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REPORT ON CRYSTAL CITY INTERNMENT CAMP

Crystal City, Texas, January 29-31, 1943

I INTERNMENT CAMP COMMANDER: Mr. N. D. Collaer.

Internee Spokesman:

Karl Kolb, Chairman of an elected internee council comprising the four following members:
Mr. Karl Heins
Mr. Franz Hohenreiner
Mrs. Louise Wilkens
Mrs. Lucy Baltrusch

Date: 2/18/43

P.W.H.E.M.

II CAMP VISITED BY: Mr. W. C. Bruppacher, Representative of the Swiss Legation, Department of German Interests.

Accompanied by: Mr. P. W. Herrick, Special Division, Department of State.

III PERSONS INTERNED:

At the time of the visit 96 adult Germans were interned at Crystal City, comprising 48 husbands and their wives. With them at this family camp were 34 minor children.

IV GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The Crystal City Internment Camp is situated between Uvalde and Carrizo Springs, one hundred twenty-five miles southwest of San Antonio, Texas, at an altitude of 600 feet above sea level. This section is called the "winter garden region", since the climate is sufficiently mild to raise vegetables all year around. Crystal City is a community which, at one time, was supported by spinach farms. During recent years the land in this section has been used more for stock feeding, since the spinach crops were not rotated for many years and the land, having become worn out, can no longer maintain its high yield. The temperature in this section varies from freezing to 115 degrees in the summer, with a mean temperature of approximately 70 degrees. While the temperature is high in the summer, it is said that the climate is sufficiently dry to cause no discomfort and that there is a cooling breeze that comes from the Gulf of Mexico in the evenings around sundown. Prevailing winds at Crystal City are from the southeast.

The Crystal City Internment Camp is a former migratory workers' camp built by the FSA three or four years ago, from which authority it has been leased by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for the internment of aliens in family groups. The reservation comprises a total of 264 acres which include, aside from the present internment enclosure, a sizeable orange and grapefruit grove and two fields used in recent years for raising cattle.

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The present internment enclosure is a square 1700 feet by 1700 feet surrounded on three sides by a high woven wire fence, and on the fourth side by a barbed-wire fence. Guard towers have been erected in each of the four corners of this fence.

At the time of the visit construction was still in progress on the many additions being made to the camp, which will have a capacity sufficient to quarter 4000 internees, when completed. It was originally planned to intern only Japanese families at this camp, but consideration is now being given to permitting the Germans presently interned here to remain, and to increasing the German group to 700 individuals.

V HOUSING

The internees at present are housed in 29 cottages, a family to each one. These cottages are one-story frame buildings 26 feet 6 inches long by 18 feet 6 inches wide, built on concrete foundations. They have board walls painted brown and shingle roofs. Each cottage comprises two bedrooms, a combination living room-kitchen, and a bathroom with shower and washbasin with hot and cold running water. These cottages at present are furnished with steel beds, steel chairs, cooking stove, icebox, necessary kitchen utensils, table ware and crockery. Heat is supplied by the cooking stove which has an attachment to heat water for the bathroom. It is planned in the future to house large families of seven or eight members in these cottages. At present, with ample space available, only these cottages are occupied.

In addition to the 29 cottages within the enclosure, there are 118 "shelters" or one-room buildings, 16 feet long by 12 feet wide, of a similar construction. These "shelters" will be used to house a family with two or three children. Each will be furnished with a double bed, a double-deck bunk for two children, of a varying size, depending upon the age of the children, and with a trundle bed or beds if there are babies. A cooking stove, icebox, kitchen utensils, tableware and crockery will be furnished. At present these shelters have no plumbing, but it is planned to put in a cold-water tap for cooking purposes in each building. Heat will be supplied by the cooking stove. Community latrines and bathing facilities will be used by the internees in these "shelters". Ten of these "shelters", which are situated near where the hospital is to be built, will be used for hospital isolation cases.

The buildings described above were built by the FSA and formed a part of the migratory workers camp. New buildings called "duplexes" have been and are being constructed to increase the capacity of the former camp. These buildings, which are of a construction very similar to the shelters and cottages, are 40 feet long by 18 feet wide and contain two separate apartments

20 feet

less equivalent to that in other Department of Justice
20 feet long by 18 feet wide. Each apartment comprises
two bedrooms and a combination living room-kitchen. Each
building has one bathroom with a toilet and washbasin,
to be used by the occupants of both apartments. There
is no bath or shower. Furniture and cooking equipment
identical to that supplied in the shelters and cottages
will be furnished. It is planned to house families of
five or six in each of these apartments. One of the
two bedrooms has a separate door to the outside and
could be shut off from the rest of the apartment for
use by a childless couple or a single person.

In addition to the cottages, duplexes, and shelters
described above, a number of frame barracks of similar
construction are to be built. These will be divided
into single-room apartments to be occupied by small
families. Internees quartered in these barracks will
take their meals in a community mess hall which is to
be built. Work on the barracks and the mess hall has
not as yet been started.

VI WASHING AND TOILET FACILITIES:

Internees housed in the 29 cottages have
their own washing and toilet facilities as mentioned
above. Internees in the shelters will use conveniently
located community latrines and bath houses which formed
a part of the former migratory workers camp. Shower
heads and toilets are based on one for each 13 or 14
internees. Internees in the duplexes will use the bath
houses which are now being constructed. Each of these
bath houses will accommodate 200 internees.

A community laundry is being built and will occupy
a separate building. This laundry will be equipped with
modern washing machines, mangles, et cetera.

VII FOOD AND COOKING:

The internees cook in the cottages in which they
are quartered. As mentioned above, stoves, iceboxes,
cooking utensils, et cetera have been supplied in each
cottage and will be supplied in the shelters and duplexes.
Internees at present obtain their food from a central
commissary within the camp. The present commissary is
located in temporary quarters, but a new building has
been built for this purpose. At present the internees
obtain their supplies twice weekly. This permits larger
quantities of meat to be issued to them at one time,
enabling them to make soups, et cetera with leftovers.
A certain selection is available at the commissary so
that each internee family does not necessarily receive
the same supplies. Food is now issued to the internees
on a weight basis, but this may be changed to a monetary
basis when additional numbers arrive at the camp. Cost
of the food at the outset approximated 70 cents daily,
but this figure has now dropped to 48 cents, more or

XI RECOMMENDATIONS

less equivalent to that in other Department of Justice camps. The high figure at the outset was occasioned by the supplying of necessary staples to various families.

Fresh oranges and grapefruits are obtained from the grove outside the enclosure. This grove has enabled the authorities to more than triple the fresh fruit ration specified by Department of Justice regulations. There is a large cabbage patch within the enclosure which provides a good supply of this vegetable every week.

VIII MEDICAL FACILITIES AND SICKNESS:

A modern hospital will be built within the enclosure. Work has not started on this building, but it is expected that the building will be completed within two months. At present a small clinic has been established in the recreation building. Hospital and dental facilities in the town of Crystal City are being used temporarily. Dr. S. Oliver of the Public Health Service, who arrived at the camp a week prior to this visit, will be in charge of this hospital. At present there is no serious sickness at the camp. A few internees are suffering from minor ailments and are confined to their beds in the cottages.

IX CLOTHING:

Stocks of suitable clothing, shoes, et cetera are being received at the camp and will be issued to the internees in the near future. In the meanwhile, the internees are using their own clothes.

X CANTEEN:

Pending the completion of the building to be used for the canteen, one of the shelters is used for this purpose. Soft drinks, beer, tobacco, et cetera are sold in the canteen. The internees have had difficulty in making the necessary connections with wholesale houses to obtain supplies, and the camp authorities are attempting to make arrangements whereby the internees can purchase supplies through the Army Post Exchange system at San Antonio.

Only one building is being constructed for use as a canteen, which it is believed will not be sufficient if both Germans and Japanese are to be interned at this camp. The representative of the Swiss Legation indicated that he doubted whether a canteen could be run satisfactorily by internees of two different nationalities. The Camp Commander stated that he believed some method could be worked out by issuing canteen checks whereby each nationality would have a different color check. An accounting of these checks from time to time would enable the Canteen Committee to pay dividends to each nationality, based on the dollar amount of their respective purchases.

XI RECREATION

XI RECREATION AND EDUCATION:

A large recreation hall which formed a part of the migratory workers camp is located in the enclosure. This building has an auditorium with capacity to seat 250 people. This building contains several classrooms and a children's kindergarten. Some of these rooms are at present used to store baggage, pending the completion of the necessary storage warehouses at the camp.

The internees have a piano and some musical instruments. Movies are given in the auditorium once a week. The internees stated that they believed the auditorium would be too small for the large number to be interned at the camp. It was the opinion of the representative of the Department of State that the present recreation hall would be sufficient since use of the auditorium could be assigned to various groups of internees at different times. The internees told the representative of the Swiss Legation that they had been asked by the camp authorities whether they would be willing to share the recreation hall with the Japanese internees provided they were to remain at the camp. They said that if they were replied in the affirmative they would be relinquishing their right to ask to be separated from other nationalities to which they are entitled under Article 9 of the Geneva Convention. The representative of the Swiss Legation told them that they should inform the camp authorities that they would be willing to share the recreation hall with the Japanese provided the method of allotting these facilities would not be contrary to the spirit of the convention.

Near the recreation hall there is a children's playground equipped with swings, seesaws, et cetera, and a small temporary athletic field. A permanent athletic field will be laid out within the enclosure later, and a swimming pool will be built. A competent teacher has been appointed by the camp authorities to teach the younger children. Additional teachers will be employed as the population of the camp increases. The internees have organized other classes and teach the older children themselves. A separate school building will be built and it is expected that classes will be organized from kindergarten on up through high school.

XII INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND WORK:

During an election held recently Mr. Karl Kolb was elected spokesman of the camp. A temporary council consisting of two men and two women was elected at the same time. In addition to his duties as spokesman, Mr. Kolb acts as chairman of this council. This council is a temporary body whose membership will be expanded when additional internees arrive at the camp.

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At present it is not contemplated to allow the spokesman to detail work at the camp. The status of the spokesman will be similar to that at Kenedy. Mr. Kolb was resentful of this fact and demanded the right to pass on work to be done by the internees. He stated that only in this way could he satisfy himself that the work done by the internees was not being used to further the war effort. In this connection he said that recently the internees had been asked to build some benches in accordance with the specifications of a War Department blue print which caused considerable commotion in the camp since the internees believed that these benches were to be used by the Army and not by them. He was informed that the War Department blue print was merely lent to the camp authorities and that these benches would be used in the camp.

This group of internees volunteered to come to Crystal City before its facilities were completed, with a distinct understanding with the Department of Justice officials in Philadelphia that they would help in the construction of the camp. At first these internees worked hard, but in recent weeks they have reduced their work-day to six hours and have refused to work on Saturdays. They have also declared holidays at various times. This has resulted in their being more of an interference than a help to the camp authorities. The internee spokesman was told that they have shown bad faith and that they are not living up to their agreement.

The spokesman stated that they had not worked in accordance with their agreement since they had been given to understand that they are to be transferred from the camp as soon as it is completed. He was told that the Department of Justice officials had made this fact clearly known to all of them before their transfer to this camp. Mr. Kolb allowed that this fact was true, but stated that it was difficult to make the others work when they knew that the Japanese alone would benefit from their work. He requested an assurance that they would not be transferred to Seagoville. This assurance was not given, but Mr. Kelly, Chief Supervisor of the Border Patrol, Immigration and Naturalization Service, who was at the camp just prior to this visit, informed the internees that consideration would be given to their request to remain at Crystal City.

The Representative of the Swiss Legation told the internee spokesman and the internee council members that they should tell their fellow internees that their transfer to Crystal City had accomplished much, even though they might be transferred to Seagoville. He told them that their reunion with their families at Crystal City had done much to improve their health, which was important to them as well as to the German Government and that this transfer had made it possible to discontinue the financial assistance that would have had to be continued to be given to their needy families by the German Government through the Legation. The

Representative

Representative of the Swiss Legation further told them that their transfer to this camp had made it possible for another group of German internees to be reunited with their families and that this group would arrive at the camp within a few days.

The Representative of the Swiss Legation further told them that no assurance could be given to them at this time that they could stay at Crystal City, but that his Legation would sustain their request to remain. He informed them that they could not be forced to work, but that he felt they should work in order not to interfere with the construction program at the camp and to make it more possible that favorable consideration would be given to their request to remain at this camp by showing their willingness to cooperate in this way. These spokesmen did not indicate whether the internees would resume work on the former basis or whether they would desist from all work other than maintenance work.

XIII COMPLAINTS AND REQUESTS:

The internees had but few complaints to make other than the question of their work. As a whole, they were well satisfied with the facilities the Crystal City camp offered and would offer when completed, and for this reason did not wish to be transferred to Seagoville which they did not believe would be as good a camp as Crystal City.

The few minor complaints and requests they made were the following:

1. They stated that since they had arrived at the camp no toilet articles had been issued to them. Mr. Collaer, the camp commander, stated that these articles had been requisitioned and were expected to be received shortly when they would be issued to the internees free of charge in accordance with Department of Justice regulations.

2. A number of the internees stated that they were using their own tools in the construction of the camp. They asked that the necessary tools be issued to them by the camp authorities. Mr. Collaer told the Representative of the Swiss Legation that the internees had been furnished the tools necessary for their work and that they were not obliged to use their own tools.

3. Mr. Kolb, the Internee Spokesman, had a number of complaints to make with regard to the construction of the camp and seemed to believe that he should be consulted whenever any new buildings were planned. In particular he stated that the shelters would be inadequate to house a family, that the canteen as being constructed would not be satisfactory and that no provisions had been made to furnish him with an office.

XIV COMMENTS:

XIV COMMENTS:

This camp is at present far from completed, but from what was seen during this visit it can be said that it should be a most satisfactory camp for the permanent internment of enemy aliens in family groups.

P. W. Herrick
P. W. HERRICK

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