



*"Ft. Eustis is the greatest thing that ever happened to me" — that's what most prisoners said as they headed for home*

# 360,000 P.W.'S—

## The hope of Germany

**How German prisoners of war who were trained in democracy by our Army are helping to rebuild and re-educate their homeland . . . Told for the first time by an American officer just back from Europe**

*by* **Capt. ROBERT LOWE KUNZIG,**



**THE** long line of black-clad Germans filed slowly up the gangplank of the S. S. Eufaula Victory. They had picked sugar beets in the West, husked corn in Iowa, canned tomatoes in Jersey; but those days were over now. There was a tenseness and a feeling of expectancy in the air. These were specially trained, anti-Nazi prisoners of war on the journey they had dreamed of for two years. These were men going home.

My mission on this ship was an unusual one. Early in 1944 the Special Projects Division of the Office of the Provost Marshal General was founded. Its mission: to re-educate 360,000 German prisoners of war and to select and specially train leaders to return to defeated Germany, pick up the shreds, and guide their nation toward democracy. Special schools were established at Ft. Getty, R. I., and later at Ft. Eustis, Va. With the aid of our universities and colleges, courses were organized in history and military government to prepare the prisoners for their return. Famous Americans in all walks of life participated. Each problem had to be approached individually, each new phase worked out with utmost care. The experiment was unprecedented in American history.

Now the Government wanted to know if this experiment was bearing fruit. I was to take charge of this particular group of prisoners, accompany them on each leg of their journey, find out what they were thinking, and how they felt toward America. Once inside Germany, my mission was to travel

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)

## The hope of Germany



A discussion group at Ft. Eustis . . . "These Germans found freedom of thought and expression even as prisoners. This seed may well take fruit in future years"

through the American Zone and locate previous graduates of these special schools—men who had returned as early as the summer of 1945. Now we would find out whether these men were practicing what they had learned, or whether they had been mere opportunists playing America for a bunch of "softies."

The first day at sea

on the S. S. Eufaula Victory I got an urgent message to report at once to the quarters of Capt. Max A. Rancod, skipper of the ship. "What the hell kind of cargo did they load me with this time?" he stormed. "The mate tells me we've got a bunch of Nazi rats that I'm supposed to mollycoddle and treat with kid gloves. I'll be damned if I will."

We sat down and talked over the situation. I explained that many of the prisoners on the ship had been fighting Hitler for years, that some had suffered in concentration camps, and that our Army had trained them for a special task. Rancod was interested; in fact, so much so, that he ordered his crew to show the same respect toward the prisoners as all decent men owe to their fellow men. We never had one unpleasant incident between American and German on the entire trip.

Late that night I was sitting in my quarters reading, when a knock sounded at the door. A quiet voice asked, "*Herr Captain, darf ich mit Ihnen sprechen?*" The voice sounded familiar; it aroused a vague memory from the distant past. I told the visitor to come in, and waited expectantly. The door opened slowly. It was Jakob ———, whom I had known almost ten years before, when he was a student at Laurenceville Academy near Princeton, N. J. Fate had played a strange trick, making him my prisoner after so many years. We talked for hours as his fascinating story unfolded.

Jakob was the son of a well-to-do manufacturer. His father had wanted him to be educated in a democracy, and so had sent him to America for part of his schooling. At Laurenceville he met and mingled with boys from all over the States. He liked them, and wanted to stay here. But near the end of the thirties, the German consul informed him

## The hope of Germany

**360,000 P. W.'s—**

**The Hope**

**of Germany**

that he had to return to the Fatherland. His visa had expired, so, reluctantly, he went back.

With the arrival of war, Jakob found himself fighting his former friends and classmates. He was a lieutenant for most of the war, his questionable politics preventing promotion. In France, American paratroopers of the famed "82nd" had captured him, and he was sent to America for the second time, this time as a prisoner of war.

In Trinidad, Colo., he soon made known his anti-Nazi beliefs. Five times he was condemned to death by kangaroo courts. Twice fanatics had tried to kill him. American authorities had finally removed him to an anti-Nazi section of camp after careful investigation. Eventually he was among the first men selected to go to Ft. Eustis for special training and repatriation. Now he was returning home, and was amazed to find an old acquaintance as officer-in-charge of his group.

I asked Jakob if his feelings toward America had changed. "I've wanted so to tell someone this," he answered eagerly. "Ft. Eustis is the greatest thing that ever happened to me. Even though it was only a short course, it was an experience that you remember for a lifetime. Eustis restored my faith in God and man. It's not only what was taught at Eustis, but the fact that the school existed, in the first place. Only the United States could have created such a place." . . .

**A**s I awakened the next morning, the first sound that greeted me was a horrible banging right over my head. Were this the "morning after," I might have understood, but not after eight hours of sleep. Making the deck a bit later, I found the mate had passed out chipping hammers to prisoners who had volunteered for extra-gratuitous labor, and they were hard at work chipping the old paint off the Eufaula. Captain Rancod was beaming all over with pleasure; and well he might, for during the nine-days' voyage he was to get virtually all his decks chipped and repainted. The prisoners were hard at work in the mess hall, in the holds, in fact anywhere where there was a job to be done. It was a good group.

The ship had a complete supply of musical instruments aboard, so I organized a jazz band, which good deed I was to rue from time to time. Within fifteen minutes after the orchestra started rehearsing, hot Berchtesgaden "corn" came pouring out of the hold. What

## The hope of Germany

those men did to *Sentimental Journey* almost made the captain turn the ship back to New York. One evening the band was doing itself proud with a medley of American college tunes. Old school ties made me ask the leader if he knew the University of Pennsylvania "alma mater." With a happy smile, he turned and whispered to the orchestra, proudly raised his baton, and swung into a seasick version of *Pennsylvania Polka*. He looked so pleased, I hadn't the heart to tell him.

Late one night we saw a big crowd gathered on the deck aft. A group of prisoners seemed to be arguing with some of the American soldiers we had on board as guards. I walked back to investigate. When I was within hearing distance I stopped short as scraps of conversation reached my ears. I couldn't believe I was hearing correctly, as "Bill of Rights" and "Fourteenth Amendment" floated my way. It was a group of PW's and Americans in a friendly, hot, free-for-all political discussion. Both sides made sense; both knew what they were talking about.

The leaders were an American farm boy from Iowa and a German mechanic from Essen. The issue seemed to be whether Germany could ever be a democracy. The Germans said yes, the Americans, no. Oddly enough, it was a reversal of the usual viewpoint. At least 40 men expressed their ideas with amazing clarity and intelligence. I couldn't help thinking what a healthy way this was to settle difficulties. It was possible, after all, for the people of enemy nations to get together and discuss their problems openly and frankly. . . .

Three days after we landed at Le Havre, we boarded a long line of boxcars and were off for Germany. When a man has spent years in a foreign country as a prisoner of war, he dreams of that wonderful moment when he'll reach home once again. As our train approached the border, in the Saar region, I was conscious of a tenseness in the men. I could see it in their eyes. They crowded to the doors for that first glimpse. Then they saw. They saw, and they'll remember for all time. Ruin, desolation, and destruction were framed in that open door. The only sound was the lonely shriek of the engine far ahead.

Standing next to me, Hans ——— watched and waited. His home was in the next little town on a small side street near the tracks. We rounded a bend, and I heard him gasp. I knew the reason. His home wasn't there. It couldn't be, because the town wasn't there. Nothing but mounds of rubble piled high. There was an awful moment of silence. Then I heard Hans speaking softly, partially to himself, partially to his loved ones wherever they might be, and partially to his God. "I swear that I'll devote my life to bringing truth and justice to my people that this horror may never happen again."

The train wound through village after village. People crowded in the ruins of the sta-

## The hope of Germany



*One of the selected prisoners, especially trained at Ft. Eustis, Va., to guide defeated Germany toward democracy*

tions staring at each car, searching for a son, a father, or perhaps a brother. Many brought "ersatz" coffee and dry bread to feed the prisoners. The situation was soon reversed, the prisoners feeding the people what little they could spare from their rations. They gave away chocolate that they had bought from their earnings in America; some even distributed cigarettes; many gave away almost all they had.

We passed Augsburg, then Munich. Finally the train came to a stop in the quaint Bavarian village of Bad Aibling. Here the PW enclosure on the edge of town was the Discharge Center for our special prisoners. Here freedom would be regained for the first time in 3 years. Real freedom for the first time in 13.

**DISCHARGE** procedure takes 3 or 4 days. The men fill out questionnaires. They're fingerprinted, interrogated, and, just to make doubly sure, they're screened politically again. Finally they file through a large hangar of this old Luftwaffe installation, where records are gone over, personal data sheets prepared, and their discharge certificates made up. If everything checks, each man is given 40 marks (\$4), his final papers, and he's free. A round-robin train of boxcars leaves Bad Aibling every few days and circles through the American Zone. Each man is free to get off at the station nearest his home. As he drops from the boxcar and waves a final farewell, Prisoner of War Johann ——— becomes plain Johann ———, citizen of Germany.

I watched the train pull out of Bad Aibling loaded with the men of my group. Eric ———,

## The hope of Germany

proud of his newly acquired proficiency in English, pronounced the valedictory: "This civilian stuff is swell. Leave us face it, Captain; there's no future in being a PW."

Smiling to myself, I turned away thinking how unintentionally right Eric had been. The future for these men was a tremendous challenge. Perhaps at no other time in history did a nation have such dire need of men of vision, faith, and understanding. It was up to them.

In Frankfort, a few days later, I learned of the plans that had been laid for integrating these special prisoners into the various German communities. They had been invited to report to Military Government headquarters in their cities and towns. A tour through Germany showed that many had done so and were already employed.

All in all, I spoke to over 1,000 of these specially trained men. They're scattered throughout the entire American Zone. Some have gone to the British and French Zones, and a few even to the Russian. Many are employed by Military Government. They're working as clerks, interpreters, investigators, public safety experts, economists, and in many other technical and advisory positions.

Dr. Rudolf Z., for example, is in charge of venereal disease control in Mannheim. Dr. M. is with the Bavarian Ministry of Economics. Professor H. has been elected rector of one of the greatest German universities. In every city, without exception, Military Government authorities praise the work of these men and ask for more.

Driving to Munich one morning with a group of former prisoners, I chanced to pass through the little town of Dachau. We stopped at the concentration camp. I wanted to see what the reactions of these Germans would be. Every single murder device from electric fences to gas chambers and ovens were still there to be seen.

After walking completely through the camp, we continued on our way to Munich. For fifteen minutes no one spoke. Then Jakob, in a voice filled with loathing and horror, said, "What in God's name were we fighting for? Think



*German prisoners of war in the United States.*

*(image added)*

## The hope of Germany

what the world would have been like if we had won. I'm ashamed I'm a German."

A newspaper editor spoke softly and slowly: "At least, the people who have seen this know the depths to which our country has sunk. I think most German people today believe the concentration camp stories. They've seen the films and read the articles in the papers. Glory and romance have been taken out of war. And oddly enough, Captain, the treatment you Americans gave us as prisoners of war in the States drove home the point with a vengeance. We were treated firmly but fairly, and everyone in Germany knows it. In comparison, our barbarity with prisoners is horrible. America can be proud of her record."

It's by no means correct, however, to create the opinion that all these specially trained men are flag-waving enthusiasts for democracy. Undoubtedly many were mere opportunists who used Eustis and Getty as a means of getting home. Careful screening weeded out some of the fakers, but not all. In Esslingen, one prisoner turned out to be a former member of the Nazi party. He had been a high-school teacher, but he'll never teach again. When such cases are discovered in the American Zone, Getty identification papers are taken away by Military Government officers and the man reverts to the status of any regular returned prisoner.

Harder to discover than party members are those whose political records appear clear, but who merely faked interest in democracy. Ironically enough, they generally turn up as "grippers," who expect all sorts of special favors from American authorities. Whenever this situation becomes apparent, an investigation takes place, and the special prisoner is carefully checked. One false move, and his papers are taken away.

The opportunists are, of course, even more numerous. I estimate that roughly 20 per cent of the special prisoners were only partially sincere. They wanted to get home, and they'd do anything to get there. But with this 20 per cent, the cause is not totally lost. These men had an opportunity to see and hear things they'd never known under Hitler. They had freedom of thought and expression even as prisoners. The seed may well take root in future years.

**F**OR some prisoners, the shock of returning home and the awful catastrophe of Germany have dimmed their enthusiasm for the United States. Otto W. was just 18 when he finally got back to his native Cologne. There he found that one bomb had wiped out his father, mother, two sisters, brother, and grandparents. For Otto, it's hard to think in terms of democracy. When I saw him later in Heidelberg, where he was working, he wasn't bitter, just numb. The shock was too great. For the time being, at least, his ideas of democracy must constantly fight the vision of that gaping

## The hope of Germany

hole off a little side street in Cologne. It's hard to forget.

My work carried me finally to Stuttgart, capital city of Wurttemberg-Baden. A small group of former prisoners had held a meeting in Munich and discussed plans for the future. Now another and larger gathering was to take place in Stuttgart upon the invitation of leading city officials. Now we would see if the Getty and Eustis graduates remembered what they learned. The Stuttgart conference would prove their sincerity, or show clearly their lack of interest. Ex-prisoners were to come together from all over Germany to vote on future plans and policies. I wondered how many would be there, if, indeed, any would come. It was the test of years of effort.

I headed at once for the home of Karl ——— If any man could be called the leading prisoner of war we had in America, this was the man. He had headed up one of our most important camps, assisted in guiding the national German prisoner-of-war newspaper, *Der Ruf*, and advised on many policy matters. He was a sincere believer in democracy and had fought for it all his life.

Now Karl was home, living in a small apartment in the suburbs of bombed-out Stuttgart, and assisting in the preparations for the conference. His welcome was warm and cordial. "I want to tell you what we've done, what progress we've made."

He motioned me to a chair. "All has not been easy. Many people still cling to their Nazi beliefs in spite of all the tragedy Naziism has brought them. Even some of our prisoners turn out to be mere opportunists. You remember, I was a schoolteacher before the war. That is, I was until the Gestapo found me out and threw me into a concentration camp for a few years. After I returned from America, I first went back to teaching. Someone must bring truth to the children, otherwise they'll be the lost generation. I used many of the illustrations of democracy that I learned in the States. The children loved them and asked for more. But we need books. Thousands of them. We need films and magazines and texts that teach truth instead of the lies of the past thirteen years. It's an enormous job; but it's far from hopeless. It's got to be tackled, and tackled now."

I asked him if he was still teaching. "In a different way, yes," he replied earnestly. "I've just been made Educational Director of Radio Stuttgart. It's my job to undo the propaganda of a decade, and to substitute truth and facts. I want the people to have a chance. German education has always aimed at training technicians; I want to guide it toward training citizens. Radio gives us the opportunity to reach millions of people. It's the greatest challenge of my life and I'm going to give it all I've got."

There's hope for Germany in men like Karl.

In a conference the next day with German



## The hope of Germany

government leaders, I realized that most intelligent, far-seeing Germans do not resent these returning special prisoners. Dr. Wilhelm Keil, President of the Württemberg-Baden Parliament, stated emphatically, "I wish that all Germany could have a knowledge of democracy such as these men bring back with them from America."

His trusted friend, Dr. Eugen Heinz, head of the State Employment and Labor Service, added, "We'll employ any Ft. Eustis man who asks for a job. My assistants in the various cities tell me these men understand conditions better than most people. They aren't dreaming of a dead past; they're building for a decent future. God knows we need men like that today."

The attitude of German civil officials toward Getty and Eustis men is proving a useful barometer for Military Government experts in choosing trustworthy and honest government aides.

The day of the Stuttgart Conference arrived. Leaders of the former prisoner-of-war group had arranged with city officials to hold the meeting in the Lorenzhaus, a large conference hall and restaurant. It had been announced in the newspapers all over southern Germany. A full hour before the beginning of the meeting, crowds were assembled on the streets. It was difficult for traffic to get through the narrow lanes. Promptly at 3, over 500 ex-prisoners jammed into the lecture hall. Familiar faces from Ft. Getty, Eustis, and the other special training camps kept bobbing up out of the crowd.

**A**s I sat at the speakers' table and faced that group of men, I had the feeling that this was a unique gathering in history. This was a "college reunion" of prisoners; men reunited to pay tribute to an idea they had nurtured behind barbed wire. Before me was a group of lawyers, carpenters, butchers, judges—every type of man. Some were well dressed, many were clothed in what an American would call rags. But all were gathered together in a true democratic meeting to express their opinions openly, without fear of Buchenwald or Dachau. An innovation in Germany.

After welcoming speeches from the top officials present, Karl rose to his feet to respond for former prisoners. In a short, poignant address he recalled their days in America, and paid tribute to the United States for permitting intellectual freedom and fostering education behind barbed wire. When he pledged all present to a lifetime of effort devoted to bringing democracy to Germany, the applause and cheers were deafening.

At 6:30, dinner was served, with the city of Stuttgart as host. After dinner, the ex-prisoners voted on a program to further the cause of democracy, and elected a Central Committee pledged to co-operate with all institutions and

## The hope of Germany

groups working for a democratic government.

As the crowd began to break up, you heard remarks like, "Haven't seen you since New Mexico, Joe," or "It sure was hot in Alabama, wasn't it?" It was hard to distinguish Stuttgart from 42nd and Broadway that night.

I rounded up the newly elected members of the Central Committee and invited them to my quarters. It would be interesting to hear their plans; I wanted to meet them personally once again.

They all came. Dr. A. from the Ministry of Economics; Mr. K. from the Office of the Minister President; Dr. S., a young intern; Dr. P., a teacher; Professor R. from the Ministry of Culture; Mr. N. from the Council of States; and of course Karl. Sincere men, all of them, with enthusiasm not their only virtue. They had practical, workable plans ready for operation.

Mr. K. was explaining, "We're going to have round-table discussions on the radio. Many of our comrades have agreed to use their spare time to lecture to school children in assemblies." Karl continued, "We've also developed a whole plan of adult education using radio."

"For my part, I've arranged a public forum to discuss questions of interest to everyone," said Dr. A. "And I also heard tonight that *Der Ruf*, our PW newspaper in the States, will be published here in Germany. The same men are continuing in their efforts; this time they're aiming at the youth of Germany."

Professor R. rose to his feet and paced slowly up and down. "The Minister of Culture has agreed to open a special school at Schloss Comburg, near the town of Schwaebisch Hall. It will train young returning soldiers for citizenship in democracy. I've patterned it after Ft. Getty in Rhode Island." Then he stopped, turned, and looked at me. "I wish America could know of our plans. Tonight's meeting was just for ex-prisoners from the States. But future meetings won't be limited to Getty and Eustis men. We want all Germans interested in democracy to join in and help us. We plan to act something like your American non-partisan 'Better Government Leagues.' This time we want to watch our government and take an interest in what it does. A citizen in a democracy has more than just rights and privileges; he has duties."

I felt a surge of relief. There was hope for Germany. Although many Germans might still be Nazis at heart, and even a few of the special prisoners mere unconverted opportunists, at least some voices would be raised for truth and justice. In the Getty-Eustis program, largely financed by the prisoners' own funds, the American taxpayer had gotten one of the best "bargains" of the war. It wasn't necessary to predict, it was already evident that the rank and file of the prisoners were an excellent leavening influence in their communities, and

## The hope of Germany

leaders were taking prominent roles in the re-education of a nation.

THE  
**American**  
MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 1947

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)