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Box 31

President's Secretary's File  
Diplomatic Correspondence  
Germany: 1939

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*PSF: Germany*

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
SEATTLE

*File  
Private and Confidential*

January 10, 1939

Mr. Thomas J. Corcoran  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Tom:

The enclosed comes to me from a source of the highest importance, and I think you may like to make it known in appropriate quarters.

Isn't it grand to see how admirably the nomination has been received everywhere?

My love to you and Ben,

Ever yours,

*Harold*

PSF: Germany

C O P Y

December 19, 1938

A German friend of mine of long standing has just arrived in this country. He is a person whose character and competence I can vouch for without qualification. He brings information of greatest interest.

This friend has been very highly placed in German aviation service. He is a man of high standing and absolute dependability with exceptional powers of observation. His contacts actually reach to Hitler's personal entourage as well as high places in the army and navy.

He confirms much that was said about the fake mobilization march through Berlin on the 30th of September. He tells me that it was arranged by Hitler to test public opinion, that Goebbels assured him that the people were behind him and that the millions of streamers that Goebbels issued were being neglected. Some of Hitler's entourage began to have misgivings and were even suspicious, and Hitler himself, that there would be trouble in Germany if they actually started hostilities. On the 30th, Hitler had three long and violent crying spells—two of them quite hysterical.

The friend referred to above compared this mobilization in detail with the similar mobilization in 1914 at which he was present. The resolution and enthusiasm at that moment, as you will recall, was overwhelming; but the procession of the 30th of September this year which took three hours and five minutes to pass a given point in the Wilhelmstrasse, was received in melancholy silence. During the entire evening, my friend did not hear one single mark of applause or goodwill; but, surprising enough, on a number of occasions, murmurs of disapproval and quite frequently a shout, "Heil Moscow." In the dark, the police could not locate the shouters and made no real effort to do so contenting themselves by shouting, "Shut up," at the various disturbers. One of them was asked if he was really for the Soviet. He said, "No, but I am against this."

More important is the information about the condition of the aviation service. Specific orders were issued to some of the commanders that, in case of eventualities, they could not count on any replacement whatever of motors; many were informed that their immediate supply of aviation gasoline could not be replenished. He tells me that machines are being turned out so fast that there are a shocking number of accidents; wings are being torn off, propeller blades break loose. These delicate machines are easily damaged and are partly incapacitated. The best new German machines are, of course, superbly designed but they are being built too rapidly and, what is more serious, they are too fast and too delicate to be managed by aviators of brief training. My informant is a superb flyer with a notable war record. He has himself built airplane factories and organized and directed aviation schools. He says that it would take three years to train a man sufficiently to handle one of these machines properly and, even then, he would have to be a man of exceptional talent. He says not four per cent of the present

aviators are adequate to their task, that the machines are being delivered far faster than the personnel can be developed and that there are no personnel reserves. They have designed an enormous volume of fire for some of these machines but the more experienced men in the service are in despair over the lack of any plan to keep the ammunition supply adequate for the prospective consumption. Moreover, the bursts of fire consume such a volume that the plane may easily exhaust its ammunition too soon under combat conditions.

One of the most responsible men in the aviation service told him that, if actual eventualities came, the German air force might be able to inflict considerable damage and have the upper hand but only for a few hours. A very high officer in the Reichwehr stated at the end of September, "If war comes, we shall have our hands full with the Czechs. We can beat them but it is going to be tough. But, we are lost if even a single other power comes in. If they do, we can only pray God it will be short."

Quite as interesting is the information from the army, that the beginning of hostilities would have been the occasion of a real crack-up in the German army. Liberals and radicals were heart sick and dismayed when Chamberlain collapsed. One said that it was the blackest day for Germany since the Versailles Treaty was signed.

Also of interest is the evidence that the present monstrous cruelties against the Jews have revolted the German people thoroughly and deeply. My friend knows of actual cases, giving the names and places, of assistance to refugees by people high both in the army and the navy, and even cases of storm troopers assisting Jews over the border.

One amusing feature of the situation is the abnormal increase in the sales of tea-cosies. These are now used very widely in Berlin to place over the telephone as it has been found that the Police have discovered a way to tap telephones and listen in although the receiver is still on the hook. To clap the tea-cosy over the telephone is the normal preliminary to conversation.

*PSF. Germany*



THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AMERICAN EMBASSY

London, January 11, 1939.

*File  
Personal and Confidential*

PERSONAL and ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Dear Sumner:

I enclose two copies of a confidential report which has just been given me at the Foreign Office with the explanation that it is the body of a despatch from one of their most reliable reporters in Germany. It was stated that they have every reason to believe that the account of mistreatment of Jews in concentration camps in this report is accurate. They felt that it would be of interest to appropriate officials in the Department, and the hope was expressed that a copy might be made available to the President.

Yours sincerely,

*Herschel Johnson  
Herschel X*

Enclosures:  
Two copies of report.

The Honorable Sumner Welles,  
Under Secretary of State,  
Department of State,  
WASHINGTON.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~

While the German Government has somewhat half-heartedly put it about that the action against the Jews, the burning of the synagogues, the smashing of shops and private residences, the assaults and looting were the work of the populace, incensed by the death of Herr vom Rath, it will be difficult to disclaim responsibility for the systematic treatment on a large scale by S.S. and regular police of the persons arrested. But some of the following facts, though unpleasant reading, should be known in order to throw more light on this aspect of the question. Those who have been released from the camps have been threatened with dire consequences if they divulge what happened there. These facts, however, have been related by a great number of people independently of each other, and they could not all invent the same lies, at the same time, about the same events.

Those foreigners who have known the German people for many years, and who believed that they understood the German character, have been made to realise the existence of a facet of the German character which they had previously not suspected. Germans seem to have no cruelty in their make-up. They are habitually kind to animals, to children, to the aged and infirm. The explanation of this outbreak of sadistic cruelty may be that sexual perversion, and in particular homo-sexuality, are very prevalent in Germany. It seems quite possible that mass sexual perversity may offer an explanation for this otherwise inexplicable outbreak:

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and it is realised by many that if the government of Germany depended on the suffrage of the people, those in power and responsible for these outrages would be swept away by a storm of indignation, if not put up against a wall and shot.

A typical case of official ill-treatment is that of a Jewish business man, who fought in the trenches during the war. This man was one day rung up by the Secret Police and ordered to stay at home. He was fetched that afternoon. He asked for permission to take a change of linen and some warm underwear with him. This was refused, but he was told to bring some money. He was taken to the nearest police station and was kept there until a sufficient number had collected to fill a motor lorry. He was then driven to a large public hall, outside which a large crowd had gathered, consisting chiefly of youths and women; this crowd was engaged in hurling abuse and invective at each convoy as it arrived, although it appeared that the women did not have their heart in the demonstration and that they had been ordered to attend, in the same way as their men-folk had been ordered to bait the Jews and to work destruction. Once inside the hall he was made to turn out his pockets, and their contents - including his handkerchief - were put into an envelope and he was told that he would get his property back on his release. He was then made to line up with others, some of whom had been there since the night before without sleep, food or water to drink.

The S.S. and police now had sport with their charges. They made them kneel down, cross their hands behind their

backs /

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backs and lean forward until they touched the ground with their foreheads. Those who could not perform this feat were assisted by the guards, who kicked them in the back of the neck. Others were made to run round the building. Some were sick. The guards removed the vomit by taking the culprit by the scruff of the neck and wiping it away with his face and hair.

About 5 p.m. motor lorries manned by S.S. men drove up and the prisoners were driven into them with blows and kicks. They were taken across the town to a suburban railway station. When unloaded they had to go down some steps leading into a dark viaduct, giving access to the platform. The guards rained blows and kicks on all they could reach. When in the viaduct they were halted and ordered to face the walls. They thought they were about to be shot and some became hysterical. The guards passed up and down behind them kicking and beating them. Some men in mufti joined in this sport. They were then entrained for Buchenwald near Weimar. During the journey, which took several hours, the guards passed up and down knocking out teeth, bashing in heads and doling out black eyes. At Weimar they were detrained and forced with blows and kicks into over-crowded lorries. During the lorry journey they were told to keep their heads between their knees, and in that position they were belaboured with sticks.

On arrival at the camp they were driven with kicks and blows into a wire enclosure, charged with an electric current, and many were badly burnt who tried to escape. They were then addressed by the commander of the camp, who

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told them what he thought about the Jews. Then every man had his hair cropped and his moustache clipped off. They had great sport with the rabbis, whose religious tenets do not allow them to have their beards touched with the scissors. They were then crowded into sheds; one of these measuring about 200 ft. by 80 was made to hold about 2,500 people. This on the face of it appears impossible. The explanation is that there were tiers of bunks in the shed reaching to the ceiling, in each of which three men had to lie. One prisoner, a cultured man, who had been an officer in the German army during the war, had to sleep for sixteen nights in one of these bunks between two cattle drovers. They had to lie sideways, and when they wished to turn over in order to relax, they had to do so in unison.

The camp at Buchenwalde was at that time under construction and this added to the discomforts. No water was laid on, and there were no latrines. The prisoners were given no water to drink the first day, and never any water for washing. One prisoner mentioned that he went for 16 days without washing except when he collected some rain water. On the second day the new inmate was given a drink of hot water, flavoured to represent coffee, and some bread. The prisoners by then were half crazy with thirst and hunger.

During the first night guards came in and picked out men at random and took them outside to be flogged. Fixed on the ground were two foot-plates to which the man's feet were strapped. He was then bent over a pole and his head was secured between two horizontal bars. Men were given

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up to 50 strokes, except in the case of promiscuous flogging inflicted for sport, and each guard was only allowed to inflict ten lashes lest his strength gave out. (Flogging was ordered for trifling offences, such as not jumping to attention quickly or not obeying an order. A rabbi was flogged because he refused to sign his name on the Sabbath. He was then threatened with a second flogging. His spirit was too weak, and he signed). Some died stretched between the poles. Those who survived were kicked back into the shed. In the day time the floggings took place in public as a warning to the others. Some went mad. They were then chained up and a sack tied round their heads to stifle their shouts.

During the first night men were not allowed to leave the shed to relieve nature. They used their hats. One cannot enlarge on these filthy details. Suffice it to say that men used the water which the human body generates to remove the excrements from their trousers, which they had been unable to retain. The guards had sport with all these disgusting details. I cannot spare you one other horror which shows the sadistic nature of some of the S.S. men, who are supposed to be the flower of the party manhood; they forced men to urinate into each others' mouths to give them sport.

One prisoner who had false teeth and suffered from pyorrhoea applied for an extra glass of water a day to clean his teeth and rinse his mouth. The lack of water and his thirst were so great that he drank this water after using it.

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One other case has to be related: a former Prussian officer was ordered to kneel down and say: "I am a dirty Jew and a traitor to my country". He refused, and he was beaten until he did as he was told.

Among the prisoners were famous surgeons and doctors, and they worked miracles of skill and devotion. They even performed operations in urgent cases. The rabbis also proved themselves worthy of their calling. One rabbi, when offered his release, declined to leave the camp before the last of his flock. One has heard of no instances that any of the guards showed any signs of Christian charity or common humanity.

When the prisoners were released they were first examined by the camp doctor, and those with open wounds were allowed to depart. The others were shaved and then reported to the political officer, who warned them that if they divulged anything they had seen in the camp, they would do so at their peril. He added that the party would be able to strike them down even after they left Germany and wherever they might be. They were then handed back what was left of their belongings. Most articles of value had, however, disappeared and the money they had had on them was sadly reduced in amount. They were told that to complain meant accusing the S.S. of theft, and that such an accusation could be punished with a flogging. As a final insult, they had to contribute to the party Collection for Winter Help. Nearly every person released has had to sign an undertaking to leave Germany within a specified time, usually from four to six weeks,

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under pain of being again interned. In most cases they have signed an impossible undertaking.

When the recent action started, few knew what imprisonment meant. A number, however, committed suicide, others hid in the woods, some went to a friendly doctor and had their stomachs opened so as to be in hospital. One man, who considers that he has had a lucky escape, was roused at 4.30 on the fateful day and his wife answered the bell. When she saw the S.S. guards she became hysterical. He went to her assistance. He was knocked down and kicked in the mouth. He lost some ten teeth and had his jaw broken. He bravely demanded to see the order for his arrest. The guards went to fetch this, and in the meantime he was able to gain admittance to a hospital with his broken jaw.

It is rumoured that another drive against the Jews is imminent in January, and the 16th of that month is given as the date of the proposed fresh action. It is anticipated that on this occasion also Jewish women will be placed in the concentration camps. Jews have been warned by their friends, who claim to have inside information, to get out of Germany before that date. Further concentration camps are being built by the "Arbeitsdienst" to house some of the victims of the contemplated drive.

As far as it is possible to mitigate the plight of the Jews in Germany, the policy indicated at present is not "women and children first", but men first; they are in the concentration camps and in imminent danger of death

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and they are the potential bread-winners. If they die, the problem of dealing with their families will be all the more formidable.

It is requested that these facts be treated as confidential.