

ZEUGENSCHRIFTUM

25-2464-7

Name:	ZS Nr.	Ed.	Vermerk:
G R O L L , Fritz	2464	I	
katalogisiert Seite:			
Sachkatalog:	Personen:		
KZ III - Behandlung	Groll, Fritz		
KZ III - Einsatz			
KZ IV - Buchenwald			
PSG III - Verfolgung			
katalogisiert Seite:			
Sachkatalog:	Personen:		
katalogisiert:Seite:			
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katalogisiert Seite:			
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17 May 1993

The Library,
The German Historical Institute,
17 Bloomsbury Square,
LONDON WC1A 2LP.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have enclosed a copy of what appears to be the personal account of a German citizen who was imprisoned at Buchenwald concentration camp before and during the early part of the Second World War.

My father, who was an officer in the Royal Signals throughout that war, was recently preparing for a house move and was going through some old papers when he came across this account, which he showed me. Although he had briefly mentioned it to me many years ago, it was the first time that I had read it. There is probably very little information contained in it that is not already known. However, as it appears to have been written before the war ended---- before most of this information became common knowledge-----I thought that it could be of historical value.

The original type written account, held by my father was given to him when he was in the Western Desert, Egypt. He only remembers that it was given to him by a Major "Daba" Smith, so called because he was the Major in the town of Daba. My father returned from the Middle East in the early part of 1946 and he believes that in all probability he was given the type written account in 1945. I have included a photostat of the envelope that my father kept the account in.

Institut für Zeitgeschichte ARCHIV	
Akt. 8374/93	Post. 752464
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I contacted Professor O'Neill of All Souls College, Oxford, for advice and he suggested that, as it appears to be written by a German citizen it would be appropriate to send it to you to forward to the relevant archives. I have also sent a copy to the Imperial War Museum, London. My father has agreed with my intentions to forward this information.

The photostats are not particularly good quality, but are readable. Please contact me if you wish a better quality reproduction or sight of the original.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian C. Young', written over a rectangular box.

Brian C. Young.

Archiv

ON HIS

SDS
REGISTERED
NO. 1111
Ruell

SERVICE

NOTE.—Open

by cutting

the label.

Re-use by

affixing

fresh label.

Major Young
3 Coy
16 Area Signals
Amiriga Det.

24134

EGG VENTURE DESERT ZONE

AP/RS/2.

FRITZ GROLL

THE FOREST OF THE DEAD

5 YEARS - CONCENTRATION CAMP

BUCHENWALD

Personal experiences written down whilst
Prisoner of War in an English P.W. Camp.

EGYPT 1944 - 1945

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The following inscription hand over the entrance to the Camp:-

RIGHT OR WRONG - MY COUNTRY
TO EACH MAN HIS DUE.

Names of the SS Leaders of the Camp:-

Commandant,	Standartenfuehrer KOCH.
Camp Leader,	Sturmabfuhrer Arthur ROEDEL.
Asst. Camp Leader,	Hauptsturmfuehrer FLORSTEDT.
Subsequent Commander,	Hauptsturmfuehrer PISTA.
" Camp Leader,	Hauptsturmfuehrer Max SCHOBERT.
Asst " Camp Leader,	Sturmabfuhrer PLATEN.
Barrack Leader,	HAAFMAN - JOHNNY.
Camp Doctor ,	Hauptsturmfuehrer HOREN.
Guard Regt,	SS Death's Head Regt.
Provost N.C.O.,	H. Scharfuhrer. SOMMER.

INTRODUCTION

Much has already been rumoured about the conditions in German concentration Camps. But the Germans themselves know least about them. Those who managed to get out remain silent. The reason is not so much the fact that they had to sign on the dotted line to keep their mouths shut, but because they were afraid to be looked upon as liars since their accounts would sound too incredible anyhow. These notes have been written down in order to throw some light on the actual conditions in a Concentration Camp, and further in order to expose to the German youth the true face of the clique of gangsters who ruled Germany. We who were there, were looked upon and called "enemies of the state" but I want to emphasize here and now that all the inmates I got to know there, loved their country as ardently as any other German, - but in any case deeper than those criminals who consciously led Germany to war. Now that the end of the war is near, even the most convinced National Socialists realize that these sadists would be capable of anything that could prolong the war and with it their doomed lives, if only for a few days. This is their conception of patriotism. It is high time for these criminals to be brought to book to the benefit of the German Nation and the whole world. Although not really religious I feel deeply grateful and conscious that justice still prevails in this world. To the innumerable friends and comrades who were murdered in cold blood I wish to say in memoriam:- "Your death will be avenged, your sufferings have not been in vain."

The train starts and the wheels of our cattle truck loaded with prisoners slowly moves over the Railway crossings of station B. We are travelling East, But as yet we are unaware of our destination. There are two of us in one tiny cell; the small window closely wired in is just high enough that, if I stood on my toes I could just manage to see the countryside pass by. Whilst I am looking through the window my travelling companion is resting on the narrow and only seat. This uncertainty is terrible but I am determined not to ponder or to brood. Later I got tired and I wanted to ask my comrade whether he would not like to get a glimpse of the outside world; a short glance was sufficient, I saw his eyes were wet. He had to leave 4 children and his ailing wife behind and all of a sudden the memories of the painful parting from my own beloved ones again surges up in me and also the uncertainty of what the future holds in store. "Don't lose courage" I say "soon you will be back with your family, what can they want from us, we haven't done anything wrong". Listlessly he shakes his weary head and my feeling of dejection deepens. All this seems like a nightmare from which I hope to emerge.

It is 5.30 in the morning, my wife is preparing breakfast in order to get me off to work, a knock at the door makes me wonder who would honour us with such an early visit. Two men enter my home, prove their identity as Gestapo officials and ask for my name. They order me to come along. When my wife objects, they curtly tell her that she need not worry, my presence is only required for confirmation of particulars and I would be back soon. A small open car standing ready in front of my home took us to the police Headquarters. There my personal particulars were taken down and without any explanation I was thrown into a prison cell. I had not committed any offence, but I had never had any sympathies for National Socialism and so anticipated the worst. Weeks and weeks of terrible uncertainty went by; at last one day I was brought up for questioning, and was told to sign a document purporting to be a request to be taken into "protective custody". It was a large pink form, stating that I had proved by remarks made at work that I was not a National Socialist, that I had refused to join various Party organisations etc. It was therefore a necessity to take me into protective custody, since I was a danger to the security of the state. I did not deny that I was not a Nazi, but replied that some of these accusations were incorrect and I requested to be brought before a civil court. In short, I refused to sign this document. One official brandished a pistol in front of my nose and told me that in the new Germany people of my kind would get short shrift. With the usual kicks in my behind, I was shoved back into my cell. I had to consider my wife, child, parents and brothers, so next day, to save them from suffering through me, I signed not the request for protective custody, but an attached slip acknowledging receipt of an order for protective custody.

The following Sunday my whole family came to see me for the last time. I repeated to them that I had done nothing wrong and there was no reason to worry. The Police official

on duty comforted my parents by telling them that, at the worst, I had only to undergo a short political re-education. My parents had brought us up in the spirit of democracy. We were three brothers very devoted to our parents, who suffered greatly by my detention. I promised then, that where-ever I would be taken, I would do all in my power to prove that I had been unjustly imprisoned. It was about the beginning of May that I and some other fellow sufferers were taken to the railway station.....

The train stops; the station is Kassel and we all have to alight. Heavily escorted we are taken to the town prison for the night. We did not sleep much that night - The uncertainty of our fate tormented us to much. We spend the night in a large barrack room with iron bedsteads and paillasses, crawling with vermin. I suppose that is the same in all prisons. In the course of the night we received two additional guests. The usual questions were asked. One of them was a Half-Jew and more communicative than his friend who remained stolidly silent. Their story was that they came from the Concentration Camp Buchenwald and that they were at present in transit. This was the first we heard of this Concentration Camp. The Jew told us that they were enroute to a court trial for some political offence and that they hoped to get a long term of imprisonment, so that they would not be returned to Buchenwald. "In a few years" he said rather mysteriously, "agood deal of water would flow down the Rhine". I requested him to express himself more clearly, but without success. In the course of our conversation he opened up a bit and after we had managed to produce some sort of Cigarette between us, he seemed communicative and told us that it was common use in Buchenwald to get 25 strokes with a whip over the small of the back for trifling offences and that one could even be tied to a tree as they did in medieval times. When I heard this, I was infuriated that I had to listen to such infamous lies; my sense of justice was deeply hurt and I slapped the fellows face. That's how this acquaintance ended. How many times later I have apologized to this man and when I had my first flogging I took it patiently, as a atonement for the injustice I had done this man. The following morning we were taken to the station again. And still we did not know our destination. The people on the platform looked upon us, some with pity, and some with contempt, quite understandable from the looks of us; without sleep, unwashed and unshaven, our clothes badly creased, some scratching themselves and hunting for fleas, in the end we ourselves felt as if we were criminals. In Kassel our party increased again, there were also a few Jews amongst those who joined us, and we became quite a big crowd. The train was waiting soon we started. It was quite a sunny afternoon when we arrived in Weimar and since we knew that Buchenwald was in the close proximity, we needed no longer guess our destination. We paraded behind the station strongly guarded and heard a sort of declaration of war. An officer informed us that anyone trying to escape would be shot like a dog. Here again people crowded around us to get a glimpse of us, as it was still a spectacle to see men, in our great united Germany, who were enemies of the state, intent upon destroying the Fatherland, rather interesting. 6 years later, when I returned to my home

town, I could hardly find my home amongst the ruins. Apparently the wrong ones had been imprisoned in previous years - or they had only been jailed so that others could, undisturbed, convert our beautiful country into a heap of rubble and ashes....

We were loaded onto lorries which took us to Buchenwald, no more than 6 miles from Weimar. The first view of our new domicile was a terrific heap of bricks; behind it were a few barracks. Our reception was rather impressive, for as soon as I got off the truck I felt warm blood running down my face. I had been hit over the head with something. A few young SS heroes stood between the trucks and the barracks, armed with truncheons and we had to run the guntlet, exposed to kicks and beatings by this courageous gang. That is how our re-education began. We arrived at the barracks. There they made us stand with our faces to the wall, our hands crossed at the back of our neck; we had to do knee-bending exercises whilst the SS men abused us and kicked us with their boots. Our personal particulars were then taken down in another room. After dark we were taken into the camp proper. We paraded on the parade ground and the senior prisoner M O O R, who incidentally lost his life a few months later, read out camp standing orders. After that our heads were shaven and we were issued with camp clothing. First we wore a motley assortment of clothing, later we were issued with blue-white striped uniform. On the left breast and right thigh we wore our numbers. Mine was 3181. In later years we had prisoners coming from other camps who had their number tattooed on their wrists.

Our Section Leader was a certain TONI MUELLER from Dusseldorf, a professional criminal. He took us to our barracks. At that time the camp was still under construction and a good many prisoners consisted of professional criminals (P.C.). Of those there were approximately 2000. The others were political prisoners and members of a religious sect called "Students of the Bible" (Members of this sect were conscientious). We thought at first that, now in camp, our lives would be safe. But this was pure illusion. The P.C.'s had established a reign of terror. All supervisory jobs available for prisoners, such as Section Leaders, Rillet Seniors, Camp Leaders and Foremen etc, were filled by them. These were recognisable by arm bands with white lettering. These people had been told shortly before our arrival, that "the right sort" were arriving this time - meaning us - and if they would treat us as we should be treated, they would be rewarded by being set free soon. Most P.C.'s founded their hopes in this promise and, in consequence, there was much ill-treatment and murder within the compound as outside with the working parties. I wish however to record that even amongst the P.C.'s there were some that were decent. The other P.C.'s never gained the promised reward for their sanguinary work and had to die as miserably as the comrades whose blood was on their hands.

Our arrival was very ill-timed indeed, as on the day

of our arrival the burial of an SS man took place who had been beaten up by two prisoners on a working party outside the camp and who had succumbed to his injuries. Both prisoners whose names I do not wish to mention, had escaped. We were in two minds about the incident we hoped that they would not be caught, but we could not agree with their action, as they had not shown much consideration for their comrades who - as they could have foreseen - would be subjected to severe reprisals. Consequently innumerable prisoners were shot and clubbed to death.

The Camp was surrounded by a strong wire fence, at all times charged with high tension current and it was impossible to escape through it. Prisoners who tried, got stuck in the wires and were scorched to death. Around the perimeter wire were crow's nests manned by machine gun posts. When prisoners were employed outside the camp, escorts were posted alongside with only a few yards between them. Outside work was done in the quarry and on drainage. I am mentioning these two groups especially as most fatal casualties came from there. There were also working parties for road construction, buildings for SS personnel and "G.E.W." (German Equipment Works), comprising joiners, blacksmiths, tinsmiths etc. In later years large sheds were added for armament production.

The camp is situated in the middle of a forest on a hill and all around the camp were Notice Boards warning civilians showing a skull and bearing the inscription "Your life is in danger if you enter this area".

We had permission to write and receive two letters per month. Later this was reduced to one letter. It was forbidden to send photographs. We were instructed to inform our relatives that it was forbidden to make applications on our behalf. If, in spite of that applications came through any official channels the prisoner concerned was punished with 25 strokes of the whip. No visitors were allowed.

There was no time limit to the period of protective custody. We were allowed to receive 15 Marks (22/6d) per month. Anyone found to be carrying more money on him was punished. Neither we prisoners, nor our dependants received any payment. Working hours varied; during summer months reveille was at 4 or 4.30 a.m. and we had to work through until 8 or 10 at night; in winter hours were somewhat shorter. As the camp construction programme neared completion the working hours were slightly reduced. There was no Sundays and Holidays observed and every day was a working day. Water was extremely scarce and we could only have a wash after rainfall. The drainage system was not ready for use until much later. In the meantime we had in several parts of the camp for latrines deep pits over which we sat on iron bars.

Owing to the change of air and diet many suffered from a well-known camp sickness which necessitated frequent

visits to these latrines.. SS personnel were always walking through the camp, armed with truncheons and beating and kicking prisoners without any reason or provocation. They followed the same practice at these latrines and many prisoners, beaten whilst perching there fell down and drowned.

The work demanded extreme physical exertions, the quantity of our rations was insufficient and we all were therefore just skin and bones. We became so weak that the slightest touch was enough to throw us off our balance - and to fall meant in Buchenwald nearly always certain death. Anybody collapsing outside the camp on a working party was at once either shot or clubbed to death. On many occasions I have seen prisoners drop from sheer weariness and exhaustion. When it rained the mud stood ankle high and and if then there was a SS Guard near a man who fell he took the poor victim by the scruff of his neck and dragged him, face downwards through the mud until his fury abated and another sufferer had expired.

Any interference or assistance given to a Comrade on such an occasion would have resulted in a similar fate for us and was forbidden. The hard work, the malnutrition the permanent nervous strain caused by the never ending uncertainty about the duration of our captivity in addition to the cruel treatment by German compatriots brought us down to the level of animals, poor hunted animals.

In summer we suffered under intense heat, rain drenched us to the skin; in winter we suffered doubly from cold. As a result of under nourishment and insufficient clothing. The result was inevitable - a mass production of corpses.

The crematorium institutes in Weimar, Jena and Erfurt, could no longer cope with the disposal of bodies and we therefore erected an incinerator on our own parade ground with, if I remember rightly, 8 furnaces. Into each of these, two corpses were shoved at a time.

We had to salute SS men by taking our cap off, with arms to the side and eyes to the front. There altogether 200 men in our barracks, hundred in room "A" and hundred in "B". The maintenance of the barrack discipline was the responsibility of the barrack leader and life and death of the occupants lay on his hands. Whenever he reported a man, then the unfortunate was punished without a chance to state his case or to defend himself, nor was there a possibility to complain about unjustified reports.

We slept on iron bedsteads with paillasses and blankets, of later which we had only two since the outbreak of war. Beds were arranged in 3 berths, one on top of the other. The lay-out of bedding was the hobby horse of every barrack leader. It was nothing out of the ordinary for us to come back from work soaking wet, dog tired and hungry and

to proceed directly to our barracks in order to layout our bedding and readjust it throughout the night without any food until the whistle for reveille blew. Our barrack senior was a past master in these tricks. He inhabited the so-called day room in the barracks and prisoners who had to relieve themselves and had to pass through his day room, were made to stand on a small stool and to execute knee-bendings exercises under a shower of blows. His was a reign of terror and cruelty. Our indignation had to remain mute; any indication of our feelings would have resulted in certain death. If this man is still alive after the war, I hope he too will be caught.

Already on our first night there we encountered the dead bodies of comrades who had hung themselves on their beds. Those who died or fallen sick during the night had to be on morning parade and we had to haul them along. On our first parade rain had fallen and we stood deep in mud. We shivered in our thin clothing and felt the cold on our clean shaven heads. All barracks marched up to the parade ground and the senior made a strength report to his SS superior who passed it on to an SS senior N.C.O. who in turn reported it to the Camp Commandant. Was the strength correct the order "Caps on" was given and we were then marched to our jobs. During the first few months the strength report was never correct, because regularly some prisoners had gone and hung themselves in a nearby forest. So, whilst we remained on parade, "Standing to attention", The barrack orderlies were sent out into the forest "to find the birds" - a phrase coined by the barrack leader HAARMAN-JOHNNY, a criminal of unique proportion. Were these corpses found, they were taken to the main gate, a recount was held and then prisoners who were unfit for work were told to fall out. Then we saw creatures half dead and half starved standing on their legs only with their last ounce of strength. The SS Officer stood there resplendent in his black shirt uniform, complete with whip, contemptuously watching them. With a stream of abuse, such as: "You swines do not want to work- he hit his victims in their faces, until they collapsed in the mud; so they died. then we were detailed to the various working parties. I myself had the rotten luck to be in the quarry party. It was there that I realized the full significance of the words "Concentration Camp". It was obviously intended to make us die there, but to extract the maximum amount of work first.

We reported to the foreman of the quarry party and were marched in block to the quarry, which was about 3/4 mile from the camp. On the march and whilst at work we were always heavily guarded. The quarry was deep down and surrounded by forest. We were there at the mercy of the foreman and the guards. It was our job to pull the trucks loaded with stones on ropes or chains to the top escorted by two guards. A comrade in my party had the misfortune to be pulling on the offside and so he was constantly subjected to deliberate kicks and blows by the escorts, all youngsters of 17 and 18. At first we tried to work as hard as possible, in the hope that this would be rewarded by leaving us in peace, but it did not work.

The escorts continued to harass my friend and he reached the point when he decided to make an end of it, by what in camp language was called "breaking through the chains". This happened daily. A prisoner who could no longer bear up under the strain approached the guard cordon and was shot without warning. These were the people whom the German Newspapers reported as having been "Shot whilst trying to escape". This method offered the best and speediest solution and was therefore practiced day by day, year in year out. It is a fact that throughout my five years captivity I have not seen one prisoner being shot whilst actually trying to escape. They all met their death whilst approaching the guard cordon slowly, worn out and tired of their lives. I tried to encourage my comrade reminded him of his family and offered to change places with him. The escort however noticed the intended change-over and with kicks and blows ordered me back to my old position. The end came soon. My comrade already listless and exhausted stumbled on the way up and fell. The escort shot him - and there was another enemy of the state less. The killer was rewarded by being given 3 days leave. He probably had the gratifying feeling of having rendered valuable service to his country.

A game which enjoyed great popularity with guards was to pull off a prisoners cap, to throw it outside the guard cordon and then order the prisoner to go and retrieve it. Newcomers approached the cordon unawares and were shot.

When work was finished all working parties paraded for the evening count. Was the count correct a loudspeaker called out "escorts dismissed". The followed disciplinary punishments. After that all prisoners had to join in the camp song and were marched off. Work inside the camp compound continued after the evening meal until 20.00 hrs, and the P.C.'s did their damndest to make a veritable hell for us. One of the worst was the Camp Senior H. R. I C H T E R who never tired of knocking prisoners about and delighted in reporting them. But a well deserved fate overtook him at last. For some offence or other he was soon afterwards put under arrest and after release clubbed to death by the prisoners. The same punishment was meted out to any prisoners who stole a comrade's 'bread ration'. This may appear harsh discipline amongst prisoners, but it was dictated by dire necessity.

As mentioned before, punishments took place after evening count. For newcomers it was a terrible experience to hear the wailing of victims resounding all over the square. We new arrivals who had not yet been punished, were determined not to utter a sound, should our turn come and so express mute defiance. But later we actually experienced the terrible pain caused by stinging blows of the whip, we found shrieking brought considerable relieve. When I had my first flogging I clenched my teeth. But the effort of stifling my groans put such a strain on my nerves, that I was very near collapse afterwards. Even today I don't yet know why I was punished. My hands and those of a few others were called out. I was strapped onto a special wooden frame and my legs were fastened in iron joints. One SS guard held of my head and another performed the flogging.

Cont'd Sheet - 9 -

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We assured at that time that our refusal to sign the pink form for protective custody was the reason for our punishment. During the first months the SS men on duty attended the spectacle, wearing their steel helmets and standing rigidly to attention. I remember once we saw a Berlin Illustrated paper, smuggled by prisoners into the camp, which showed pictures of SS guards flogging prisoners, as we witnessed daily. The caption was :- Atrocities stories the spread abroad about conditions in German concentration camps. In most cases the whip took the skin off and left the flesh raw and bleeding.

In the beginning there was no sick bay. If a prisoner broke his arm or had any other injury or ailment, he had to carry on with his allotted task.

When, as mentioned before one SS guard had been killed, an order was issued forbidding all prisoners to smoke. There will not have been many who dared contravene this order, the punishment would have been out of all proportion. All pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, lighters etc, were confiscated, piled up and burned. The no-smoking order was frequently imposed on later occasions. Tobacco smuggled into the camp by SS guards sold, even in peace time at, 2 1/2 - 3 per ounce.

Shortly afterwards men were wanted for the erection of SS Barracks and I volunteered, glad for a chance to get out of the quarry party. The change, however was not much of an improvement. By then, it had become clear to me that the only hope to keep alive was to hold one's eyes and ears open and to remain alert at all times. To avoid sickness and overwork was imperative as our bodies were weak and undernourished. The alternative would have been certain death.

We had a pre-arranged warning call, well known to every prisoner. Whenever an SS guard approached within sight of working prisoners, the whisper went around "Eighteen". It spread quickly and every prisoner endeavoured to look as busy and hard-working as possible.

The buildings under construction were sited near the quarries and their erection was a priority job. We therefore had to work until 22.00hrs. The last evening on that job would have nearly been fatal for me, had providence not shown some kindness. The escorts were placed in intervals around the building and each one of them had a pile of stones in front of him. As we came out of the building to fetch material they pelted us with stones and one had to be very deft to avoid getting hit. At 22.00hrs we returned to the camp under the usual showers of knosks, kiaks and blows by the escorts. It was dark the ground was full of pot-holes and ditches. Any-one stumbling and falling was done for. We prisoners held each other by our hands, whilst the escorts run around us like dogs herding a flock of sheep. One of the SS men hit me with the butt of his rifle in the back, I stumbled into a big hole. My comrades holding my hand just managed to pull me up and so saved me from the worst.

Cont'd Sheet 10.

by "worst" I do not mean death itself, but the degradation of being wiped out defencelessly - and there was the thought of the family at home. To die was easy there, but to live on required more than ordinary courage or bravery. The wound in my back turned septic and a few days later I stayed in camp for treatment. I had a temperature and reported to the sick-bay, which was situated in the forest. Many prisoners were there standing or lying down waiting for examination by the doctor. I am convinced it would tax any author to describe fittingly the misery and the sufferings of the poor wretches who had to live through these few months in Buchenwald. I shook with fever, the sun sent warm rays through the foliage of the trees and I knelt down, supporting myself with my hand against a fallen tree, letting the sun comfort my worn out body. Unnoticed by me, an SS guard came up, kicked me with his boots and said: "If you swine can't work anymore you should be clubbed to death, that would save all the bother about medical treatment. In itself this incident was nothing out of the ordinary, but my being ill made me more sensitive than usual and I played with thought of making a definite end of this misery. As explained before suicide was easy enough, it was only necessary to approach the fence and the sentry would do the rest, not because there was an escape to be prevented - nobody could hope to get through the fence anyhow - but simply because there was a reward of three days leave for it.

Another routine punishment in the camp was "suspending". It took place even during working hours and the dense forest resounded at all hours with agonised cries of tortured humanity. The method was as follows:- A prisoner was stood with his back close against a tree and his hands fastened around and chained. He was then lifted high enough not to touch the ground and his hands tied by a nail to the tree, so that he hung free and only suspended by his backward bound hands.

This method of torture was far more painful than flogging and many prisoners died as a result of it. I witnessed a particularly gruesome execution of this kind on the parade ground one day. The parade ground had not been entirely cleared of trees and some had been left standing. It was a hot day in midsummer. A prisoner hung suspended from one of the trees and in front of him were two SS guards. They hit the suspended man with truncheons over the head which soon bled profusely from several wounds. Swarms of flies covered the wounds and added to the torture. Then the SS men proceeded to kick the victims shins so that his body swayed to and fro. The prisoners' torments must have been terrible and he called to heaven and his mother for deliverance, which caused his torturers to laugh with great amusement.

I hoped for a sign from heaven which would stop and punish the perpetrators of this horror. But nothing happened. It seemed impossible that these things could happen in this out country whilst, a few miles away life was running its normal course. When I think back today, it seems sometimes that the years I spent there and the things I saw, were nothing but a nightmare.

A day after my visit to the sick-bay I managed to contact the foreman of the carpenters and it was possible to arrange my transfer to the carpenters working party.

We were engaged on building sheep folds, pig stys and horse stables within the camp but were also employed on some outside jobs. The foreman was a P.C. and, because of his bandy and crooked legs, was called the "Crook". The Jewish prisoners who arrived at a later date and were housed in the sheep folds have reason to remember him well. On the day of my joining the carpenters party, we were working on the construction of a new mortuary as the old one sufficed no longer. I still was weak with fever and with the connivance of my comrades I with-drew into the old mortuary, unhinged its door and, using it as a cover lay down to rest. The place was a terrible sight. The floor and the walls were spattered with blood and strewn all over the room were paperslips with inscriptions like, "Accident from the Brain age Party! It was from that working gang that daily a number of prisoners were shot dead and brought back to the camp. In this war we all had to get used to death and bloodshed, but it should be remembered that this happened in peace time.

My new employment, however, gave me a chance to recuperate and when we worked inside the camp things were somewhat easier. The "Crook" did not interfere too much and thought himself pretty safe in his position in the camp. I remember an incident at that time which caused us hardened prisoners as we were some amusement.

In summer 1938 there were three deers in the forest and one Sunday we were all ordered to catch them. The whole camp personnel formed a cordon and soon the deers were caught and locked up in a hut on the parade ground. Over night one deer escaped and next morning we all were out to recapture it. The "crook" was in charge of the hunting party. It did not work out to well as, this time, there were not enough of us. Eventually, however, we had the animal cornered and, holding each other by our hands, closed in. Suddenly the terrified deer leaped high up and escaped again. We had to start all over again but caught it at last. The "Crook" however was given a flogging for sabotage, since a working hour had been lost with the hunt. Incidentally, the same fate overtook me shortly afterwards. I was with a working party of 14 men, felling trees. One of us lit a pipe, was noticed by an SS guard - and every one of us was awarded with 25 strokes of the whip. We were lucky not to be transferred to one of the "penalty" gangs or I would have found myself with the quarry party again.

There is also another incident connected with "crook" which I shall not forget. One evening a prisoner was missing from roll call. A search party was sent out and found him sitting on a tree. He was brought back and flogged. Then he was made to crawl into a wooden cage, lined inside with barbed wire. The "crook" as foreman carpenter was ordered to nail it up, the cage was put away and we never saw the prisoner again.

One day something had disappeared from the SS stores. All working parties employed in or near these stores had to parade and every fifth man was given 25 with the whip. The flogging lasted well into the night.

On some days the order came that everything had to be done on the double. Before, during and after working hours.

Anyone

Anyone found at a normal pace on these days received the usual flogging. It should be remembered in this connection that some prisoners were 60 and 70 years old.

Yet, on several points in the camp there were notices boards bearing the words, "There is a road which leads to liberty. Its milestones are: Industry, Restraint, Obedience, Love for the Fatherland etc."

The Nazis had coined the slogan: The Jews are our misfortune, if there is any lesson we learnt in the Concentration Camp it was how utterly untrue this Slogan was. Particularly Jews have saved many a human life in these camps. But we all hoped that the slogan would come true in a different sense. We were convinced that the small number of Jews who were released from Concentration Camps would make it their task to inform the world of conditions in Germany generally and of the horrors of these camps.

During summer 1937 approx. 15,000 to 20,000 Jews arrived and the SS guards lined up on us in order to concentrate on their new victims. And so the Jewish road of suffering began. Emergency barracks were put up on the parade ground, surrounded by a fence and there they lived below all human standards. They kept their civilian clothes and later some of them were released whilst the remainder were brought to us. These barracks, however, were separated from ours and we were forbidden to talk to them. During the day we worked together with them. Amongst the Jews there were men with well known names; FRITZ LOEWER who had written the words to many popular songs, HERMAN KOPPEL, a Viennese Cabaret star, Fritz GREENGLAS, a Viennese composer, etc. We had our song to sing each night on parade, and the Jews had theirs, beginning with the words: For centuries we have cheated the people.

One day I saw two SS guards walking through the camp and overheard one of them saying: I wonder if I could kill a Jew with one stroke. A few elderly Jewish prisoners were working near-by. The SS man walked up to them and hit one of them with his truncheon in the back of his neck. The prisoner jerked convulsively - and was dead. The SS men laughed highly amused and walked on.

In these conditions and under such treatment the Jews died like flies.

There was not a week that passed without the whole camp being collectively punished by one days fasting. The reason given was that here or there work had been slack.

At Whitsun 1939 one of the escapees who had killed an SS guard was captured and brought back. A gallows was built on the square, the whole camp paraded and the SS guards marched up, armed with heavy machineguns. The prisoner was brought in heavy chains from his cell and hung by the aforementioned RICHTER. The corpse was left on the gallows for 24 hours. His accomplice was caught in Czechoslovakia in Autumn and executed in the same manner.

Through this we lived on; every day might have been the last for anyone of us and smoke poured from the chimneys of the Camp Crematorium without interruption. Our main and last hope was war. Knowing National Socialism as we did, we never doubted that war was inevitable. We did not live on for our own sake but for the hope to see the day when our torturers would stand unmasked before the world and would be made to account for their deeds.

The initial successes of the German army deceived nobody less than us and we were convinced of Germany's ultimate defeat. For this we hoped and that hope kept us going. There were many of us who had been in captivity since 1933 but they never lost their faith in a just end of the war.

In the winter 1938/1939 most of the professional criminals were transferred to other camps and we political prisoners filled the posts so vacated. From then onwards conditions in the camp improved to some extent. In the same winter I succeeded in getting employment in the cobblers shop.

On 1st Sept 1939 the long awaited day came and all our hopes revived. The war against Poland soon brought the first Polish prisoners they were civilians. The SS guards said they were guerillas. Again tents were erected on the square and surrounded by a fence. There were a few hundred Poles and they were left in that enclosure without blankets without medical aid. Not one of them ever got out, they died, lying in the mud, to the last man, Terrible beyond description.

Once again we felt deeply ashamed to be Germans but none of us could give them any help. Daily we had to pass their compound and could see their numbers decreased. One day, one of us threw a piece of dry bread over the fence; This was noticed and the whole camp was kept standing in the biting cold as the culprit who had thrown the bread would not come forward. As a result many died through pneumonia - but we stood there gladly filled with hatred and defiance.

And morning after morning the loudspeaker called for the body disposal squad to the gates. The crematorium chimneys belched smoke day and night.

Later came the first air raid warnings; I am not ashamed to say that our eyes sparkled with joy. One night we heard the droning of a single plane, flying low over the camp in the full glare of the camp lights. It circled several times, dropped a flare and then a few bombs aimed at the SS Leaders residence. Great was our joy but unfortunately the bombs fell wide. But from this day the nearby living families of SS personnel came into the camp whenever there was an air raid alarm and took to the cellars there. Apparently they thought the camp itself would never be bombed, and in this they were right. We, prisoners, of course, had to remain in our barracks during air raid alarms.

In autumn 1939 a trivial incident brought bitter sufferings to the camp. One night a pig disappeared from the pig stys. No trace of the thief or the animal could be found and the whole camp was collectively punished by four days without any food whatsoever. That was the time when the prisoners on parade collapsed in whole ranks and were left lying on the ground. Very few could muster sufficient strength to remain standing. We crawled on all fours to the rubbish bins in our search for food and lucky was the man who found a crust of mouldy bread. It is very difficult to describe adequately the sufferings of the 25000 wretches in the camp at that time. They died in great numbers and a mobile crematorium had to be added to the existing one. When I think

back to these days, I can hardly believe to myself that these things really happened. We tried to eat the oddest things and when, at last, we received our first plate of soup again we had hardly enough strength to swallow. But needless to say, work had to go on during these days. As was to be expected, dysentery, typhus and other epidemics broke out and stronger than ever grew the temptation to end all that misery by suicide. When men died in the sick bay, their death was reported days later in order to obtain their rations.

At a later date the camp received many young Poles, accused of having had sexual relations with German women. They were forced to hang each other near the crematorium.

I also remember the special treatment reserved for German persons. They were taken to the Camp Detention Cells as soon as they arrived. There was a strip of road for them on the square, about two feet yards wide. It was paved with sharply pointed stones and in the centre of the road a stick was planted with an old hat stuck on to it. The persons had to walk this road barefoot and each time they passed the stick they had to raise their arm and shout "Heil Hitler". With bleeding feet but quietly resigned to the will of God they went on their way of the cross.

And so passed the years; waiting and waiting we became nearly resigned to our fate. High walls appeared outside the camp and rumours said that the High French Officials would be kept there. In 1942 the first Russian prisoners made their appearance in the camp. They were, however, subjected to treatment different from ours and to different punishments.

Behind the usual timber barracks there were some stone buildings, 2 storeys high, and one of them, Block 46, was adapted for special purposes. I don't know much about medical matters and am only trying to tell what we assumed these purposes to be, what we heard rumoured about these things and what we came to know. Frequently prisoners were called out on parade and told to report to the sick bay. From there they were sent to Block 46 and there injected with germs of every conceivable disease: Malaria, Typhus, Cholera, Smallpox, Psittacosis, sleepy sickness etc. When the disease reached its crisis, as serum was extracted from the stricken prisoner and used for inoculation of troops. Of course none of those human guinea pigs ever came back. It can easily be understood how great our fear of this new invention was. Each one of us lived under constant threat, it would be his turn next, and having survived all those years in Buchenwald, the thought of dying in the end in this manner was unbearable. Many good comrades however disappeared into block 46. Later some more buildings were erected for the same purpose, but at the time of my release they were not in use.

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In 1942 a new Camp Commandant arrived and from then on our treatment was somewhat juster, but flogging continued and was given on the Bare back. Generally however we were more than glad, to have seen the last of the previous Commandant, SS Leader K O C H, a sadist of the worst type. His wife, slim and red-haired, was a worthy product of German, or rather National Socialist culture. I was at that time already foreman in the cobblers shop and I had on many occasions the doubtful pleasure of taking this women's order for all sorts of things for her and her children. She fancied particularly lamp-shades made of human skin. Other SS members had similar tastes and human leather purses with zip-fasteners were in great demand. All these 'goods' were made in our workshops by decorators who worked there since 1933; they were good comrades and I hope they are still alive. I could give their names, should they be required, as evidence for these crimes. Next to the crematorium was the dissecting room where SS men choose the tattooed skin on the corpses, it was then cut off, dried, and put to use. It will be clear how dangerous it was for prisoners with some particularly ornamental tattoo marks to show them in public.

About 20 yards behind the workshops a rifle-range was erected and we saw frequently civilians being brought there accompanied by SS guards and 2 prisoners with a stretcher to take the bodies away. We had made a few small holes in the back wall of our workshops and so could witness what was going on.

The horse stables were about 200 yards from the camp. During winter 1942 they were rebuilt for a new purpose. Comrades working there, told about the new horrors that would soon be enacted there and one day it started. There was freshly fallen snow and we could see car tracks from there to the crematorium and blood all along these tracks which must have dripped from the vehicles. Later on we saw during daytime truckloads of strong, young Russian P.O.W. arrive at the horse stables and soon we came to know what happened to them. They were killed by a shot in the back of their neck and then burned in the crematorium. Their uniforms and boots, often still soaked with blood were given us for repair and then worn by us prisoners. According to comrades who worked in the horse stables the procedure was as follows:- Loudspeakers, blaring music, drowned every other sound. SS guards in white coats took the Russians singly into a sound proof room. There they were made to stand with their backs against a frame, similar to those used in all armies to measure the height of recruits, and standing there the Russian was shot in the back thrown onto a truck and the next man was brought in. It was quick work; no sooner had one truck delivered its ghastly freight to the crematorium, then the next one arrived. When going to our work we had to pass the crematorium and we often heard "coup-de-grace" shots fired when some bodies there still showed signs of life.

And with this last description I am closing my memories of Buchenwald, which I have only reluctantly brought to paper.

I had given up all hopes for a release and being convinced of Germany's defeat in the war I and my comrades there only wondered what they would do with us when the end came.

But fate decided otherwise. One day my name was called out and I was brought to the SS Camp Leader and sent to the SS sick-bay for medical examination; I was to be a soldier in the German army. After another five weeks of anxious waiting, on the 21st March 1943, my name was called out for release. I was given civilian clothes and brought up before the SS camp Leader.

His words to me were; " You have behaved and worked well for 5 years. You can spare yourself the trouble of telling me you are a good Nazi now, but we are convinced you will do your duty as a soldier. He warned me not to mention anything I had seen or heard in the camp to anybody, and then I had to sign a declaration to the effect that during my period of protective custody I had not suffered any harm physically or otherwise, and that I undertook to maintain strict silence about the rules and institutions of the camp. Then I was taken to another room, received my release certificate and at the same time my call up papers. When I asked if, after all those years, it would not be possible for me to visit my family, the kind gentleman answered only "are you daft" (The actual German words used are much coarser and mean; have you got your ass up where your head should be). And so I went directly to my unit at H E R R O R D, and was "free" again. The same day I took the oath and was put into uniform. My O.C. said ; "Now is your opportunity to prove you are a good German, by offering your life for the defence of the Fatherland. The oath was taken over the officers sword. Next day I was on my way to Denmark.

In September 1943 I had my first leave. I came home to find that my wife and child had become strangers to me and so I went to war again for a fatherland, which had robbed me of everything.

I do not think it necessary to emphasise the authenticity of this account. Because after the war the full truth about Concentration Camps will come to light. There is only one more thing I would like to add for the full blooded Nazis. There are people who have every reason to fear a German defeat, as they cannot have treated the subjugated nations of Europe any better than their own countrymen in peace time. But those whose conscience is clear can look with confidence towards a better future, the others will reap what they have sown.

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THE BUCHENWALD SONG.

Thou, Buchenwald, shalt never be forgotten
Thou art our destiny
And only he for whom thy gates will open
Will know how sweet is liberty.
We shall not moan and wail, we shall not waver
Whatever our fate might be
We shall say YES to hope and YES to life forever
Until the day, the day that makes us free.