

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

347 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

To Americans Who Were
War Prisoners in Germany:

Welcome home!

We would like to say that personally to each and every one of you, but since it is not possible, we are taking this way of shaking your hand and saying, "Hello. We're glad you're back!" Because our welcome comes through Uncle Sam's mail mails it not one bit less warm and sincere.

We hope the love and care of your family and friends have been able to erase at least some of the memories of what you went through during the months or years you spent behind barbed wire. For those of you from whom internment took a heavier toll, we pray that medical skill and your own high courage will see you through.

We hope, too, the Y.M.C.A. was able to make prison camp life at least a little more bearable for you. We know we were able to get books and games and musical supplies through to a good many thousands of American prisoners in Germany. Others, particularly those captured in the Battle of the Bulge, were beyond our reach. Where we helped, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve. Where we failed, well, we did our best, but we guess that at times it just wasn't good enough to overcome all the obstacles in our way.

You might be interested to know that Y.M.C.A. help to prisoners of war began in the American Civil War and in World War I, the "Y" served 6,000,000 prisoners in 28 countries. When the present war began, in the fall of 1939, the Y.M.C.A. through its World's Committee headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, secured agreements with the belligerent powers permitting it to visit prisoner of war camps and supply prisoners with educational, recreational and religious materials.

During the past two years, the Y.M.C.A. has shipped from the United States to Europe the following major supplies:

Sports Articles	1,754,254
Musical Articles	244,232
Books	1,280,146

In addition, there were large quantities of handicraft materials, theatrical supplies, games, religious articles and many others. All told, some 650 different kinds of articles were sent from the United States. From our headquarters in Geneva during the past two years, 64,756 individual orders were filled and 123,073 shipments were made to prisoners in Europe. (The total for the world would be larger. For example, since the beginning of the war in 1939, the Y.M.C.A. has distributed more than 4,000,000 books to war prisoners.)

Some of this material never got to the prison camps. Some was destroyed by Allied aviation and other military operations. Some was lost due to the chaotic conditions within Germany and probably some failed to reach prisoners due to our own human errors. The invasion of Southern France so seriously disrupted our communications that for a period of six months it was not possible to get materials from the United States to Geneva. During that time, we had to depend upon stockpiles and purchases in Switzerland and Sweden, and the establishing of new routes through northern Germany.

We know our service at best was not sufficient to meet your total needs. And we know, too, that without your courage and ingenuity, even what we did get to you would have gone to waste. To the everlasting amazement of your captors, you men refused to be licked even when the going was toughest. The neutral Swedish and Swiss Y.M.C.A. workers who visited your camps commented repeatedly on your abilities to make good use of the smallest scrap of paper or stick of wood. Though written with the most strict neutrality, the reports of our workers revealed how even behind barbed wire, you established Little Americas in Germany. It made us proud to be your countrymen!

Some of the requests prisoners made were both surprising and amusing. There was the time someone asked for frog's eyes. That had us stumped until we figured out that they were glass eyes for use in taxidermy. Then, there was the request that came through reading, "dice, a roulette wheel and sacramental wine." Of course, there were lots of things like a man by the name of Barber wanting a book on hair-cutting or a Kriegie named Segar wanting books on tobacco raising.

Some of you were in camps where there were well-established educational courses. One former prisoner told us recently that his camp, with classes in almost everything from German to geometry, was as good as a "one horse college." We know that many ex-Kriegies are hoping to get high school and college credit for their prison camp studies. Unfortunately, many of the educational records were lost when the camps were evacuated so that we were unable to develop our plan for keeping a study record of each prisoner. The decision in regard to credit can be made only by the school or college to which you apply, not by the Y.M.C.A. nor by the United States Armed Forces Institute. However, we shall be glad to counsel with you as you prepare your application. Perhaps we can supplement your application for credit with a statement concerning the educational standards in your camps. For those who are to be reassigned for further military duty, application for credit should be deferred. This will permit including with your application all studies and military experience that may be of educational value.

No letter to you would be complete without commenting on the splendid job done by the Red Cross in getting food, clothing and medical supplies to American prisoners in Germany. (The Red Cross in general looked after prisoners' physical welfare, while the Y.M.C.A. tried to meet their educational, recreational, religious and similar needs.) When conditions in Germany made it impossible for us to carry on our regular work, the Y.M.C.A. divided its fleet of trucks into two units. One unit was turned over to the Red Cross to help get food through to the camps. The other was used to help evacuate wounded men and to accompany some groups of prisoners on their forced marches.

The War Department did not forget you because you were behind barbed wire. It supplied the Y.M.C.A. with great quantities of athletic and recreational equipment to be relayed on to you. Many other organizations contributed to your welfare and, of course, the good old American public opened its purse as well as its heart and poured out millions of dollars to the Y.M.C.A. through the National War Fund.

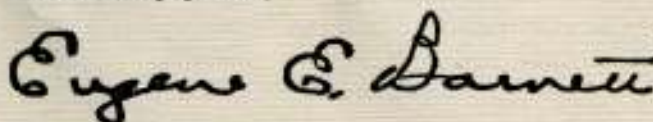
You should understand that the Y.M.C.A. was able to serve American prisoners only because since the beginning of the war its World's Committee has carried on an international, neutral, Christian service for prisoners on both sides of the conflict. Many of you have spoken warmly of the neutral Y.M.C.A. workers who served you in Germany. You will be glad to know we are planning to bring some of these men to the United States so you may meet them again under happier circumstances.

We have on hand in Geneva a supply of War Time Log Books we were unable to distribute before the war ended. If you failed to receive one, or lost yours in the evacuation of the camps, we'll be glad to send you one as long as our supply lasts. Some of you also lost the medals awarded by the Y.M.C.A. for sports or camp leadership. We have a small supply left and will gladly replace your medal if you will indicate the circumstances under which it was awarded.

Now, I wonder if you would do us a favor? Because of conditions in Germany with which you are entirely too familiar, we do not know the full extent of our service to American prisoners. We would appreciate it, therefore, if you would fill out the questionnaire below and return it to us. It has been approved by the War Department.

If the Y.M.C.A. can be of help to you in any way, please let us know.

Sincerely yours,



Eugene E. Barnett
General Secretary

WAR PRISONERS AID OF THE Y.M.C.A.

347 Madison Ave., New York

1. Name and rank _____
Home Address _____ Street _____ City _____ State _____
2. What prison camps were you in? _____
3. Which of the following Y.M.C.A. services and supplies did you know of in your camps?

A. Books _____	I. Theatricals _____
B. Games _____	J. Painting and drawing _____
C. Phonograph Records _____	K. Cooking utensils _____
D. Educational classes _____	L. Building materials _____
E. Musical instruments _____	M. Electric light bulbs _____
F. Religious supplies _____	N. Wartime Log Book _____
G. Athletics _____	O. Christmas decorations _____
H. Handicrafts _____	P. Any other _____
4. Which of the above were most helpful to you personally? _____

5. Which were of most use to the camp in general? _____

6. Did you know that your camp was visited by neutral Y.M.C.A. workers? _____

7. In general, how would you class the attitude of German officers towards leisure time activities? Encouraging _____ Neutral _____ Discouraging _____

8. Despite the conditions under which you lived, what if any experiences did you have which were helpful or memorable? _____

9. What general comments do you have concerning our work? _____
