

to intervene in their behalf. Whether or not the communique was ever sent was not revealed. In any case, the prisoners did not wait for an answer, but eventually returned to work after four days on bread and water.

Other periods when prisoners were assigned to Worland passed without incident. Two hundred men from Scottsbluff helped with the beet harvest in 1944, and 300 prisoners from the Douglas camp thinned, blocked and harvested beets near Worland during the 1945 season.

* * *

WRITINGS OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN WYOMING

(Translator's note: All materials in this section were translated from the original German by *Lowell A. Bangerter*. Excepting the writings of Rudolf Ritschel, they are presented without commentary.)

POEMS AND ESSAYS BY RUDOLF RITSCHHEL

Introduction

Mr. Rudolf Ritschel, who spent the summer of 1944 working in a lumber camp near Dubois, Wyoming, has this to say about experience as a prisoner of war in Wyoming: "For decades I have carried memories of the land of Wyoming in my heart. Again and again I pictured in my mind the days that I was able to spend in your beautiful country. Although I was a prisoner of war, during the time I spent in the Rocky Mountains I felt free and was happy every day to be able to work in that magnificent countryside."¹⁹ All of the essays and poems included here were written while Mr. Ritschel was a prisoner of war in this country. He has provided the following brief overview of his earlier life and his prisoner of war experiences, as an introduction to his writings.

When I look back today, in the autumn of my life, I know that it is not only knowledge, courage and strength that conquer the abysses in human life. An important factor is and

remains luck. My generation specifically, was certainly not born under a lucky star. The years of my youth, after World War I, were full of privations. Worry about daily bread and an army of millions of unemployed men created fear and difficulty. Monetary inflation in the extreme stole the last savings.

My father ran a small printing shop. He worked day and night like a man possessed. My brother and I stood daily at the handle of a speed press, which at that time was still run by hand. We often turned the handle into the night, and nevertheless sang happy songs while doing so. Often enough, the next day in school we struggled with fatigue.

The war had brought with it a negative development in the behavior of people toward each other. The contrasts between poor and rich and the different political opinions caused tensions to arise, even in our small city. Farm workers and laborers opposed the rich landowners. The miners from the potash mines agitated against factory owners and capitalists. What the people needed, however, was work and bread. The slogans of the red functionaries about elimination of the middle class and nationalization of private industry helped nobody. Distress remained.

An Austrian recognized these weaknesses of the German people and developed a plan. In a suggestive manner and with persuasive gestures, he drummed away at the people in speeches that lasted for hours, in mass meetings, and in enormous parades. Like a Messiah, he promised peace, happiness and well being. His appearance and his words soon had effect and success. People fell to him in hysteria. Women wept over the radio during his speeches, and weak men were made into striking figures in brown uniforms. There was now only one salvation—Adolf Hitler. The people thought of nothing else any more, did not see the face often distorted with brutality when he spoke of his enemies. They did not see his narrow followers, who spoke of peace like him, while planning enormous murder. They succumbed to the promises and elected Hitler their leader. Thus began the great German tragedy.

I had completed a business apprenticeship, and to avoid waiting for an appointment, I joined the voluntary labor

service. This was a nonpartisan organization until, during the Nazi takeover, SA-formations occupied the camps. During this time I became acquainted with my wife, who was a branch director of a commercial firm. In 1934 we decided to marry and leased a small grocery store in Magdeburg. After two years of hard work, we moved to Weimar to take over a business there. During this time Germany developed into a powerful military state. The demagogues of this period convinced the people that the Germans alone were the nordic master race, which had to reduce the other nations to subjection. The great extermination of the Jews began. Driven together in concentration camps they were tortured and murdered by the tens of thousands.

In 1939, the fearful suspicion became reality; the German war machine started up. Its troops marched across all borders into the neighboring countries. In the spring of 1942, I was drafted into the air force. I received my training at Rochefort sur mer in France. After that I served with the ground forces at various air bases in France. But that did not last long and they made me into an infantryman.

By the fall of 1943, I was already lying in a shelter made of logs and earth on the Gustav-line at Cassino in southern Italy. The city with its world famous monastery became one of the most terrible chapters of this war. It changed hands several times and at the end consisted only of rubble and ashes. There I had the greatest luck in my life. I escaped that hell without physical harm. For weeks the American artillery had plowed up the countryside with heavy explosive shells and had inflicted heavy casualties upon us. Our positions remained only weakly occupied when they began the major attack against us. On the afternoon of February first it was all over. Suddenly some GIs stood in our trench in front of the shelter. "Come on!" they yelled, and we looked disheartened into the rifle bores. They had concentrated charges ready, of which one could have blown up both us and the entire shelter. Resistance would have been senseless. At the sight that we presented the soldiers they looked shocked. We had been under heavy fire for two weeks, almost without supplies, and without washing and shaving had become filthy figures. For days it had been

impossible to take two seriously injured men back to an aid station in the rear.

After a night march through a mine corridor, we spent the time until morning behind the front lines in a donkey barn. Stowed on a jeep, we then made the trip to the collecting camp. An enormous fenced area was crawling with German soldiers. And more and more were added. They were all happy that the war for them was over. After a week under open skies, we were taken in trucks to the harbor at Naples. On the way, we could experience the sympathy of the Italian population directly; they threw rocks and dirt at us.

In the cargo hold of an 8,000 ton transport ship, I too found a place. The crossing began in the middle of a convoy of many ships of the same type. All of us had only the one wish: to reach America without being discovered by a submarine. Soon after we put to sea, we got to feel what it meant to be locked up in such a ship, emaciated to the bone, during spring storms up to wind strength twelve. Heavy breakers fell on the ship and threw it to and fro. In the hold, tables and benches flew alternately from one side to the other.

Soon my condition was such a cause for worry that some comrades thought I would probably not get to see America. One thing contributed to the worsening of my condition. The course had to be changed several times because of the submarine danger. As a result of that, the trip was stretched out over thirty-six days. When the ship was off the coast of Florida, it set course for Newport News. Then the memorable moment had arrived. We had reached America.

In the halls along the harbor, trains with pullman cars stood ready. But before our departure, the prisoners were disinfected and medically examined. The thirty-six difficult days were over. We took courage again. A journey through various states of the U.S.A. with charms of many kinds brought us in three days and nights to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Upon our arrival, we were confronted with what was for us a totally unusual scene. We left the train on snow-covered prairie at night. Spotlights lit up the scene with a ghostly light. Flashlights jerked up. Soldiers in fur caps on foot and on horseback

accompanied the march into the nearby camp. I felt like an extra in a movie production.

After the arrival at PW-Camp Scottsbluff, each of us felt the greatest amazement concerning the reception at that midnight hour. In the mess hall the tables were set and a meal was brought out, such as we had not seen for a long time. Every man received a duffle bag with clothing and underwear. What probably nobody had dared believe before was reality. We slept as prisoners of war in beds with white sheets.

After a thorough medical examination, a four-week period of rest was prescribed. Later, when I had regained my strength, life took on more variety. I rode along, out to the farms and did various kinds of agricultural work. I was often a guest for dinner in the homes of farmers of German origin. Each of them was interested in talking with the German boys some time.

The good treatment and food in the camp soon brought the Nazis to the surface again. They thought they were doing their country a service, when they did damage to the farmers in the fields or refused to work. Falsified army reports were read, and truth was turned into lies. Thus the situation in the camp became more and more threatening, the more the defeats of the German troops stood out. For reasons of safety, I and six other comrades placed a request with the American camp leadership to be transferred to another camp.

Before it came to that, I received from the interpreter the assignment to select twenty-five dependable men for an advance group to build a lumber camp in the mountains near Dubois, Wyoming. That was really something, to get out of the camp for once and make a trip by car into the Rocky Mountains. Up in the mountains we lived in log cabins, as we knew them from wild west films.

During the day, the area was cleared and leveled with bulldozers, and carpenters of the Tie and Timber Company worked with us to build the wooden floors for the tent city. Later, after everything was finished, additional POWs arrived and moved into the tents. Soon the first trees fell in the forest, which were made into railroad ties. It was the most beautiful time of my internment, and I will never forget it. Far away

from human settlements in this mountain wilderness, the living together of prisoners with their guards developed in a most friendly fashion. Christmas Eve was celebrated together quite according to German custom. The men on both sides were deeply impressed with the entertainment presentations.

Later, when the snow depth grew to more than a meter and work in the forest became virtually impossible, the camp was deactivated. I was placed in a side camp at Veteran, Wyoming. In this small camp, the facilities were very primitive, but a good spirit of comradeship prevailed. Everyone was striving not to succumb to monotony. With the most primitive tools, artists, painters and sculptors worked at projects that perhaps still today decorate the rooms of American officers.

We founded a variety group consisting of actors, scenery painters, music students and many others. I wrote dialogues and appeared several times as a narrator. The first evening brought a resounding success. Word of it penetrated to the main camp at Scottsbluff, and one day we heard that the officers were coming in a bus to see a performance.

The end of the war approached, the camp at Veteran was closed, and we went back to Scottsbluff. I received a position in the army library. It was directed by a first lieutenant named Terry, who was transferred to Frankfurt am Main shortly before my release. I hoped after my return home to be able to see him again, but because my home was in the Soviet sector it was not possible.

After a democratic re-education in a camp, the name of which I have forgotten, we were informed that we would be given preference over others in being released. From New York we travelled this time not in the hold, but like tourists in cabins, to France. From there we were taken back to Germany by train.

Untitled Essay

(Written for a writing contest sponsored by the Scottsbluff camp paper)

There are so many who, without thinking—as is so often the case,—brusquely reject the question: “How will I conduct my life after my return to the homeland?” In my

opinion, open competition for prizes should not be necessary for approaching the question, for it is really the most important problem that there is for us. It is now senseless, simply to curse and complain about what a criminal state leadership brought upon us.

It is, however, also totally wrong, now, when the war—this terrible murdering—has ended, to look at everything through dark glasses. We affirm life, and therefore we must be confident.

I hope that the submitted essays will be a motivation, especially for the younger comrades. Youth too often and too quickly allows itself to be carried away with prejudices. For that reason, we who were already employed for many years and who had to experience the struggle for existence in every form, want to say to the comrades who were torn from the school bench or from an apprenticeship that had hardly begun, that today more than ever, life outside demands the entire man. For this reason everyone should adopt as his motto the old proverb: "What Hans does not learn as a boy, Hans will never learn as a man."

Never again in life will as much free time be available, as is available here in internment. Is it not unpardonable foolishness to let the time pass unused? We really owe deepest thanks to the men who put themselves at our disposal with their knowledge, in order to give us in interesting lectures that which is necessary for occupational improvement and for daily life. So many reject this instruction with the observation that they do not need it, or that they will have no use for it later. Do not reject it so quickly, comrade. You will someday regret that you let pass without using it an opportunity to learn something.

I believe that each of us has grown to love his profession, and our longing and our thoughts go back to our work, because it gave our lives meaning. But the difficulties of the times will prevent many from taking up again their previous occupations. Is that any reason for a man with a healthy mind and a good general education to have doubts about his future? Should it really be so hard to find an appropriate place of employment in our homeland, which lies in

ruins and which we, of course, want to rebuild? I face everything much more confidently, when I rely upon my head, which is able to think clearly, and my hands that can grab hold.

For that reason, I finally will answer the question that was offered, briefly and concisely: I will do my part and work, no matter where, always in the belief that I will make it again.

The time of professional arrogance is past, but thank heavens, so is the time when men could cover their inability with the Party book.

Thoughts about Wyoming

More than ever, we are all inspired by the great thought that the long awaited return home, and with it the end of our internment, lies ahead of us. It is a thought which causes all hearts to beat faster and helps us to bear the fate of confinement.

There are many who already have spent nearly three years in our camp. Many of them had to spend the greatest portion of this time in the Scottsbluff camp, without once even having had the opportunity to leave this very limited area.

Many of our prisoners of war here in America are acquainted only with this extremely tiny spot—our camp. Day in and day out the same routine; no special experience shortened the time.

How much better, on the other hand, was the lot of all of those who were able to leave and go out to the farms, or even into the distant country, into a side camp. New impressions during trips and at the places of work caused the time to pass more quickly and more pleasantly. Unnumbered opportunities arose, to see American cities and villages, and to work and speak with their people. And with justification many can later say at home: Yes, America is also beautiful.

It is not intended as reproach, when I say that much too little has been said about the experiences of this kind. There are so many of these individuals who have returned to us here in the main camp, but everyone remains silent.

For this reason, I would like to make a start, to look back and awaken memories. Perhaps one or another will follow my example and tell us about his experiences. There was certainly for each one something new and noteworthy out there which would interest all of us.

For myself, the time that I spent in the forest camp at Dubois will remain unforgettable. My enthusiasm for this magnificent Rocky Mountain landscape will probably accompany me for my whole life.

Even during the long journey there, there was much to see, cities and villages, oil fields and large industrial sites! Endless prairies with enormous herds of cattle and real cowboys appeared. Yes, real cowboys, the dream of every boy, as we ourselves up until now have known them only from films and books. They are really audacious fellows who appear to be completely grown together with their horses.

And then the Rocky Mountains with their natural beauties, the overpowering giant mountains and the nearly infinite forests.

It was a special kind of romanticism for me to have lived up there among the loggers, cut off from the outside world. One would have to have gone through this world of mountains with closed eyes, not to have been impressed and enthused by it all.

Enthralled by the beauty of nature, at that time I gathered together everything that moved me, in the following simple lines:

Wonderful Wyoming

How still and peaceful lies the world
Down here now, right at my feet.
You glorious mountains and steep heights too,
You quiet lakes, and the green valleys' view,
O Wyoming, how fair are you!

O Wyoming, how fair are you!
My eye will ne'er tire of the view,
Many brooklets splash bright in the sun,
Over spraying, foaming waterfalls they run,
And o'er everything golden sunlight is spun.

O Wyoming, how fair you are,
When over the plains the herds wander far
And with them the cowboy upon his steed,
On free earth a free man indeed,
Who at the campfire lives and sings,
Who loves his homeland, his beautiful Wyoming.

O Wyoming, how fair are you
When the icy snowstorm hides the heights from view,
When moose and bear—by hunger annoyed—
From their loneliness come
And draw near to men.
When in hoar frost there glitter forest and hill,
And bewitched by this splendor each voice becomes still,
And my heart rejoicing sings
You wonderful fair Wyoming.

(POW-Camp Dubois, Wyoming)

(No Title)

I stand and listen
Again, again
Quiet, forsaken
Lie the grove and lea.
No bird is chirping
In the branches
It's as though there were
On earth none but me.

Way off, along the far horizon
Tower the lofty mountain peaks
Capped with snow eternal
Above them the final gold of
Rays of evening sunlight,
True miracle of God
Sets my heart aquiver here.

Slowly now sinks the land
In twilight low
And in the broad clear sky
Star after star
Appears with twinkling, friendly glow.
Soon covers night
The world and all with its dark wing.

And still I stand here,
Finding in my heart no peace,
Before my eyes
Out of night arise
Scenes of the distant homeland
Which the bloodiest of wars
Now endures.

You land, whose praise once
O'er the whole earth pealed,
In battle wild
You are destroyed,
In bitter distress and pain,
Now sink unhealed
The beauty and the joy
Into the wasted rubble field.

Yet from the evening's quietness
Grows in me
Power of hope I've never known,
Which can all pain now overcome
As faith and trust are in me sown
The nations all will surely
Join their hands in peace,
And love will conquer all and hate will cease.

(POW-Camp Veteran, 1945)

(No Title)

When brightly bells of peace are ringing
And German soldiers return home,
When maiden, wife and child are singing,
Then still will I feel all alone.

For in Nebraska's reaches, far from home,
Imprisoned by America's might,
I wait with longing for times to come
In which I'll see dear freedom's light.

And only then, when peace is in my land,
I'll say farewell, Nebraska's sand,
My hearts burns with a fiery heat,
My greatest wealth is freedom sweet.

When you with your warm arms surround me
And my young sons are then around me,
No more alone, then I'll be free,
Then can the world no fairer be.

(POW-Camp Scottsbluff)

(No Title)

America, land of freedom great,
I greet you in a time assailed by fate.
My way to you led over war and pain,
My glances now feast on the plain,
O'er the prairies roams my gaze
As thoughts return now to my childhood days,
As I, with cheeks afire
Read how the Indians battled hard for fame,
And always was it my desire
In cowboy circles to remain,
To ride a mustang,
Gallop o'er the plain.

Long are my childhood days now gone,
The great war broke over
German land,
And me it o'er the ocean banned.
And now I see with drunken eyes
You, free and undefeated land.
Yes, wild west romanticism
Is long gone,
The old time must give way before the new,
One thing remains, will never yield,
The freedom.
America, you are the shield,
Your sons fight now in every land
Where men knew only slavery's band,
America, you will the world this freedom
Once more give,
And then all men at last
In peace will live.

(POW-Camp Dubois, Wyoming)

Spring's Awakening!

Once more the storms now bluster over the prairie,
The song of the nearing springtime
Is their sweet melody.
They waken with rattling and soughing
The nature that slumbers
And soon the young blossoms and grasses
Are reaching again for the light.

Once more the storms now bluster
And led by God's own hand
Drive now with violence
Over the spacious land.
They drive away darkening cloudbanks
From blue and vaulted skies,
And in glorious sunny glow
The world awakened lies.

Once more the storms now bluster
Over the land away,
Waken in mankind the faith,
The love and the spirits so gay.
Let us forget now the sorrow and pain,
Greet full of ardour
Springtime again.

(POW-Camp Veteran, 1945)

Dedicated to my Comrade Leo Riesinger on His 37th Birthday

Dubois, November 6, 1944

A hard misfortune brought us late together,
We both went forth into the foe's domain,
Together we've endured and come through fight and misery
And stood where our dead comrades we could see.
In all you've been to me a help, in fear and dread,
Too often shared with me your last dry crust of bread.
Today you stand yet helpful at my side,
When I am homesick and my cares rob me of my hope once more,
Then it's your sense of humor, your good word
Which always can my confidence restore.

For that I thank you every hour and every day,
Whatever fate may bring us, come what may,
You will remain my friend and comrade for all time,
I'll stand by you in all your joy and pain.

My only wish today upon your birthday will now be
That you may in our homeland soon
Live better and find joy in what you see.

SELECTED POEMS AND ESSAYS BY OTHER PRISONERS

Everyday Life in the Rocky Mountains

Give me a palette and brush! But don't forget any color, be it even the tiniest deviation from the seven colors of the rainbow. Yes, I would say that, if I could paint. Unfortunately, I have only words at my disposal, to attempt in a description to come close to doing justice to this harsh beauty which presents itself to our eyes up here.

Today we took hold, and without regard for the additional Sunday drops of sweat, we climbed up the mountain. Ever higher and higher from our logging camp, until we finally reached the peak of Beltai Mountain.

There I now sit upon stone overgrown with rust-red patches of moss, and I let my gaze wander in a wide circle. I really do not know where I should begin. A feeling of freedom moves through my breast at this magnificent view. I take everything into myself with new eyes. Another world lies before me than the one up until now, the accustomed one, which almost let one forget that something like this still exists too. It is to me as though I had spent my entire internment waiting for this moment.

This mountain peak, which is green almost to the top, is surrounded by forested slopes. Four more just like it lie in its vicinity. The fir trees and yellow pines, which grow up to within a hundred meters of here, lean, primarily on the north and northeast sides, with the angle of the slope. Only a few healthy trees jut up with their disheveled crowns out of the

dry, ghostly underbrush. Toward the southeast, the valley opens a little bit. There, like a gatekeeper, lies at 2300 meters elevation the small town of Dubois, which in French means "of the forest." Its houses are all made of artistically framed wood timbering. In the south, as far as the eye can see, stretch the snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountain chain, which reaches from Canada to South America. But their white peaks are rather faded in comparison to a month ago, when snow also lay up here. Situated in front of the Rocky Mountains is a rugged sandstone mountain range that stretches for miles. Its steep slopes glow red-brown, like marble in the sun. Their flat stubby peaks are covered with gray-green plains grass. Right now the shadows of the clouds are tracing their outlines upon them. Very close by is the border of the Indian reservation. The bare slope that lies across from us to the northeast is somewhat higher; its snow fields testify to that. All around at our feet is forest, nothing but forest, leaving free only a small mountain meadow lying southward. By and large I feel as though I had been moved to the Black Forest of our homeland. The surrounding mountain range is similar to the Bavarian or the Austrian Alps. There is lacking only the peacefully nestled villages. The climate is severe here. Milder traces do not appear until a thousand meters lower. White cloud-banks cover the horizon, which only gives place to the sun for moments, letting then everything in mountain and valley shine forth in ever richer colors. Then hordes of flying insects land on the rocks to warm themselves. In all keys they hum and rumble like a hurricane; ranging from fat bumble bees, through animals that I do not know at all, to singing, humming one-day-flies. Their fleshy bodies shimmer colorfully against the white stone. Magnificent butterflies, that could not be more beautiful if they came from paradise, spread their wings waving to the sun, and then praise the Sunday, fluttering in an arrogant, happy wedding flight from flower to flower.

The grass is rather sparse and pale in color. Nevertheless, a few undaunted little flowers do not let themselves be kept back from living out their lives. Several kinds of common leeks with red and yellow blooms on soft stems blossom here in indescribable fulness and beauty.

Also, innumerable sky blue blossoms, similar to forget-me-nots rest on carpets of green-gray moss, without stems and leaves.

Far below us on the meadow slope cows are peacefully grazing. Down there, the edge of the forest is bordered by blooming mulleins, just as if they had to light up the dark at night, because the candle shoots of the yellow pines flourish up here for far too short a time.

Over the boulders in the west, a thunderstorm is threatening. High above us, a hawk circles majestically without beating its wings. Just as he lifts himself from the earth, so we today with this experience lift ourselves away from the everyday world of the prisoner.²⁰

HEINRICH THEODOR, Dubois

Our POW Home

It seems to be especially characteristic of the German, or at least of the German soldier, that he views the area to which he is bound for a certain time, whether voluntarily or by force, more or less as his "home," and that he also defends it against the defamatory insinuations of a stranger. This does not mean that in so doing he forgets his real home or his fatherland. No, but in addition to that home, one can also "find a home," which, if one approaches this task with some love, can help to form a somewhat more joyful life in the foreign land.

One would think that for us POWs this task is especially difficult in a foreign land that one sees, for the most part, only from the barbed wire perspective. Yes, perhaps the camp can soon become a homeland and the barrack a home for a person. But the area or the town of the camp too? For many an outsider, that will be inconceivable.

And yet it is true, even if not everyone is as yet willing to admit it.

We "Basin residents" are, in any case, not only well acquainted with our POW-town and its surroundings, but have—I can probably say it with a clear conscience—also

grown to love it, by opening our eyes during our trips to the different farms. Perhaps it was especially easy for us here, to make friends more rapidly with this spot of earth, than may have been the case elsewhere.

Alone the pleasant site of our camp gives us residents of Basin a right to be especially proud. Tall, shady poplars surround our seven barracks which, in an orderly triangular arrangement, encompass a grassy place in the middle, on the tree lined edges of which many other cool, shady places can be found. But we can also be proud of our POW-town, Basin. Decorated with numerous parks and flower gardens, it is a clean little town. In addition to the pretty colorful single family houses, it possesses also rather impressive buildings, as for example the county building (Big Horn County), the high school, and not last, the beautiful public library. Even the three Basin bars are not unknown to us POWs. Even if we haven't yet had the pleasure of a closer look there, many of us will have painted with active imagination a picture of their interiors, and will certainly have been there in spirit at dances and evenings of drinking.

At first we had great difficulty in getting used to the broader surroundings of our POW home town. The bare, treeless mountain chains of the Rocky Mountains with their often steppe-like foothills and valleys did not appeal to us, even though we had the best intentions. It was first the alert nature lovers among us, who soon found even here its beauties, for which they certainly did not have to search long, especially on the way to our place of work on the other side of the town of Greybull. Wonderfully beautiful, unforgettable pictures were conjured up often enough by the morning sun, which, with its first weak rays, transformed the snow-covered peaks of the mountains into glittering thousand colored majestic domes. A picture, that many of us will gladly take back to the homeland, a homeland, which to be sure bleeds from a thousand wounds, but nevertheless will be there for us in its old beauty. Even such a lovely spot of earth as our "POW home," which many have grown to love, cannot deceive us and make us forget that.²¹

A. K., Basin

Thoughts Before the Journey Home

In a few days, the majority of us will leave Douglas. Many have been in the camp for more than a year; many were previously in other camps in America or North Africa. The long period of imprisonment will soon be over. Everyone is happy that he can soon depart from the world behind barbed wire, in order to follow his civilian occupation once more, with significantly more personal freedom.

A glance back at the past months—for many even years—will not let the thought arise in anyone, that we were treated badly as prisoners in American hands. Lodging, food, clothing, sanitary facilities, medical treatment—all could be termed more than adequate. Even the treatment from an intellectual point of view can be noted with praise. Study courses in all areas of knowledge benefited us. Music, theater, film and an extensive library gave form to our free time and helped many to overcome homesickness. The work on the farms or in the factories was for a large number of us unfamiliar and therefore difficult. Nevertheless, the accomplishments were good and were recognized by the American army and civilians, as we read with pleasure and satisfaction in our last camp newspaper. Insofar as a linguistic understanding was possible between individual prisoners and American soldiers or civilians, we were able to learn that in many areas of daily life many points of contact exist, which, during the discussions, in many instances brought complete agreement of opinions. Other conversations were enlightening and instructive for both sides and brought us significantly closer with respect to our understanding of one another, so that the artificial gap between us, which was created by the war, was recognized as nonsense, and the first steps were taken toward its elimination. Who of us, who has come to know Americans, does not consider it possible that he could live in the same house with an American family and have the American as a good neighbor? We do not doubt that they are precisely such people as we are, and that we could live with one another under one roof in peace and quiet and the best of harmony. We have learned, not only in America but also in other lands, that the higher

leaders of National Socialism brought hate and division among humanity, and brought war upon us, but that the nations want to have peace and quiet.

When our train crosses the enormous land masses of the United States in the next few days, and our ship brings us across the seemingly endless expanses of ocean and nearer to home, then we will know that the fate of imprisonment is sad and certainly hard, but that in America we had it good and that we were treated more like equals than like evil enemies. We hope and wish and intend to do our part that peaceful, beneficial cooperation will become the leitmotif for the future.²²

GUETHE, Douglas

A Summer Day in Douglas

Sky glows with golden heat now without cease,
And like a glistening, rises o'er the land,
Where even lies the crickets' little band
At rest in midday's deepening silent peace.

In peace, whose silence stretches without end
As far as eye o'er this broad land can see,
In peace, from which the storms of war now flee,
Before whose glow night's shadows backward wend.

Is it peace, toward which all those people press,
Who far below there wander, once beguiled,
The tired old man, the mother with her child,
Millions whose future's all that they possess?

Is it not peace that calls to hope anew,
And—like the heavens which to this dry land
Must soon now give a drink with cooling hand—
To dried-up souls brings rest and comfort too?

Yet hotter from the sky the sun's rays seep,
The glistening glow still rises o'er the lea
Where shadowless this world's life silent, free,
Unmoving lies in midday stillness deep. 23

E. D., Douglas

In Autumn

The tree 'gainst which I leaned on summer days
Is colored now, for fall has come already,
It shielded me before the sun's hot rays,
Now from the north, cold winds are blowing, steady.

The time is gone, its course so quickly run,
With its green leaves, its shadows, golden lights.
The graying day that has for me begun
Is filled with sterner faces, solemn sights.

I lean and tremble now against the tree,
My ear lies listening on the cold rough bark,
I hear it creak and sigh in there, and see
The branches bend in wind now raw and stark.

The leaves are falling, rustling, rustling in the sand,
Are driven roughly, heartlessly away,
I wave to them goodbye now with my hand,
Til with the tree I'm left alone today.

Consoling through the dance of leaves I see
A friendly scene, long borne in silence, oh!
It stands in its old gleam in front of me
Just as it did once long, so long ago.

I said farewell then, full of worry, care,
But hoping that I'd sweet reunion know,
And many precious hands waved to me there
As I saw colored leaves around them blow.

Today the hands are waving at me too,
Like then, the leaves are dancing to and fro.
A quiet voice says, "I am waiting, you!"
And my voice answers, "I'll return, you know!"²⁴

W. M., Basin

In Wyoming Near Basin

Immense, immeasurably great, this land,
White peaks afar jut upward to the sky,
Where clouds tear loose from them, from summits grand
And their dark shadows wander o'er the throngs of high,
Bleak, empty hills—of men completely free,—
As broad, as lonely as the distant sea.

Close to the river that flows through the plains
Presses itself a broad green strip of land
Which fields and meadows, house and yard contains
Along the edge of fruitless barren sand.
It colors water that gives drink to fields,
Flies in the wind, when sun its hot breath yields.

The land is large and lies untamed and wild,
The thunder rumbles in the far ravine,
The lightning flashes in the darkness mild,
The storms rage through the deep bay, cold and mean.
Wild waters rush in fury downward bound
And drag so many to the grave's cold ground.

But when upon a happy sunny day
The tender breeze blows through the green trees there,
When man and beast in cooling shadows stay,
Then is the quiet land sunk down in prayer.
From distant peaks, untouched, caught in white glow,
One feels the breath of the eternal snow.²⁵

W. M., Basin

Adam Hermannsdorfer

Fresh air is good for everyone.
It strengthens nerves and blood, my son,
And Hermannsdorfer knows that too,
Thus chooses he the evening hours
For breathing the fresh air.

But since it's always dark,
Alone he does not go,
Or otherwise a moose cow
Could be his doom, you know.

He whistles with his whistle
And brings us on the run
And counts us off in order,
To see if six men somehow
Added a seventh one.

His words with gestures leading,
He speaks the news to all,
He never mastered reading,
Commands are his downfall,

The foreign words within them
He cannot say at all.
His last words surprise no one,
“It is not so?” we hear,
And then the most used question:
“Is that clear?”²⁶

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

Franz Marchhart

Once I heard someone speaking
Who did not like it here:
Just what does Marchhart do then?
It's not too much, that's clear.
He sits in the scribe's tent
And dozes the whole long day,
And then for being idle
Still gets a lot of pay.
But truly that is not well said,
The man to false conclusions was led.
For someone has to sit up there
As even the most stupid know,
And it had to be Marchhart
From Austria, it's so!
And I can tell you why,
I'll clear it up for you:
Up there we need a smart man,
A dumb ox will not do.

How good it tastes to all
When for dessert Franz mail presents
And stretches his full length
Above the crowd unbent,
And then I hear so gladly
His Viennese accent:
“Now listen just a little bit.”
I have right here three letters,
Unfortunately that's it.
For me it has become too dumb,
Just see how he runs to and from.
One finds no prisoner today,
If I bring paint and brush,
He hollers, “Go away!”²⁷

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

Russ, The Firemaker

A fire maker we have got
Who should at four rise, on the dot,
To heat the water for us all.
To laugh about it, you've no call,
For when you get here then at six,
You find that you are in a fix.
The water still has ice therein,
You take it with a sour grin.
I've known it long, we need not fear,
Our Russ is the best fire maker here.²⁸

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

(No Title)

Chaste and modest in word and deed,
You should always give these words heed,
So spoke our Walter Happel's mother when
He joined up with the army's men.

For in this army there are naughty boys
Who oft their evening hours employ
Telling some tales and some pictures showing
Of things Walter had no way of knowing.
Show him a woman in negligee,
He'll blush and then say to you: Go away!

But quiet waters, they run deep,
A voice in Walter would not let him sleep:
You're no child, that's sure,
And yet your heart is pure.
Kissing, however, is what girls are for, you see,
What's more, they can even from Dubois be.

You need not always blush so, when
You must know, such a handsome man as you
Will ne'er be born again.

But if you know it, then take care,
Or wrinkles in your face you'll wear.
Labor moderately and love the wine,
Go down into Dubois to your girl fine.
That strengthens your nerves and then your mind,
It's the best medicine you'll find.²⁹

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

SELECTED CHRISTMAS WRITINGS

Our Christmas Celebration

So solemn, deep, grasped ne'er before
At our poor hearts a Christmas feast,
The candle light has all but ceased,
The table holds few gifts in store.

External glow has died away,
The unencumbered joys are gone,
Each one is wrapped up, still, alone,
Within his cares and sorrows gray.

But brighter glows for all to see
Within us now a new light's ray,
And whence it comes, no one can say,
It shines forth from eternity.

A spark it is of strength and might,
O let it in our hearts now burn,
The hope, the faith, for which we yearn,
It leads us safely from the night.

A spark it is, which evermore
Will burn at Christmas through the years,
When you've learned of its strength that cheers,—
And ne'er so wonderful before!

"And ne'er so wonderful before!"
Can one write such a thing in these times?

We quarrel with our fate, and we turn away from a world which promises us so much and disappointed us so terribly. Life seems to us to be without content, the path into the future choked with rubble.

Now the Christmas celebration has come again. What should be we do with this festival of love, of warmth, of light, we who far from a destroyed homeland, without news of our loved ones, live out our lives in brooding and worrying? We have become foreign to ourselves, and the days that now are to

be celebrated again are no less foreign. Gone is their magic, gone the intimacy and secret joy which filled our hearts year after year. Care and restlessness have now intruded into them.

When I recently heard a Christmas song in an afternoon concert, I remembered the letter that I received from Germany at the beginning of the year. It had been written on Christmas Eve, and in it appeared these words: "We have a Christmas tree again. To be sure, it has only a few lights and no decorations, yet in spite of that it appears to me to be more beautiful than usual, and we look more reverently into its little flames. This time we are not alone. Strangers are here, a mother with her little son from Frankfurt and an old man with his two grandchildren from Hamburg. They have all been here only a few days, and yet this evening we are together like a single family, as though we had known each other for a long time. And believe me, I am actually very happy, and if I examine myself in earnest, I have only one wish: that you were here with me . . ."

I do not know whether she is still alive, she who wrote this letter to me. None of us knows whether a gracious fate has preserved his loved ones, but we know that thousands and thousands of thoughts and wishes fly over here to us from our homeland, thousands of thoughts that greet us and long for us. Perhaps you are included, perhaps I am too?

There is this much that such a Christian letter can tell us, when we read it correctly: about the power of the Christmas tree, and that of total strangers, driven by the war, gathered together as a single family; about the strength which allows the hunted to catch their breath in its influence and gives them peace and a feeling of happiness; about the power that becomes all the stronger, the poorer, the more helpless despairing people are.

We too have now become poor, we too are in despair. Perhaps we too are permitted to feel the blessed influence of the Christmas tree upon ourselves.

"And ne'er so wonderful before!"

Certainly, this Christmas celebration will differ greatly from others. It will be so infinitely much simpler, without the

outward splendor and show of the usual "celebration." One sees no people clothed for a feast, who spread gifts that have long remained a secret, beneath the Christmas tree, who give and receive with a joyful heart, who look forward to a special holiday meal, to a theater performance, to a concert. All we wrapped up in their cares; all have suffered and lost much. But somewhere they will gather around a Christmas tree, as we will too, to celebrate Christmas. On us as well will the simple, undecorated tree have its effect, and we should ask ourselves: Why?

We quarrel with our fate and we rebel against it—we live. We have the will to live and must cope with our fate under new conditions, in new surroundings, in the face of new challenges. For the first time, as changed men we step into the circle of light of a changed Christmas tree, to which we now actually draw nearer, because all the habits and customs which were dear and familiar to us about it, have now fallen away, habits and customs which also masked the real meaning of the Christmas celebration and here and there caused it to disappear completely. We see the lights burning on the tree, we sense its fragrance, hear the flames crackle. Scenes of the past arise, which already appeared to have sunk away. They fill us with melancholy and joy and also cause a light to be kindled in our hearts, more brightly than usual, the spark that gives us confidence, that we call "faith," "hope."

Christmas is today! It has become Christmaslike within us—without show, without glamour, without all the accessories. Without all the accessories we have moved closer to life itself; it speaks more directly to us. We should not close our hearts to it, because it has much to say to us, because many rubble-choked springs and wells have been opened again, which clearly whisper into our ears things that earlier could hardly be heard.

Do you not also see the burning lights with new eyes? Do not the flames appear to be brighter to you, because all the splendor has gone which distracted you before? You will notice that such accessories are not necessary at all to celebrate a deep, intimate Christmas, that you celebrate your Christmas more intimately than usual. You "experience" your Christ-

mas more truly, more deeply! "To live means to experience!" Remember those words.

Soon, in a changed homeland, we will be confronted with a changed life. Change yourself as well!

Hear how directly life will speak to you there. Do not let yourself be intimidated by distress. Do not let misery harden you. Be happy about life that grows up unbroken out of destruction! Think, when you eat your bread, about how it was sown, how it grew, how it ripened and was harvested. Be happy about the child that greets you in a friendly manner. Look at the flower that blooms at the edge of the path. Listen to the thousand voices. Take in the multitude of impressions with which nearby speaks to you. Then you will "experience" your life, and you will approach your daily work with inner satisfaction, with that spark in your heart which the Christmas tree has, to kindle in it,—let us call it "faith," "hope."

It is necessary that we go back to the springs of life and draw from them. They alone can give us the strength that helps us go on. The light on the tree is such a spring, for it embodies for us amid ice and snow and bitter death, warmth and security.

The people in our homeland, who this year will also gather around the Christmas tree, will celebrate a deep, intimate Christmas, just as we do. Their thoughts and wishes will fly over to us, ours over to them. And we will all be nearer to those "small" and so often unnoticed miracles—the eternal miracles of life.³⁰

WERNER MENGER

Christmas

The snow fell from the sky in heavy flakes, thickening the white blanket which, in many places in the valley, covered the landscape meters deep. The road that led up to the mountains had been cleared by the snowplow, but the freshly fallen snow made walking very difficult.

Today was Christmas. The clouds hung gray and heavy in the mountains and surrounded the majestic peaks with a misty veil.

For the first time in six long years the bells of the little village church rang in the Christmas of peace. Never before had they sounded so clear and pure, and in the mountains their peals echoed a thousand times, as though they wished to express their joy.

From the small pretty houses the light of the Christmas trees streamed once more, which during those long years had had to hide itself behind the blackout curtains.

Through the window, we see the family of the mountain peasant Anzengruber. The farmer's face is as hard as the cliffs up in the hills. His bright blue eyes look into the lights of the tree, as though they were directed into the far distance. The little round peasant woman sits on the bench at the warm hearth; today her busy fingers are folded in her lap. She has closed her eyes. Her thoughts wander far over the ocean, over the broad prairie plains to her only son, who now spends his second Christmas as a prisoner behind barbed wire. Plainly, she sees the blond boy before her, as he used to gaze in wonder at the Christmas tree as a child, his eyes alight when he discovered all the gifts, for which she, his mother had saved from the sparse income of the farm. He had never been able to say much, her Toni, for the people here are as silent as their mountains, but his eyes had always spoken an eloquent language of thanks. It had been that way year after year. Then the war came, and Toni went out to do his duty as a soldier.

In France, on the channel coast, the waves of the sea had sung their Christmas song to him. Up in Norway, the icy polar storms later howled their melodies to him, and the following year Toni and his men huddled deep in the forests of Russia around a little tree that brightened the shelter with its lights. The next year he had been at home and had sat there on the bench by the hearth, and had stroked his mother's hard work-marred hands. Here, through the window, she had watched him, as he marched back down the valley to do his duty out there.

Last year, after long, fearful waiting, she had received a letter from Toni, from his place of confinement. Her prayers had always accompanied him along his paths during these difficult years, and this year too, she pleaded with God to watch

over and protect her only beloved son, far away over there in a foreign land, and to bring him home right soon, healthy and happy, to the mountains that he loved so much.

Over there, however, in the foreign land, Toni lay upon his bed. He had closed his eyes. Outside, the snow rustled down and the prairie wind swept around the barrack. The stove radiated a pleasant warmth. Toni's thoughts wandered over the ocean, whose mountainous waves lapped at them in vain. They wandered far across the German country, up the windings of the path that led to his mountains. Plainly he saw the small clean house of his parents before him. In the stall, he plainly heard Liesel, the old cow, lowing, and Maxl the little Dachshund barked with his hoarse voice. Inside, however, in the living room, sat father and mother. The lights of the Christmas tree shone clear and bright as never before. Peace had come to Germany again.

His thoughts wandered a little way farther, past the mighty beech tree, beneath whose protecting limbs the crucifix stands, to the little village church. He heard the bright ring of the bells, and from the church the organ rang, which the old schoolmaster played with trembling hands. He also heard the choir sing. Among the many faces one glowed especially; from the many voices one soprano rang so clear and pure. It was Christl, his fiancée.

In his thoughts he held her warm, soft hand in his and whispered into her ear, "I'll come back soon."³¹

WILLY PAUL, Douglas

Christmas Song

From heaven to deep chasms bare
A mild star smiles down warm and bright,
The fragrances from forests fair
Arise and float on winter air,
And night's aglow like candle light.

My startled heart for joy would sing,
This is the dear sweet Christmas time.
I hear the distant church bells ring,
Enticing, homey sounds awing,
Which grand in fairly—stillness chime.

A pious spell holds me in thrall
Adoring, wond'ring I must stand,
There sinks o'er me, as eyelids fall,
A pious child's dream over all,
I feel a miracle's at hand.³²

ANONYMOUS, Douglas

Have You Already Heard It?

Knecht Ruprecht has, the same as we,
been made a prisoner of war.

I saw him trotting through our woods
right toward the camp today,
to me it seemed he carried still
a bag of gifts so gay.

Together quietly we sit
at holy eventide,
'neath cozy glow of lighted tree
await we side by side
the news Knecht Ruprecht
may bring us
in the old accustomed way.³³

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

Greeting for Santa Claus

O Santa Claus, now we greet thee,
Who can but come from Germany,
We greet thee in a troubled time,
Who in the great folk-strife afar
The dear old German Christmas feast
Must spend as prisoners of war.³⁴

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

Santa's Greeting

The war drove me to the U. S. A.
To Wyoming in the wild west,
Near Dubois, in the mountains high.
I think you are the best.
'Twas fate that brought you here together,
As real Germans—but imprisoned
In this, a bitter, troubled time.

I greet you now
And am prepared to pass around the presents
And these few happy hours yet
To spend here in your presence.

I greet you now in this, the Christmas night
And wish you from my heart
That soon may smile on all a free sun's light.

May all of us forgive the cares
And pain, yet let us quietly
Remember our dear homeland sorely tried.
May God beside our loved ones stay,
That we at last, when this hard time is past,
May once more see them healthy, happy, gay.³⁵

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

(No Title)

A truck transports us from the base,
So all the timber men
Quickly reach the working place.
The truck's side walls are made of
Thin light boards of pine,
Now twice have fallen out
Prisoners along the line.
Once it was on some stones,
Then on snow,
And I believe that
That brings woe.
Again now they are creaking,
The side walls, suspiciously,
Myself, I sit both morn and evening there
And have strong fear in me.
Perhaps the truck will even get
Some proper walls for Christmas,
Strong and new.
Me and the other timber men
That would cheer up too.³⁶

ANONYMOUS, Dubois

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- 26 "Der Adam Hermannsdorfer," *Weihnachtsfeier im Kriegsgefangenenlager Dubois-Wyoming U.S.A.—Weihnachten 1944* (Dubois: mimeo., 1944), p. 6.
- 27 "Franz Marchhart," *Weihnachtsfeier . . .*, p. 7.
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