Berlin, Christmas 1950

By WILMER FROISTAD
Chief, Public Health and Welfare Branch
Berlin Element, HICOG

So far, the words “a gift from your American friends” are just a motto on some 10,000 red-white-and-blue rubber balls, awaiting distribution to Berlin children at Christmas. But they might well be attached to a myriad of other gifts and activities the American community has planned to bring Yuletide cheer to Berlin.

With Berlin’s economic situation substantially improved, the charity motive is secondary to that of good neighborliness. While once a hot meal was the most needed Christmas gift a child could receive, this year the old-fashioned Christmas accoutrements — trees, songs, puppet shows, tinSEL, skits and Santa Claus — will be added.

More than the young people, the aged, blind and needy of all ages will be introduced to an American-style Christmas through parties and packages.

Celebrations for the children will be staged cooperatively by the Berlin Military Post and other American community groups, along with the German welfare offices in the six Bezirke (boroughs or administrative districts) of the US Sector. The German Youth Activities (GYA) clubs will play host to 5,500 children, of whom 1,500 are in institutions the organization has adopted. The other 4,000 will be selected from needy families by welfare officers.

Americans will be informed of the parties through the American Women’s Club, so that as many as possible can attend and demonstrate interest in Berlin’s children.

As Christmas is not exclusively a children’s affair, many of the agencies are centering their activities around needy families, aged and handicapped people.

One of the leaders in such activity is the American Women’s Club which, through the sale of calendars, has raised funds to buy food boxes for the needy. This group will continue distribution of warm clothing to the aged, a project begun in the winter of 1947 with the help of Mrs. Lucius D. Clay, wife of the former military governor.

Other groups quietly carrying on their own Christmas-time community projects include the American Community Church, the Enlisted Men’s Wives Club, the Masonic Club, the neighborhood centers, especially the centers supported by the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee and the YWCA.

A unique contribution this year is 30 tons of coffee seized from black-market operations, which, thanks to Judge J. A. Sabo of the US Second Judicial District, was turned over to HICOG for distribution. This year, for the first time, the coffee supplied by the US authorities will be distributed in all the Bezirke in Western Berlin. Almost 100,000 aged and handicapped persons will share in this Christmas program of Kaltekklatsches (coffee hours) and Weihnachtsfeiern (Christmas celebrations).

Also in the category of unusual gifts is that coming from funds raised by RIAS, the American radio station

That old familiar face, Santa Claus, returned once again to Berlin at Christmas time, 1946, after a wartime absence.

INFORMATION BULLETIN
in Berlin, and the Hamburg Lottery. Approximately 200 persons, either sick, aged or handicapped, will receive radios from this worthy effort.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE of the Red Cross is also making a large contribution which includes eight tons of food to be used in providing warm meals in the youth centers throughout Berlin where youths not affiliated with any particular youth organization and especially those unemployed will congregate for their Christmas dinners. ICRC also has provided food for gift packages to be distributed to 50,000 aged persons before Christmas and also is planning a three-month milk distribution for children in institutions. Under the latter program some 25,000 children will receive a cup of milk each day.

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which receives about 80 percent of its support from the US government, has supplied enough yarn for volunteers to knit 80,000 pairs of stockings for Christmas distribution to the children of Berlin.

CARE (Co-operative for American Remittances to Europe) expects to deliver more than 10,000 packages purchased by American friends and relatives of Germans in Berlin. CARE will distribute approximately 1,000 “undesignated packages,” purchased for delivery to any family in need.

One of the principal results of interest on the home front will be parties for about 100,000 old people, disabled and blind. This will be effected by use of supplies shipped through CRALOG by American welfare agencies and distributed by a Berlin committee (The Central Committee for the Distribution of Foreign Relief Supplies) representing all public and private welfare agencies. This committee will also distribute 40,000 packages of food to sufferers of tuberculosis while another 8,000 such packages will go to families whose food supply is inadequate to care for the foster children placed with them.

And so the list grows. Along with the many private projects of individuals are such acts as the forwarding privileges at reduced rates of Berlin-bound gift packages

to New York and the payment of their transportation from there to Berlin by ECA.

BUT ALL OF IT, as in Christmases past, is the result of individual effort on the part of all. Two years ago it was “Operation Santa Claus,” a project initiated by two young Airlift fliers stationed near Celle, in the British Zone, who wrote to their home town papers, describing the needs of Berlin children.

The first notice of this project in Berlin was the receipt of checks ranging up to $50 made out to General Clay’s Christmas Fund and beautifully wrapped packages of children’s clothing, addressed to the Women’s Club.

This year the outstanding effort of the moment is that of Karen Woehl, a 4-H Club girl of New Richmond, Wis., who has interested the citizens of her town in raising money for a Christmas dinner for Berlin’s needy children. It is reported that $3,000 has already been raised.

While the thousands of contributors in America will not see the smiles of happiness and gratification that Berlin recipients will carry on their faces when Christmas comes to Berlin, perhaps they can imagine, as representative, the portrait of a little Berlin girl when she wrote the following letter:

“Dear Americans: Thank you very much for the Christmas Party. All of us enjoyed very much the bags, but most of all we liked the candies. When I got home I immediately ate up the orange and the bar of chocolate. The lot of candies I’m going to eat on Christmas Eve, and I’m sure they will be fine. Certainly you had much trouble with the parties, but everything was really very fine. Thank you again for all this, and many regards from,”

“Yours,

“SUNNIVA.”  +END