

Some Essential Facts concerning the Health Situation in the Alien Internment CampCristal City, Texas

To the Spokesmen of the German and Japanese Group:

This is to inform you about the health situation of the camp population during the last weeks.

Generally speaking, this health situation has been good beyond all expectations. There have been no serious contagious or other diseases and no major accidents. Only minor accidents and inconsequential health disorders occurred, except for the injuries mentioned subsequently. It is remarkable that we have not yet had a single case of infantile paralysis, although the incidence of this disease has assumed alarming proportions in this state. There is, however, no guaranty that this present satisfactory state of health will last. Medical experience proves that such a favorable condition must be regarded with skepticism and it is, therefore, sound policy to be prepared for a sudden change to the worse. This is particularly pertinent in our case where the present satisfactory state is not the result of favorable environmental conditions but is due to mere luck.

Severe damage to the health of many of the camp inhabitants has resulted from exposure to the injurious weather, especially to the heat. There have been many cases of heat fever and heat exhaustion, circulation collapses, intensification of menopause syndroms, severe impairment of sleep and appetite and many skin diseases. Further injuries to the eyes and to the respiratory tract are caused by the large quantities of dust resulting from the existing surface soil conditions in the camp.

In addition to these physical afflictions, there have been many mental disturbances such as increased excitability and loss of vigor and vitality.

Under the influence of the heat, some people have acted strangely or even foolishly; others again have taken such acts too seriously.

The detrimental effects of local weather conditions on body and mind indicate that this vicinity is not suited as a residence for people unaccustomed to them. The burden of having to live under such conditions becomes even more unbearable as at the same time most of the people have to overcome the hardships of a primitive mode of life to which they are not accustomed. This combination of weather and reduced living conditions may possibly cause permanent injuries to the health of the individuals.

Fortunately, the dry heat of the last weeks has effectively impeded the propagation of flies and mosquitoes. Considering the defects of our sewer system, there is no telling what might have happened, had there been the abundance of flies one would normally expect in this season. On two occasions during recent weeks, sewer pipes became blocked by foreign matter and as a result, the overflowing sewage entered an adjoining ditch which carried it through a large area of the camp. In one instance, it was found that the object causing the obstruction had been introduced through a manhole which was, and still is, covered by a few boards nailed together instead of being fitted with a proper lid. By such negligence, easy access to infectious material is given to flies and other pests, thus counteracting our efforts to protect people by immunization against infectious diseases.

The same applies to the recent practice of turning off the water supply during certain hours of the day. As a result, toilets remain filled with feces and infections may be spread by flies, or persons forced to use such toilets may become contaminated by splashing water containing infectious material.

An adequate water supply and sewage system are basic requirements

for a camp; therefore, if the above conditions continue, this camp must be regarded as utterly unsuitable for its purpose.

A considerable number of the cases of heat exhaustion referred to above are, no doubt, due to the extremely hot living quarters. Many of these quarters not only afford insufficient protection against the heat but also fail to keep out the rain as was shown during the last rainfall. It is also to be expected that in the coming cold season, it will prove difficult if not impossible to heat some of these quarters properly.

Considering these inadequacies, it seems incomprehensible that people already living under difficult and unaccustomed conditions are now, after they have diligently improved their dwellings in order to obtain the maximum comfort possible under existing conditions, advised to move into other quarters, because "they now occupy more space than the present regulations permit." It is more than doubtful whether these moves which entail much additional mental and physical strain are justified by the reason given. The regulations in question are probably made for troops or prisoners of war, i.e. men in the prime of life, but not for women and children of all ages. In times of peace and war, it has always been a sacred principle to grant women and children the special consideration due to their sex and frailty. Moreover, such regulations obviously do not take into account the problems arising from the varying sizes and ages of children. It seems foolish to distribute the available accommodations on a rigid space per head basis, disregarding the natural composition of the families.

Conditions in the Hospital improved inasmuch as the USPHS furnished it with 3 additional nurses. Thus it is possible to cover the 24 hour period with trained nurses on permanent assignment.

However, the supply of urgently needed books, reagents, instruments and

equipment is still far behind schedule and promises given a long time ago have not yet been fulfilled. The most typical is the book situation. These books were requested and promised to be furnished at the beginning of April. Mr. Kelly as well as Miss Hershey and other officials who ought to know stated repeatedly that these books were ordered. There is no shortage of books and no difficulty to procure them. Nevertheless, up to the present time none of these books arrived but one. This situation invites speculation on the reliability of statements given by the authorities, or the efficiency of certain offices or the lack of interest in necessary procurements.

The same can be said of laboratory equipment; we would have been unable to stain a blood smear for about a week if we had not obtained the necessary stain by ourselves. For a long time, we have been waiting in vain for the requisitioned stain. We have an expensive incubator but not a single culture medium as yet and for quite some time we have been in urgent need of some reagent. - Hospital operations are still hampered by the lack of a steriliser and so is the dental work by the failure to obtain an additional dentist chair.

A similar situation exists concerning the medical care for eye patients. A specialist was announced, he did not arrive and that apparently was the end of the matter.

At present we are inclined to believe that the authorities feel justified by the prevailing favorable health situation to pay only little attention to health problems. However, we wish to make it quite clear that any complacency in this matter is entirely unwarranted as the situation is far from being under control and danger is just around the corner.