be called upon to officiate. Many times, too, laymen or those who were theological students in civilian life conduct the services. Barriers of creed and communion are likely to be ignored. Occasionally clergymen of one faith lead the services of another and make common use of such religious articles as are available.

Prisoners of war may not always read their Bibles but just carrying them in their pockets seems to comfort them. "I never read it," a prisoner said, referring to his Bible, "but I know that I have it in my pocket and this knowledge gives me a certain feeling of security. I know that something necessary is following me around." When prisoners first arrive in a camp, they want to read light literature or hear dance music, according to an American aviator at Stalag Luft VI in Germany. "Then they begin to think of the future and wonder about the meaning of life," he explained. "Then comes the time when they want to think deeper. They choose books in the library that lead them into the world of Mind and Spirit and they ask for and voluntarily attend religious services regularly."

Music Brings a Touch of Home

The solace that music brings to troubled men is not denied prisoners of war. To meet the varied musical tastes of prisoners, they are sent instruments for swing bands as well as symphony orchestras. Talented musicians give concerts and serve as instructors for music classes. Frequently groups of musicians are taken from the camps to play for work detachments in the country.

You can well imagine what it means to an American interned in a camp thousands of miles from home to be able to hear the music he has learned to love. Attendance at prison camp concerts often crowds the halls so far beyond capacity that many repeat performances are held.

Prisoners who love music, but have little artistic ability, are provided large quantities of such simple instruments as ocarinas and mouth organs. Phonographs receive such hard use that they must be equipped with extra springs for the motors. For community singing, thousands of song books are sent to the camps. Glee club music is supplied for smaller groups. There are "barber shop" quartets in prison camps as well as along Main Street.

Baseball Behind Barbed Wire

You would not expect to hear such a good old American sound as the crack of a bat against a baseball in a prisoner camp in Germany, but it can be heard there, for baseball is the most popular sport among Yankee prisoners. In some camps the men have organized leagues made up of teams named after their favorites in this country. There is the New York Yankees, the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Cardinals and many another. The softball team at an airmen's camp has no less than six colonels on it.

You must not get the idea that life in a prison camp is like belonging to a country club because the men are able to play baseball, football, basketball, soccer, ping pong, volley-ball, boxing and many other sports for which the "Y" supplies the necessary materials. Our representatives report, however, that even in work camps the Americans are still interested in athletics and turn to them in the evenings and on their rest days for relaxation. One of the most popular features of our sports service is the sending, by wireless, of a weekly sports summary. This is done in cooperation with Time, Inc. The summaries are sent by radio to Geneva, then relayed to the prison camps.



At Stalag III B, a prison camp in Germany, Yankee prisoners of war have formed an orchestra to entertain their comrades behind barbed wire. The "Y" supplies prisoners with musical instruments, glee club music, and phonographs and records. Musical comedies also are presented.

Plays and Movies Help Pass the Time

Theatricals and musical comedies, as well as motion pictures, are highlights in the lives of Americans in prison camps. In every camp are talented actors, musicians, stage designers and others who work together to entertain their comrades. To help them, we supply make-up kits, costumes, scripts, music and stage materials. Films and projectors also are furnished the camps. Regular Hollywood productions are supplied American prisoners through the cooperation of the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry of America, the Overseas Motion Picture Division of the United States Army, and Y.M.C.A. Motion Picture Bureau.

In some prison camps, the men have erected stages and built properties that are of a professional quality. Stalag Luft III has an orchestra pit that can be raised and lowered like those in American movie palaces.

"We are producing two and sometimes more, big-time Broadway successes here each month. This is a big enterprise here and is doing wonderful work in morale upkeep. We are doing 'Rose Marie,' thanks to your help. We are also doing a variety show as an added attraction. Thanks again and a salute for the 'Y,'" writes a prisoner from Germany.

Service to Prisoners in the Far East

Because it has been impossible so far for any agency to establish regular channels of shipping and communication to the Far East, the Y.M.C.A. has not been able to extend its full program to prisoners of war there. However, service of a limited nature has been provided, and while this does not come anywhere near meeting the problem, it is a step in the right direction.

For some time neutral representatives of War Prisoners Aid have been able to purchase quantities of books, seeds, gardening and carpentry tools, athletic equipment, musical instruments and other such goods as are obtainable in the Far East, and distribute them to war prisoners in Japan and Japanese-occupied territories. As this booklet goes to press, there are hopes that arrangements may be completed whereby boats going to Russian ports will carry relief supplies which then will be trans-shipped to Japan and Japanese-occupied territories. Exchange ships which have gone to the Far East have carried large quantities of relief supplies sent by the American Red Cross as well as recreational equipment and religious materials sent by the Y.M.C.A.

All such shipments made to date have reached the prisoners as scheduled, according to cabled information from neutral sources in the Far East, and more shipments will be made as frequently as conditions permit. The demand for these materials is unceasing and the appreciation of the recipients is boundless.

A letter from a prisoner of war in Japan states, "Thank you most sincerely for your very kind gifts. All of us greatly appreciated your thoughtful selection of books. Your kind action will always be remembered." A prisoner from another Japanese camp writes, "We want to give you our most sincere appreciation. Your gifts have been extremely welcome. We will always remember the fine work you are doing for all the prisoners of Japan."

What the "Y" Cannot Do

There are certain things the Y.M.C.A. cannot do for prisoners or relatives. The Y.M.C.A. cannot send food or clothing to men in prison camps, nor locate men listed as "missing" or those known to be prisoners but for whom an address has not yet been received. Full instructions concerning the sending of mail, books, food and clothing to prisoners are sent to the next of kin by the Prisoner of War Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshal General, War Department, Washington, D.C.

How YOU Can Help

One of the things you can do to help your relative who is a prisoner of war in Germany is to tell him to write to our Geneva headquarters requesting any educational, recreational or religious materials he may desire. His request will receive the same attention as though it came through our own official channels. The address is:

War Prisoners Aid of the Y.M.C.A.

37 Quai Wilson

Geneva, Switzerland

Large stockpiles have been accumulated in Geneva for this very purpose. Prisoners also may list their needs with their camp leader, who will turn it over to our workers when they visit his camp.

All Prisoners Are Served

While this booklet deals chiefly with the aid provided American prisoners in Europe, it should be borne in mind that the World's Committee of the Y.M.C.A., together with the International Red Cross, serves all war prisoners and civilian internees, regardless of nationality, race or creed. It is significant that in a world torn by war and hatred, the great humanitarian work of these two organizations continues on a basis of international, inter-racial and inter-faith help to suffering mankind.

Work of War Prisoners Aid of the Y.M.C.A. is carried on in Australia, Bermuda, Bonaire, Canada, Free and Occupied China, Egypt, Finland, Formosa, France, Germany, Great Britain, British and Dutch Guiana, Hong Kong, India, Indo-China, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, North Africa, Palestine, Philippine Islands, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and the United States.

The object of this booklet is to acquaint you in general with our work. While the service of War Prisoners Aid is as comprehensive as conditions permit, you can readily understand that circumstances beyond our control may make it impossible to reach every American prisoner. Even in the same camp, not all prisoners have identical leisure time opportunities. Because it is difficult or impossible to stamp with our insignia all materials we supply, it may well be that a prisoner is being served by the "Y" without his realizing it.

A Word of Advice

When you learn that your boy has become a prisoner of war, try not to give in to despair. The chances are good that he is well and safe. Believe the best, not the worst. Above all, keep your letters to your boy bright and cheerful. You must not tell him war news of any kind, as this is against censorship regulations. Write short letters frequently. One typewritten page once a week is about right. Typewriting has the best chance of getting past the censors. Letters in handwriting sometimes are held up because the censors cannot decipher them.

Prisoners generally can write about two letters and four post cards a month, but may be under more rigid restrictions. It takes time for mail to cross borders and oceans in war time, so allow months, not days or weeks, for an exchange of letters. Do not wait for your boy to write to you. As soon as you have his address write to him, and keep on writing even if you do not hear from him. He may be getting your letters, even if you do not get his.

We Are Supported by the National War Fund

War Prisoners Aid of the Y.M.C.A. is financed largely through the National War Fund. Certain religious activities are financed by the churches. Funds also are received from the various national Y.M.C.A. Movements and other sources.

You can support War Prisoners Aid by giving to your local war chest, which represents the National War Fund in your community. The sending of this booklet to you should not be construed as an appeal for funds. Its intention solely is to inform you of our service to prisoners of war.

All inquiries should be sent to

War Prisoners Aid

Young Men's Christian Association

347 Madison Avenue

New York 17, N. Y.