GERMANY Learns of Her War Dead

MG Agency Notifies 9,000 Next-Of-Kin Daily from Former Wehrmacht Personnel Files. Captured Records Enable Analysis of the Rise and Fall of Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht. Collection Widely Used by Inter-Allied Agencies.

A year ago doughboys of the 87th Infantry Division of the First US Army were closing in on Saalfeld, Thuringia. When the city was finally captured on 12 April 1945, "Operation Goldcup" was initiated. Saalfeld had been not only a military objective but the known location of an extremely valuable prize — the files of the German Armed Forces Information Bureau for Prisoners of War and War Casualties — and this was one of the targets of "Operation Goldcup." At first the significance of the capture was not fully appreciated. But today, more than a year later, the records have been thoroughly examined and their crucial importance established beyond all doubt.

The captured agency contained about 17,000,000 individual card files on men who had passed through the Wehrmacht, including the Luftwaffe, from 1939 to 1945. Valuable as was this information, it was surpassed by an even greater find: Complete rosters of troop units of the Army and Air Force in the form of identification lists, including vital statistics. It does not require too vivid an imagination to guess what the possession of such documents could mean in the hands of a vengeful reconstituted German General Staff, bent upon the rebirth of a military machine which could once again threaten the peace of Europe and of the world.

Since one of the aims of the Potsdam Agreement is the complete demilitarization of Germany — guaranteeing that she will never again be in a position to constitute a threat to her neighbors — it is very fortunate that these records of the former German Armed Forces are now in Allied possession, and it is imperative that they remain there. The US Department of Justice and Allied Counter Intelligence agencies have evidenced interest in this wealth of data, for it contains the names of members of Wehrmacht intelligence units. Of particular interest are men who had managed to worm their way into the US Army in pursuit of espionage activities for the fatherland.

It is characteristic of democracy that the work of casualty notification interrupted at the time of surrender, is today resumed. This work is now being accomplished under a new name, under entirely new management and for only one purpose: To notify near relatives of the death of fallen members of the former Wehrmacht. Now known as "The German Agency for the Notification of War Deaths in the Former German Armed Forces to Next of Kin," it is func-

tioning directly under US military supervision — specifically, under the Armed Forces Division, OMGUS — by virtue of authorization from the Allied Control Authority (ACA). Three American officers are in charge of over 650 German civilian clerical personnel (mostly women) who are engaged in the gigantic task of mailing out over 1,000,000 death notices to next of kin of deceased former Wehrmacht personnel and of registering the deaths with the local German registry offices. Both British and French liaison officers are assigned to assist in extracting information for their respective governments. Although dispatching of death notices is at present the only task which the ACA has permitted the agency to perform, it is a staggering one.

NOTICE PROCESSING STEPPED UP

The present organization works very differently from its German predecessor. The Germans sent out about 8,000 death notices monthly, while today an average of over 9,000 daily are dispatched. A target date of 1 June 1946 has been set for the completion of the mission, and the future of the agency beyond that date has not yet been determined .

Two reasons are suggested for the disparity in speed of operation. First, the Germans employed a very cumbersome system of casualty recording and notification which involved an inordinate amount of "red tape." Secondly, there was probably a deliberate attempt to conceal casualty figures from the public, and the number of death notifications actually sent was intentionally kept small. This assumption is fortified by the fact that from 1941 through 1943 thousands of death notices were not dispatched, though casualty records were kept.

At the time of capture, over 20,000 death notifications, completely stamped and ready to be mailed, were awaiting dispatch. They represented about two and one-half month's preparatory work, and the break-down of mail service resulting from the deterioration of the German military position had made it impossible to mail them. But even so, the casualty records of the agency throughout the time it was operated by the Germans were never kept up to date. The officers in charge showed a complete lack of interest and never made personal inspections to see how, or even whether, it was functioning.

Originally established in Berlin in 1939 as part of the German Central Administation Office of the Wehrmacht, it was the counterpart of our own Adjutant General Casualty Records Section. Four years later in 1943, doubtless as a result of the stepped-up bombing campaign against Berlin, it was moved to Saalfeld, in Thuringia, where it was captured. In addition to the main headquarters in Saalfeld, a small sub-section was established at Meiningen, also in Thuringia. The Meiningen section handled only graves registrations and records of Allied prisoners of war in German hands.

The main work of the organization consisted of compiling statistics on all German Armed Forces casualties (except Naval) and dispatching death certificates to the registry offices of the last residence of the deceased; keeping records on hospitalization of German Armed Forces personnel (except Naval); recording data on all German Armed Forces personnel captured by Allied armies except the Soviet; keeping records on graves registrations of all Allied and German personnel buried by German agencies; receiving and forwarding personal effects of all Allied and German dead and administering last wills and testaments; keeping extensive card indexes of all personnel in the German Armed Forces who had been killed, wounded, captured, missing or hospitalized; maintaining data on identification numbers, full name, date and place of birth, home address and next of kin; and finally, recording information on all Allied prisoners of war in German hands. Information concerning

Allied prisoners in German hands was extracted and transmitted to the Allied governments through the International Red Cross at Geneva, Switzerland.

When the agency was captured an Allied Commission was dispatched to Meiningen, charged with completing the records and extracting and removing those concerning United States, British Commonwealth, French, Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourg and Norwegian prisoners of war. Another Allied Control Commission took over the headquarters at Saalfeld and both Commissions immediately set to work screening personnel and appraising the documents now in their hands.

Of the almost 1,100 German civilian clerical help (mostly women) at Saalfeld, surprisingly few were found to have belonged to the Nazi Party, but those who had joined prior to May 1, 1937, and those whose husbands or near relatives held offices in any German organization, or those who could in any manner be considered security threats, were discharged. Approximately 400 were thus let go.

COMPLETE MOBILIZATION RECORDS

The screening of the documents at Saalfeld revealed about 17,000,000 individual card files on men who had passed through the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1945. From a study of graphs found in the files it was possible to reconstruct the strength of the German Armed Forces at any given period. It is interesting to note in this connection that the peak strength of the Wehrmacht was reached in December, 1943, when it numbered 10,983,000 men. Also uncovered was the Identification File mentioned previously, containing lists of names of personnel of all German Army and Air Force units mobilized during the war, from which an "Order of Battle" was extracted by the Allied Commission. It is this set of records which is being considered for destruction when they have served the purpose of the Allies, for it is from this data that a future Wehrmacht could be recruited.

ON TO BERLIN

Another prize of great value was discovered: Lists of names of personnel of German intelligance units, sabotage units, secret field police and training units. This set of records has already been used by Allied Counter-Intelligence, the United States Department of Justice and many other agencies, including the International War Crimes Commission.

In the latter part of June 1945, three months after the capture, the work of screening personnel, examining documents and extracting intelligence data from the files was suspended to permit the organization to make its second move, this time to Fuerstenhagen near Kassel. Some 500 tons of documents were packed and moved and 365 personnel were retained for continuing the work of the agency in its new location. At Fuerstenhagen new documents consisting of 1,000,000 records of dead and prisoners of war were received from the International Red Cross at Geneva and records from the Abwicklungsstab of the German Army, the staff whose duties were to determine the fate of the individuals whose units were destroyed in combat. These files, obtained from the Third US Army area in Bavaria, consisted of a million interrogation reports concerning individuals and two million file cards relating to members of destroyed units. Because of the pressure of work in examining, sorting, and bringing the extensive files up to date it was impossible to dispatch any death notices from Fuerstenhagen.

The redeployment of US Forces from the Fuerstenhagen area during the fall of 1945 was the signal for the agency to make its third and final move. This time it returned to Berlin. It took two months — from 15 December 1945 to 16 February 1946 — for the movement to be completed and the agency to be returned

to operation. Only 56 of the employees who had been at work in Fuerstenhagen were brought to Berlin, and about 600 more were hired locally. All the employees have been vetted by the Public Safety Branches of the US, British or French, respectively. The files are now located in barracks formerly occupied by Berlin Police Guards, next to Tempelhof Airport. Administratively the agency is part of the Ministerial Collecting Center.

The first actual notification of death by the new agency was made on 15 February 1946. On the first day 20 notices were mailed. With the hiring and training of additional help the number of completed notices increased by leaps and bounds. By the end of February, 611 notices had been sent out. By the end of March a total of 9,000 notices represented an average day's work. To the end of April about 386,000 notifications have been made; but the task of mailing out the more than 600,000 remaining is an appaling one — and the work is scheduled to be completed by June 1.

NO FLOWERY STATEMENTS

The official notification which is sent out today differs vastly from the flowery mass of verbiage which the Germans employed to tell the next of kin about the son, father, brother, etc. who had fallen "gallantly defending the fatherland." Now a simply worded declaration tells the essential facts: The name of the individual, the date and place of birth, date and place of death, whether the individual died, was killed, committed suicide or was executed, the location of the grave and, finally, the registry office to which the official death notification has been mailed. Unfortunately, in many instances all of this information is not available. Many of these notices are being returned to the dispatching agency because of misinformation in the German records: Incorrect addresses, incorrect spelling of names, and the lack of a forwarding address. Often, too, the home to which the card was mailed had been destroyed. Whatever the reason, about 200 notices are returned daily because of non-delivery.

Word soon spread among the civilian population that information concerning the fate of missing kinsmen in the former Wehrmacht was being made available by the Americans. Immediately individual requests began to pour in from Germans in Germany and in the rest of Europe. Many pathetic letters were received from Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, England and Denmark. At present close to 5,000 individual requests are received daily. Unfortunately the bulk of them cannot be honored because it would seriously hamper the work of mailing out the great mass of cards in the process of preparation. And yet the anxiety expressed in them is understandable. In many cases widows of fallen German soldiers write in and wish to be notified officially of the demise so that they can re-marry. These cases are completed, if possible. But the overall task of dispatching notifications is regarded as being more important in the long run than furnishing information to individuals who have already learned officially the fate of their kin.

FACTUAL RECORDS AVAILABLE

From records maintained in Berlin today one may learn any or all of the following facts relating to the Wehrmacht:

Name of members of the German Army and Air Force units at a given period during the time the unit was organized.

The names of Allied nationals serving with the German Armed Forces (except Naval).

Home address and next of kin of persons wanted for war crimes.

Information of legal value to German courts for property settlements, marriages, insurance, etc.

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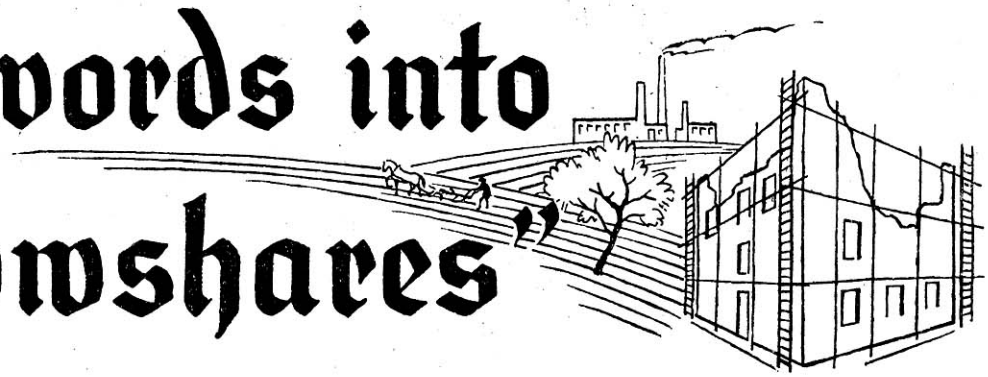
"Swords into Plowshares"



German industrial level set by Control Council to eliminate war potential. Agriculture and peaceful pursuits to be encouraged. No living standard guarantees.

We were twenty five years late in learning the lesson of modern warfare. It was a costly lesson. Basically it is a simple one: The ability of a country to wage war depends not only upon the number of its citizens in uniform but also upon the industrial capacity of the nation.

When the leaders of the three great powers met at Potsdam, they were determined that Germany should not retain the means to wage modern war. Rather than have German factories build locomotives for France or Holland, and keep within its borders the industrial capacity for producing the weapons of war, they would give the iron and steel plants to the Allied nations as reparations. Less efficient? Perhaps, but very much safer.

The Potsdam Conference left the development of the Reparations Plan to be worked out by the Allied Control Council on the basis of these guiding principles:

Elimination of the German war potential and disarmament of Germany industrially.

Payment of reparations to the countries which had suffered from German aggression.

Development of agriculture and the peaceful industries, leaving Germany with sufficient resources to maintain a standard of living no higher than the continental European average, excluding the USSR and the UK.

It was not easy to translate the broad principles of Potsdam into concrete terms. Each of the three nations represented at Potsdam had its own interpretation of the agreement. And France, which was not represented at Potsdam and therefore not bound by its principles, was admitted as an equal partner in the months of conferences and decisions. Point by point, industry by industry, the level of post-war German economy was established. All four of the occupying powers were united in desiring the industrial disarmament of Germany. Through cooperation and compromise, agreement was achieved. Full accord had not been reached by 2 February, the deadline set at Potsdam. It was not until 26 March, after months of discussion, sometimes lasting all through the night, that the final plan was released to the world.

The over-all level of German industry will be cut to almost half of what it was in 1938. The additional capacity is to be removed as reparations.

That does not mean that every industry is to be cut an even 50 percent. Fourteen industries with a high war potential, including synthetic gasoline, ball bearings, primary aluminium and synthetic rubber are ultimately to be eliminated completely.

Other industries, essential to war, but also essential to a peacetime economy, have been drastically reduced. Steel is cut to a third of 1936 production; the capacity of the basic chemical industries will be 40 percent of 1936. Machine tool production and heavy engineering capacity will be even more severely cut. The automobile industry will be allowed to produce no more than 40,000 light trucks and the same number of passenger cars. Compare this with 245,000 passenger cars produced in 1936.

PEACE TIME INDUSTRIES REMAIN

To balance the loss of the heavy industries and to provide exports to pay for the necessary imports of food and raw materials, certain industries will be allowed to retain their present capacity and to expand within the limits of Germany's resources. These industries are those which have no war potential such as funiture and woodwork, glassware, ceramics and the building construction industries (excluding cement). The coal mines will be allowed to operate to capacity, for it is from the sale of coal to the countries of Europe that Germany will receive most of the foreign credits needed to pay for imports.

Agriculture is to be maximized, but with nearly a quarter of Germany's arable land ceded to Poland, it is impossible today and it never was possible in the past to make Germany completely self-sufficient.

In reaching an agreement, the Allied Control Council proceeded on three assumptions: (1) By 1949, the target year of the plan, the population of Germany will be 66 and a half million; (2) Germany will be treated as a single economic unit; and finally (3) Exports from Germany will be acceptable in the international markets. If these assumptions are not realized, the plan will have to be revised.

The level of industry blueprint has been criticized as being too drastic. It has been claimed that large scale unemployment will be unavoidable. However, MG emphasizes that the plan does not guarantee Germany any specific standard of living. It merely leaves within the German borders sufficient industrial capacity so that with ingenuity and hard work, the Germans may develop a tolerable economy.

It must be remembered that achievement of the permitted industrial production level will not be an easy task. Industries in Germany today are operating at only a fraction of capacity. While steel capacity has been severely cut, the current rate of production does not come near the permitted tonnage. If the Germans succeed in overcoming their many obstacles they should be able to achieve a standard of living about a third lower than they enjoyed in pre-war years, when their standard was 30 percent above that of the rest of Europe. In some fields, such as housing, it will take twenty years to rebuild their country. For many years there will be shortages of consumer goods. However, although a diet of 2700 calories, 10 percent below pre-war levels, based mainly on bread and potatoes, is poor compared with Germany's pre-war standard, it would look mighty good to the German civilian today.

WAR PLANTS TO BE DESTROYED

What of the plants declared in excess of the German level of industry? First, the bombproof and underground war plants will be blown up. Moveable general purpose equipment will be used for reparations but nothing will be left which could be used for another war. Recently, demolition was begun on the huge explosives plant at Allendorf, a subsidiary of the I. G. Farben cartel.

Other plants are being crated and shipped to the Allied nations. During April, the Deschimag shipyards, near Bremen, began to be loaded on a Soviet freighter. They will be rebuilt at Odessa in the USSR.

As of 1 May, 661 industrial plants had been declared available for reparations from the three Western zones of Germany. Approximately two-thirds of the plants were from the heavily industrialized British Zone.

That is the blueprint for Germany as it stands today. Its principles are those of Potsdam. Security first, reparations second is the theme. The Peace Conference this spring at Paris will have the final say on the future economy of Germany. It will be up to this peace conference to devise long range controls for Germany. With the lessons of the past thirty years to guide them, they will once more attempt to eliminate Germany as a breeder of wars.

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Information desired by the International Red Cross on missing persons throughout Europe.

Statistical data on war casualties in the former German Armed Forces.

Information concerning types and causes of wounds suffered by casualties.

Many organizations are today availing themselves of the wealth of data available in Berlin, to satisfy all sorts of purposes. To mention only a few: Allied Intelligence Agencies; Internal Affairs and Communications Divisions (British, US, and French); Central Tracing Policy Board; US War Department; British War Office; International War Crimes Commission; Legal Division (British and US) and the International Red Cross, Geneva.

Since knowledge of this agency is now fairly widespread, additional information can be expected to find its way to the files in Berlin. For example, casualty records collected by the British Forces in Hamburg, Flensburg and Denmark, totaling between 250,000 and 300,000 death records, arrived in Berlin on 29 April 1946. In addition, death notices received from Allied military sources, records from German sources such as cemetary authorities and local administrative officials, sworn statements by former German Armed Forces personnel and additional data from the International Red Cross in Geneva will all be used to supplement records now only partially complete.

A great percentage of this new material are in the form of indentification tags with no names given. In order to identify unknown dead, the tags must be passed through the department containing the Identification Files, a most cumbersome process where even a trained worker can complete only 20 items per day. When all this work is completed, it will give a truer picture than was available, of how the Wehrmacht was literally bled white during its six years of conquest and defeat.

Germans Will Restitute Nazi Victims

Property stolen by the Nazis will be returned to their owners by the German Land Governments.

Control of MG-held property will soon pass to the German Land Governments and they will become responsible for restitution to Nazi victims under an interim custodial program set forth in recent OMGUS instructions to the Laenderrat. By 15 May details for carrying out these responsibilities are to be presented by the "Council of States" for OMGUS approval; by July the program may be in effect.

Specific classes of property which MG desires to transfer to the custody of the Germans include properties owned or controlled, directly or indirectly, by the following; The German Reich; governments, nationals or residents of other nations which were at war with any of the United Nations after 1 September 1939: the Nazi Party and its affiliates; organizations prohibited or dissolved by MG; and property which was the subject of transfer under duress or wrongful acts of confiscation, disposition or spoliation. The plan will not cover the Reichsbahn, PT and T the Reichsbank, German external assets covered by Control Council Law No. 5, installations now in use by occupation forces, and foreign exchange assets turned in under MG Law No. 53.

WORKS OF ART INCLUDED

Provision for interim custody of works of art and cultural objects which MG declares not subject to external restitution will be included in the Laenderrat plan. MG desires to turn over such items to Land custody not later than 30 June, with the understanding that they be returned if found subject to external restitution, inter-zonal transfer or restitution within Germany.

DISPOSED NAZI PROPERTY

The Laenderrat is also instructed to develop by 1 June a plan for final disposition of Reich-owned property, Nazi Party and affiliates' property, and that of Nazis, militarists and war profiteers confiscated under the Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism. All categories of property except foreign exchange assets are to be included.

Concerning awards to Nazi victims, the Laenderrat is instructed "... to institute immediate measures for the prompt restitution of property which has been the subject of transfer under duress or wrongful acts of confiscation, disposition or spoliation, whether purusant to legislation or by procedure purporting to follow forms of law or otherwise. The plan should consider the use of existing judicial machinery and the possibility of using specially constituted tribunals, and should also provide for the rights of such innocent third parties as may be involved. Initially, MG is concerned with restitution to individuals.

Consideration will also be given to restitution to organizations. However, the former will not await a decision on the

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