

CONCENTRATION CAMPS - WEISSKIRCHEN BEZ
KRATZAU

000297

ELP-444
Distribution of true
reading only by special
arrangement. [REDACTED]

Bern
Dated February 2, 1945

Rec'd 1:15 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington,

744, February 2, 1 p.m.

FOR WRB FROM MCCLELLAND

In line with Legation's 416, January 20, exchangees from Bergen Belsen (BB) recently in Switzerland.

Reported that upwards of 25,000 men and women (Jewish) deportees arrived in BB early in January from Auschwitz and adjoining upper Silesian camps. They were "housed" under most primitive conditions in tents in BB and will, it appears, be transferred progressively to other parts of Germany as labor.

Exchangees from BB were in state of acute undernourishment, three having died during their stay here. I have every reason to believe this situation is far from confined to BB but common to all German concentration camps and deportee work companies. Fact that tens of thousands of internees in similar or worse physical condition are liable to be found as Germany is occupied by Allied forces should be drawn to attention of competent military authorities and UNRRA anew.

BB exchangees further reported although parcels reaching camp were properly delivered to them number was pitifully inadequate to need. According to all available information this due to deterioration in land transport in Germany rather than to any withholding of packages, which are generally distributed if they actually reach a camp. Any favorable action, accordingly, which could be taken on basis of Legation's 455, January 22, would be of greatest value.

HUDDLE

JT

cc: Miss Chauncey (for the Sec'y), Ackermann, Akzin,
Cohn, Drury, DuBois, Gaston, Hodel, McCormack, O'Dwyer,
Files

DECLASSIFIED
State Dept. Letter, 1-11-72
By R. H. Parks Date **SEP** 1 1972

000298



LEGATION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AIR MAIL

Bern, January 24, 1945.

Dear Mr. Pehle:

I am pleased to enclose for the Board's information a translation of a report on the work camp for Jewish women at Weisskirchen bei Kratzau, Sudetengau, recently referred to in the Legation's telegram No. 416 of January 20, 1945.

This report was written by two women, Anna Sussmann and Margot Ségal, who escaped from Weisskirchen at the end of November 1944 having been previously transferred there from Auschwitz on October 31, 1944. These two women were originally deported from Drancy (the ill-famed deportation center for Jews outside Paris) by the Germans on July 31, 1944 and sent directly to Auschwitz where they remained, as stated above, until the end of October when they were sent as labor to this small "camp" not far from Breslau.

I forward this particular report because I have every reason to believe that it is sympathetic of the change in the general Nazi policy toward Jewish deportees, namely, to use them for labor rather than to exterminate them. Both these women are intelligent and alert and told a particularly straight and convincing story. Too, their information is of comparative recent date (they reached Switzerland toward December 10th, 1944), and confined to exactly what they actually saw and experienced. There are so many reports circulating that are 60% speculation and compilation based on the almost inexhaustible fund of rumor and hearsay that goes the rounds of the camps in Germany that one has to be especially careful in culling out the facts from the fiction.

Strangely enough the picture these women painted of Auschwitz was much less precise than that of the work camp at Weisskirchen. In the

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Otherwise their story is the depressing and tragic one of humiliation, poor food, illness and suffering characteristic of the Nazi concentration camp system.

In the course of the next week or ten days I expect to receive a written report from them on their stay at Auschwitz and will sort out for the Board any factual information that might be of value to the future of our work.

Very sincerely yours,

Roswell D. McClelland

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Special Assistant to
the American Minister.

Enclosures: 2 copies of Weisskirchen report.

John W. Penle, Esquire

Executive Director

War Refugee Board,

Washington 25, D. C.

000300

REPORT ON THE WORK CAMP FOR JEWISH WOMEN
AT WEISSKIRCHEN BEI KRATZAU - SUDETENLAND.

(November - 1944)

The camp which is described in the following report was set up specially for Jewish women. According to our information a large number of similar camps were opened during the course of 1944 in this region of Germany (the Sudetengau) and are administered from the concentration camp of GROSS ROSEN near Breslau (Silesia). We heard the names of the following camps mentioned: LIEBAU (Sachsen), LANGENBIELAU (Schlesien) and TORSCHANOD an der Elbe.

Our camp, which contained 500 women, had been quite recently established. There were 200 Hungarian women there at the beginning of October and our convoy, made up of 300 French and Dutch women (that is to say, women deported from France and Holland), arrived on November 3rd. 500 more women were expected, but their coming was postponed since there was not work enough for so many people.

The exact location of the camp is at a small place called WEISSKIRCHEN, in an abandoned textile mill, about 3 to 4 kilometers from KRATZAU. The building was of stone and could be adequately heated; and during our stay in the month of November it was more or less regularly heated. Furthermore as we were 250 to a single dormitory we did not suffer from the cold. These sleeping rooms were large enough and each person had a bed and a so-called mattress filled with straw or more often wood-shavings. Theoretically we were entitled to two blankets each, but actually, since an adequate number had not yet arrived we had to make out with a single blanket per person. Due to this fact, most of the women slept in their clothing with the result that shortly before our departure (escape) body lice made their appearance in camp for the first time.

There was a set of showers, but in the morning we were forbidden to leave the dormitories before breakfast, and in the evenings returning from the factory we had first to wait for the soup distribution after which there was

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very rarely hot water left, in any event not enough for all the women. We were taken, therefore, in groups of 20 to 40 to the showers. This occurred about every 8 days. The two lone water taps existing in the building where we slept were reserved for the camp personnel and we were severely forbidden to draw water from them.

The schedule of our working day was roughly as follows:

3:30 a.m. - Reveil. The beds had to be made.
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21:00 hours - Curfew.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Theoretically all the women had to work in the WERK KRATZAU, a munitions plant requisitioned by the S.S. The factory employed about 2,500 workers in all, of various nationalities. It soon became apparent, however, that there was not enough work for all the women, because of the lack of raw materials and especially of oil for the machines. From our group, therefore, only 300 women worked in the factory itself, 200 being on the day shift and 100 on the night, the latter much more tiring and compensated for only by a slightly larger food ration. The rest of the women worked outside in the "courtyard shift or squad," shovelling coal, working on the road or handling heavy packing cases. This work, which was extremely difficult, began at 8 a.m. in the factory yard and stopped at 4:30 p.m. when the light failed. The women who were all insufficiently clothed were forced to be out-of-doors regardless of the weather so that everyday 2 or 3 collapsed during work. On several occasions the German overseers (women) complained and asked not to be sent out, since they themselves didn't care to be soaked to the skin, for instance. Such complaints, nevertheless, were in vain.

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At the factory itself there was an overseer in every room, but in general she paid very little attention to us. In addition there was usually a German woman mechanic whose duty it was to prevent us from talking with the workers. The female overseers, in the main, were not mean, a few of them even displayed a certain sympathy for us and declared that the treatment in camp was disgraceful. The KOMMANDOFUEHRERIN and the UNTERSCHARFUEHRER, on the other hand, did everything to make our life as unpleasant as possible.

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HYGIENIC CONDITIONS

In speaking of the dormitories I explained that we experienced the greatest difficulty in camp in obtaining water to wash ourselves or our clothing. We generally had to be satisfied with washing ourselves very superficially at the factory where there was water. During the four weeks we spent in this camp we were never once given either soap or soap powder. Certain of the Nazi female overseers, commenting on our condition as a result of being unable to wash properly took various occasions to remark to the workers at the factory: "You see how naturally dirty those Jewesses are!" One or two other overseers, more understanding, asked at the factory if a little soap powder could not be distributed to us. The answer was: "Soap will only be given out as a bonus."

Part of the women worked constantly with oil; and without soap it was impossible for them to get clean. As a result of this they soon became afflicted with severe cases of eczema which often developed into more serious furunculosis. In the main the appearance of furunculosis

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due to undernourishment was very common and in some cases there was even a beginning of phlegmon. Another illness frequent in the camp was a type of enteritis due to the poor quality of the bread. There was one woman physician (a Jewess) in the camp and two nurses, but they had almost no pharmaceutical supplies at their disposal. During 15 days, for instance, for lack of a simple, appropriate remedy, a large number of women suffered from severe cases of diarrhoea.

The infirmary contained 12 beds, but the camp directress gave strict orders that not more than 8 of them could be occupied at any one time. So the well-known concentration camp rule applied: no one with a fever under 38.5 C. was considered sufficiently ill to go to the infirmary.

CLOTHING

The acute lack of proper clothing, in particular, aggravated the hygienic conditions in the camp. When we left Auschwitz on October 31 we were given: 1 shirt, 1 pair of underdrawers, 1 summer dress, 1 summer coat, 1 pair of socks and a single pair of low shoes (often ill-assorted, and some of them with heels). We had neither handkerchieves, towels or a change of underwear. When we wished to wash our one undergarment or shirt (naturally without soap) that left only a summer dress to wear in November! After two weeks work in the factory we were all filthy. When given rags to clean the machines, most of the women used them to wrap around their heads (we had been shaved in Auschwitz) or to wear in lieu of stockings.

KRATZAU is located at between 3 and 400 meters altitude; and in November the first snow fell. One can well imagine how we suffered from the cold in our thin summer clothing. An even more serious question, however, was that of shoes. The road to the factory was a dirt, country one and at that season of the year very muddy so that our shoes, after a couple of weeks, being constantly wet, were in a terrible state. By the end of November some of the women were already going barefoot. They (the camp administration) promised to get us wooden shoes

shoes

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("sabots") since the female overseers continually complained that it was impossible to keep us in line marching to the factory with our shoes in this condition. Toward the end of November the so-called "sabots" were actually distributed, but they turned out to be a sort of wooden slipper or clog, open at the heel, so that it was still almost an impossibility to walk in snow or deep mud with them.

We conclude this short report by stating that in order to bring any worthwhile aid to these women and many others in similar camps and work groups, shoes and a few of the most necessary articles of clothing should first of all be sent. This is even more important than food; but as far as foodstuffs are concerned, things as concentrated as possible should be sent, such as powdered milk, jam, fats and products containing vitamins. Soap and a few of the basic pharmaceuticals should not be forgotten.

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ELP-44
Distribution of true
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Bern

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Rec'd 1:15 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington.

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DECLASSIFIED
State Dept. Letter 1-11-74
By R. H. Parks Date **SEP 1 1972**

400308



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000310

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There was a set of showers, but in the morning we were forbidden to leave the dormitories before breakfast, and in the evenings returning from the factory we had first to wait for the soup distribution after which there was

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WORKING CONDITIONS

Theoretically all the women had to work in the WERK KRATZAU, a munitions plant requisitioned by the S.S. The factory employed about 2,500 workers in all, of various nationalities. It soon became apparent, however, that there was not enough work for all the women, because of the lack of raw materials and especially of oil for the machines. From our group, therefore, only 300 women worked in the factory itself, 200 being on the day shift and 100 on the night, the latter much more tiring and compensated for only by a slightly larger food ration. The rest of the women worked outside in the "courtyard shift or squad," shovelling coal, working on the road or handling heavy packing cases. This work, which was extremely difficult, began at 8 a.m. in the factory yard and stopped at 4:30 p.m. when the light failed. The women who were all insufficiently clothed were forced to be out-of-doors regardless of the weather so that everyday 2 or 3 collapsed during work. On several occasions the German overseers (women) complained and asked not to be sent out, since they themselves didn't care to be soaked to the skin, for instance. Such complaints, nevertheless, were in vain.

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Work in the other shops was not disagreeable. We were relatively little watched and the treatment meted out by the German foremen and foreign workers was decent, with a few exceptions. In most of these cases convinced Nazis were involved who wished to be overly zealous. The other workers were formally forbidden to speak to us but in several of the shops the women were given bread, fruit and occasionally newspapers by the workers. Russian prisoners who worked in the camp for a few days building a new shed even succeeded in throwing us such articles of clothing as sweaters and gloves.

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The infirmary contained 12 beds, but the camp directress gave strict orders that not more than 8 of them could be occupied at any one time. So the well-known concentration camp rule applied: no one with a fever under 38,5 C. was considered sufficiently ill to go to the infirmary.

CLOTHING

The acute lack of proper clothing, in particular, aggravated the hygienic conditions in the camp. When we left Auschwitz on October 31 we were given: 1 shirt, 1 pair of underdrawers, 1 summer dress, 1 summer coat, 1 pair of socks and a single pair of low shoes (often ill-assorted, and some of them with heels). We had neither handkerchieves, towels or a change of underwear. When we wished to wash our one undergarment or shirt (naturally without soap) that left only a summer dress to wear in November! After two weeks work in the factory we were all filthy. When given rags to clean the machines, most of the women used them to wrap around their heads (we had been shaved in Auschwitz) or to wear in lieu of stockings.

KRATZAU is located at between 3 and 400 meters altitude; and in November the first snow fell. One can well imagine how we suffered from the cold in our thin summer clothing. An even more serious question, however, was that of shoes. The road to the factory was a dirt, country one and at that season of the year very muddy so that our shoes, after a couple of weeks, being constantly wet, were in a terrible state. By the end of November some of the women were already going barefoot. They (the camp administration) promised to get us wooden shoes

shoes

("sabots") since the female overseers continually complained that it was impossible to keep us in line marching to the factory with our shoes in this condition. Toward the end of November the so-called "sabots" were actually distributed, but they turned out to be a sort of wooden slipper or clog, open at the heel, so that it was still almost an impossibility to walk in snow or deep mud with them.

We conclude this short report by stating that in order to bring any worthwhile aid to these women and many others in similar camps and work groups, shoes and a few of the most necessary articles of clothing should first of all be sent. This is even more important than food; but as far as foodstuffs are concerned, things as concentrated as possible should be sent, such as powdered milk, jam, fats and products containing vitamins. Soap and a few of the basic pharmaceuticals should not be forgotten.

DEPARTMENT
OF
STATE

INCOMING
TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF
CENTRAL SERVICES
TELEGRAPH SECTION

AVH-736

1945 JAN 22 AM 9:42

Distribution of true reading
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Dated January 20, 1945

Rec'd 11 p.m.

Marked for file

copy

Secretary of States,
Washington.

416, January 20, 3 p.m.

FOR WRB FROM McCLELLAND. Department's 192
January 13 WRB'S 360.

As reported in Legation's 6818 October 12
Germans issued press denial of any intention to
exterminate inmates of Tuwiscim and Birkenau follow-
ing contrary report brought out by Polish circles
in London that time.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE RECEIVE RELIABLE CON-
FIRMATION OF REPORTS CIRCULATED THAT GENERAL ORDERS
HAVE GONE OUT TO S S CONTROLLING JEWISH CAMPS TO
KILL ALL INTERNEES WHO CANNOT BE EVACUATED IN FACE
OF ALLIED ADVANCE.

Based on a great deal of fragmentary informa-
tion collected during past several months regard-
ing course of Nazi policy toward Jewish deportees
in camps and more particularly on very recent

statements
RECEIVED
TELETYPE ROOM

DECLASSIFIED
State Dept. Letter 1-11-72
By R. H. Parks Date SEP 1 1972

For security reasons the
text of this message must
be closely guarded.

000318

-2- #416, January 20, 3 p.m. from Bern

statements of two intelligent Jewish women who reached Switzerland during late December having spent three months in Ausschwitz (Oswiecim) August through October 1944 where they were deported from Drancy late July 1944. I think it can be reliably stated that Nazis have abandoned extermination of Jews as a general policy and certainly of those capable of working. On other hand they show tendency continue doing away on small scale with elderly people and children.

(2) Women from Ausschwitz reported that sizeable convoys (from three to six thousand souls each) of Jewish women - they were unable to observe movements in men's camps - were transferred from Warsaw, Radom, Lodz and Kielce to Ausschwitz and thence on to Germany proper as labor during early fall of 1944 in apparent effort on part of Germans to remove them from chance of capture in case of Russian advance.

Present rapid Russian advance will undoubtedly reveal whether SS exterminates Jewish internees they

000319

-3- #416, January 20, 3 p.m. from Bern

they can't evacuate since whole upper Silesian industrial region of Katowice, Beuthen and Gliwicz is apparently honeycombed with work camps of Jews deported from all occupied or formerly occupied countries.

These women themselves were transferred along with some 200 other Hungarian and 300 French and Dutch Jewish women from Auschwitz on October 31 to a work camp at Weiskirchen near Kratzay, Sudenland. This camp was part of another complex of Jewish work camps administered from concentration camp of Grossrosen near Breslau.

Transfer of similar group of 3500 Hungarian and Slovak Jewish women from Auschwitz to Bergenbelsen (reported Legation's 223, January 12) during late September 1944 constitutes further fragmentary evidence of this movement of Jewish deportees into Germany as labor.

Our two women reported that no indiscriminate shooting of internees occurred in Auschwitz, that they observed there as little wanton brutality in "selection" of ill for extermination and even some slight

100320

-4- #416, January 20, 3 p.m. from Bern

slight effort on party of camp authorities allow them to recover. Naturally mortality rate in all such work camps is high due mainly to under nourishment unhygienic conditions and especially to exposure for lack of sufficient clothing.

I shall continue to report any further reliable findings along this line which I can make..

HUDDLE

WSB

000321