

PM

APRIL 15, 1945

Nazis Treat U. S. Prisoners With Special Brutality Obviously Out 'to Get' Yanks, Says Bernstein

By VICTOR H. BERNSTEIN



DUDERSTADT, Germany, Apr. 14.—Six sick doughboys—one with his leg freshly amputated—

told me the story. They couldn't remember much because they still were dazed, sick for lack of food,



Bernstein

their bowels gripped with dysentery, their bodies full of sores. Their story is one of a new death march at the hands of their German captors that rivals Bataan in sheer horror.

Where I could not get the entire story, it was filled in by eager Britishers who had been along with the Yanks and, like them, had just been released from bondage by the coming of the fast-moving 1st Army to this town.

I want to tell the story as far as possible in the words of the boys themselves. But one thing must be brought out first and hammered home, not only to the civilians in the U. S., but to the Yank soldiers everywhere in Europe. And that is that the Germans are out "to get" the Yanks and, unlike the treatment given British and French prisoners, they are treating their American captives in a distinctively and discriminatingly harsh manner.

Equal Bestiality

It must be added, too, that Russian and Polish prisoners are similarly - discriminated against. On this new Bataan-like march, the German guards treated all Americans, Poles, and Russians with equal bestiality.

Out 'to Get' Yanks

Censorship demands suppression of the names of the six boys, lying on makeshift hospital cots, waiting for evacuation, who told me their stories. But here is the gist of what they said.

Soldier X: "I was captured by the Krauts in Luxembourg last Dec. 16 during the German breakthrough. We were ridden for five days in box cars, packed 60 men to a car. We had to urinate and move our bowels through chinks in the walls and floors of the cars.

"For these five days all we had to eat was one-sixth of a loaf of bread each. At one station one day the Red Cross gave us a cup of hot soup and milk. I repeat, that is all we had to eat for five days.

Walked to Gorlitz

"After the railroad trip we got out and began to walk. We walked to Gorlitz—the train had taken us about halfway from Luxembourg. We stayed at the Gorlitz camp until Feb. 14.

"At Gorlitz our daily food was one loaf of straw bread for six men, a pint of soup made of beet tops and cabbage, and a half pint of *Ersatz* coffee. Americans, Russians, and Poles had one blanket each. The other prisoners, notably the British and the French, who had been in camp for several years, had several blankets and always could get something from the guards. We never could, nor could the Russians and the Poles.

"When we left Gorlitz on Feb. 14, we already could hear the guns of the Russians, about three miles away. We left on foot and we marched on foot back the way we had come—westward for 180 miles, as far as this town of Duderstadt.

"On the march our daily ration was a piece of bread, smear butter, and *wurst*. It was bitter cold and we still had only our one blanket each.

Some guards would not give us water—forced us to eat snow. A few civilian women tried to give us bread and apples as we passed, but the guards would beat us back with the butts of their guns when we tried to get out of line to accept the food.

"Still some of us managed to scrounge at night to pick up raw sugar beets from the fields. The stuff made some of us deathly ill with dysentery.

"We marched approximately one month and came to Duderstadt. I know some of us died on the way, but I don't know how many. Others got too sick to walk and were picked up by wagons following the column.

Shot by Guard

"At Duderstadt we were put into a camp in the brick factory. Our beds were four-foot boards covered with straw—we still had only one

Out 'to Get' Yanks

blanket each. The guards tried to keep the Yanks together, but some of us mingled with the British in the huge building and that way fooled the guards and could share the better conditions.

"On Mar. 20, three of us tried to snatch some beets from the neighboring farm. The guard shot me through the shoulder as I was climbing the fence between the factory yard and the farm.

"My two companions fell down on their stomachs, hoping that the guard had not seen them. But he had. He came up and shot one of the prone men through the back.

"The wounded man lay there 40 minutes before the guard would let any prisoner approach him. He lay there, bleeding to death. When he was finally picked up, he was a goner. He died half an hour later.

"The Germans brought me to the hospital and that is where the Yanks found the men when they came into town a couple of days ago."

I want to quote only one more soldier who had a similar experience to the chap quoted above.

Said soldier Y: "Out to Gorlitz some prisoners could get more food by volunteering to work on neighboring farms. But the Germans would not permit Americans to volunteer. I believe that the same restrictions were put on the Canadians.

"I personally know of two Yanks who were shot to death at the brick factory camp. I think each had lit a forbidden fire to prepare some hot food. I also know there were a hell of a lot of sick guys all around the place—mostly dysentery.

"And I know that a few days before the Yanks came, the Germans took away several hundred prisoners who were the strongest among us. But an hour after this batch left, one Yank came back staggering with illness. I don't know what was the matter with him, but he died in an hour."

Verified

All these facts were verified by British prisoners who had been at Gorlitz and made the march east with the Yanks. They verified most particularly that Yanks, Russians, and Poles were treated persistently with special harshness.

One British sergeant, who had acted as an unofficial burial officer, told me that many Americans were buried without coffins—just dumped into a sack and flung into the grave. He said the Germans tried to give the British decent burial, providing coffins and often a guard of honor.

I tried to get details on the deaths. There were several medical corpsmen among the Yank prisoners, who attempted to keep a tally, but it was a huge marching convoy, and more than 4000 pris-

Out 'to Get' Yanks

oners were housed in the big brick factory.

The best estimate I got was that at least 55 men of all nationalities died in 16 days at the factory camp here and perhaps 200 died on the march, of whom perhaps 50 were Yanks.

Yesterday I wandered around in a jeep with Lt. Earl King of Oklahoma, regimental liaison officer. I say "wandered" advisedly, because the lieutenant was looking for his regimental command post, and in these days of what they call a fluid front, nobody—not even a liaison officer—knows where anything is.

This division has been advancing at the rate of 20 and 30 miles daily, and I now learned the definition of a break-through: it is when you don't know where you are going to sleep tomorrow night.

Before the end of the day, both the lieutenant and I were lucky—he found his regiment and I found a story.

In the small town beyond the Weser that had fallen only a few hours before, I had a chance to talk to a group of prisoners, among them six kids aged 15 to 17, who were members of the SS (Elite Guard). The kids were sitting on a fallen log in the driveway of military police headquarters, with a guard over them and surrounded by a group of curious Yanks who never had seen children in uniform before.



Another sample of what the Nazis do to the GIs they take captive. This Yank just has been liberated, but he is too weak and ill to show any emotion. All he can do is stare dazedly into the darkness.

16-Day Soldier

A 15-year-old kid told me he'd been drafted into the SS exactly 16 days ago—on Mar. 26. "Everybody my age had to go in," the boy said. I asked him how much military training he had had. He said he had been a member of *Hitler Jugend*, but added that, after the SS took him, he had been given just four days' basic training.

I translated that for the watching Yanks and one of them said: "For Christ's sake, why didn't they just take him out and shoot him straight off."

And his fellow kids, after their

Out 'to Get' Yanks

four days' training, had been sent out on security patrols, watching road blocks, patrolling the woods, and on similar duties.

Other youngsters said they also had been inducted last month, except one who was a real veteran—he had been a soldier since early February.

They were a sorry-looking lot of kids, no more a credit to the vaunted National Socialist youth development program than to the great German army. They were sallow-faced, thin, unkempt, with sores on their lips, running noses, and tattered clothes. They sat with drooping shoulders and lifted their eyes from the ground only when directly addressed.

What They Thought

I asked them what they thought of Hitler and one of them said: "He talks and talks and we're still not winning the war."

I asked why they thought it was that Hitler could not win the war, and one boy said: "We haven't enough men and not enough weapons."

It was at this point that the youngest kid volunteered a remark. "What do you expect from an army when it makes soldiers of 15-year-old boys?" he said. His boyish voice had the querulousness of a bitter old man. He was staring at the ground and tears were rolling down his cheeks.

PM