

INTERNAL RELATIONS DIVISION

The Internal Relations Office was originally organized and designated as the Liaison Office and was directed by Patrol Inspector Larry R. Elwood. On June 8, 1943, the writer, then Assistant Officer in Charge of the Fort Stanton Internment Camp, was detailed to Crystal City to take over direction of this division.

Upon arrival, the staff of the Liaison Office was found to be quartered in the east end of the present Food Market building. Here, in four small rooms, a valiant effort was being made to take care of the censoring of several thousand pieces of mail and numerous packages, amid the confusion of people buying groceries, people wanting employment, people wanting better housing, people wanting answers to a myriad of questions and people just wanting. Many of these questions concerned problems new and different from anything encountered previously. Details of a few of these will be given later.

There followed a period of orientation and familiarization with the camp, its programs, policies and aims. Within a few weeks a pattern of things to come was beginning to materialize. Looking back, it might be compared to a giant jig-saw puzzle. A few pieces were in place, with others recognized but not yet ready to be set in, and it might be said that the puzzle had, for all concerned, a certain fascination, a certain something, which for all the work, sweat and frustration obviously in store, would not allow anyone to give up or turn back. And the principal reward in view was headaches, heartaches and backaches. But no one shirked.

By July 1, 1943 the writer had perceived that his division was understaffed. A plan was drawn up outlining the work to be performed, the personnel needed at that time and the personnel need as the camp population increased. It was necessary to justify this recommendation to the Officer in Charge and to Mr. W. F. Kelly, Assistant Commissioner for Alien Control. However, with their suggestions, recommendations, and directions, an adequate staff was authorized and very soon organized. Larry R. Elwood was appointed Assistant Liaison Officer, a new and larger office was made available and business commenced to pick up. Not that it hadn't already been adequate

One of the most complex problems was the billeting of families. Here were seven or eight types and sizes of quarters designed to fit the varying needs of different sizes of families. To further complicate this, however, it was found that each family had an individuality all its own. For instance, here was a family of five consisting of father, mother and three sons, ages one, three and five and here was another of five persons consisting of father, mother and sons, ages 14 and 17 and daughter, age 15½. Obviously these two families of five persons were faced with entirely different situations. We were trying to house the maximum number of people in the camp, keeping in mind, of course, the social problems involved etc., while the internees, naturally, were trying to obtain living quarters as large as was possible. We soon found that we could lay down no hard and fast rule for

occupancy of quarters and follow it in all cases. We also found we could not give one person a concession without having to give it to all.

As the camp population swelled, it was often found necessary to move families from the quarters being occupied to other quarters, for one reason or another. Here we encountered that trait of humanity (even in internment) which might be expressed - "Here - this is my home, I built that shelf in the corner, I planted those flowers, you can't do this to me." And sometimes, probably because we knew we could if we wanted to, and also because of that American phenomena sometimes called by our enemies "Softness", we didn't move them.

Then we suddenly discovered that a family of three or four does not necessarily remain a family of three or four. Life goes on even in an internment camp. So the expecting mother must be treated as all expecting mothers are treated. Living must be made a little easier, things a little more convenient. So we arrange for a little private cottage, with hot and cold water, gas range, bathroom, a good bed and all the conveniences we have available. This gives us an "inner glow" for having been able to do a good deed. And then "Junior" arrives, a few months fly by and it is necessary for the family to go back to their simpler quarters to make room for another expecting mother. Then that trait, previously mentioned, of "squatter's right", crops up. Then you explain, and argue, and issue ultimatums, and set dead lines and you wonder why people have to be so unreasonable and finally feeling like you want to blow up, you manage to say the right thing and the family, without further ado, vacates the quarters and you proceed to install the other family in the cottage and regain your sense of humor. Indeed, it is found you are in a bad shape around an internment camp if you don't have a sense of humor.

And then you have the family whom nothing pleases -- the rooms are too small, the windows are in the wrong place, the apartment is too hot, the floors are too hard, and nothing is right. They inform you that they have been used to far better and they would never have put their servants in such a place. You advise them that they have the same quarters as the others and that they will have to make the best of it. But they never resign themselves and they constantly seek better quarters or attempt to have the ones they are in fixed up, by someone else.

Then in contrast, you have the family who before the war owned a newspaper, an import-export business, or a security exchange and who could write a five or six figure check and who lived in a mansion. They quietly take the quarters assigned, spend a few days planning and figuring and then they proceed by sweat of their own brow to make their quarters a home. They build a shelf here, and one there, out of some scrap they have found. They daub a little paint here and there. They plant some grass and flowers. They start some climbing vine such as morning glory or moon vine and string it in such a way as to make a shady arbor, and other than to thank you for

that quart of paint you gave them, you never hear from them.

Then we had Mrs. "Malingerer" who was living in cottage A. Her ailments fluctuated in direct proportion to the number of persons needing cottages and the pressure being exerted to evict her from the cottage. Observations would be made and reports submitted showing Mrs. "M" was up and about. Hospital records would be checked and it would be ascertained she had not necessitated any treatment for several weeks. Mrs. "M" would be called and told to prepare to move to other quarters in order to take care of an urgent case. Within a few hours, Mrs. "M" would suffer a relapse. She would have to go to the hospital, she would need special medicines, special doctors and special diets. Her ailment would become so real in her mind that according to the Medical Officer in Charge she was in reality a sick woman, and so it would go....

Yes, frustration, headaches, backaches and earaches are your lot when dealing with billeting. But the pattern unfolds as time goes by and the hard part is behind you. You begin to place the problem in its proper place in the puzzle and it makes a little more sense.

Then there was the internee employment situation. The farm manager needs forty employees. Only twenty have volunteered. There follows conferences with the Spokesmen's groups. Explanations are offered to the effect that the farm work is too hard, the weather is too hot, the workers all want office jobs, etc. You manage to get a few more out to work and then one morning you hear that the workers have all quit. Investigation shows they are indeed not working. You call them all together and find that their complaint is that the irrigation water is ruining their shoes, that they want additional clothing due to the fact that theirs is wearing out abnormally fast due to necessity of frequent laundering. Also they would, like a say as to what is planted, and where and when and how. You advise them that quitting their job is no way to solve their problem and promise them that if they will return to work you will present their complaint to the Officer in Charge and the Farm Manager. They return to work and in a short time the Officer in Charge issues instructions correcting the situation insofar as their complaint is justified.

We soon discovered that our employment situation had all the problems encountered in any business or enterprise employing hundreds of workers, such as, a large turnover of workers, many "drones", resignation of key employees, strikes and other difficulties too numerous to mention. Our Employment Section proceeded to place into effect a program designed to smooth out these various situations. This program proved to be a success and resulted in the saving of many thousands of dollars and in the accomplishment of a smooth functioning Internee organization. Credit for this success is not due the Employment Section alone, as all Divisions participated in the program, but a large amount of work, planning, and effort was put forth by that section.

The internees soon found that no problem they might have, however big or small, was too complicated or too insignificant for a solution by the administration and they soon settled into the pattern necessary for the smooth operation of the camp. Another piece of the jig-saw puzzle had taken its shape and color and found its place.

Our largest and busiest section, the Internee Mail and Censorship Unit, seemed from the very first to have found its proper groove. This is not intended to infer that no difficulties were encountered, for such would be untrue. However, the general mechanics of operation were set up and have, with only minor changes, remained the same. Our aim here was the maximum service with a minimum of delay consistent with a policy of careful censorship. Considering the fact that this unit handled thousands of pieces of mail and packages monthly, it is believed remarkable that not one single letter or package was ever established to have been lost by an official Service employee. In fact, a record system, so complete and accurate was maintained, that in numerous cases the local U.S. Postoffice called upon us to check and verify certain records and facts. We were able by our records to assist internees in securing funds and settlements from business houses for purchases and parts of orders not received and for which they had paid. Also, we were able to assist mail order houses and other institutions to collect for C.O.D. shipments sent as straight parcel post. We have never found a justifiable complaint with this particular phase of censorship.

This also might be said to be one of our most interesting operations. Here we are able to learn many things which were of inestimable value in operating the camp as a whole. We were also able to furnish the Department with information connected with the security of the country. Attempts to evade censorship were discovered, with often amusing circumstances. One such case is recalled in which messages were attempted to be smuggled in and out under the stamps of envelopes. This particular case proved to be an illicit love affair. The person involved, a woman internee, was thwarted in her every attempt and at our latest observations, was living quietly and quite happily with her husband and family, the other part of the triangle apparently having given up his attempts to lure her away.

We believe that perhaps an interesting book could be written around the camp postal unit, but here it is suffice to say that another very colorful piece of the puzzle found its pattern and was fitted into its proper place.

The internal security of the camp was the responsibility of the Liaison Division until the Internal Relations Division was organized, and in this unit, we could always be assured of something new and different. During construction of the camp we were faced with the situation of the internees removing building materials from the various jobs for their own personal use. These depredations reached alarming proportions and it became necessary to search the homes and recover the material. This only served to make the malfactors more cautious. It then became necessary to fence in certain areas

and to restrict the internees from entering. The situation never entirely abated until the main construction work was completed, as it was virtually impossible to guard all of the area under construction. It must be said, however, that the majority of building materials purloined were used in and around the housing units to improve their livability and were not taken out of the camp or otherwise misused. Nevertheless, the guards were kept on their toes and eventually succeeded in keeping this nuisance to a minimum.

Security was also responsible for receiving and examining all incoming parties of internees and their baggage. Amusing and semi-serious situations arose in this connection when internees would attempt to conceal and smuggle into the camp, money and other things they felt would be taken from them. We particularly recall the group who loudly protested having to submit their baggage for inspection claiming they were "officials" and "semi-officials" of the German Government and, therefore, not subject to such indignity. Over their protests and loud howls of dismay the search proceeded. The guards immediately found cameras, binoculars, questionable books and documents and a pistol and shells. The protests stopped at once and the guards proceeded to thoroughly examine the remainder of the baggage, finding many items of contraband.

We also recall the consternation created when it was ruled that no currency over the denomination of \$20.00 could be used in the camp. This uncovered quite a large cache of \$50.00 and \$100.00 bills, evidently smuggled into the camp concealed in shoes (judging by the musty odor of the money), hems of clothing, and in other inaccessible places.

Instances of peace disturbances were another source of headaches. Speaking of headaches recalls the finding of evidence that illicit distillery operations were being carried on. A warning was posted on the bulletin board calling attention to the regulations prohibiting such activity. This apparently had no effect and after some further investigation, it was found that a certain internee was having quite a prolific "schnaps" business. A report came in one morning to the effect that the subject was in the process of "running off a batch of brew". A raiding party was dispatched and the still was found to be merrily running off the "Skull-pop" with the internee and two cronies in close attendance. They had several gallons of the finished product and several gallons of mash ready to be run. Quite an elaborate setup had been made from two five gallon fire extinguishers, which they had appropriated, a length of copper pipe and some very neat soldering. Needless to say, operations ceased at once.

Then there was Mr. "Tough Internee" who liked to impress other internees as to his mightyness. One evening he went to the home of another internee, who, while some years his elder, was, nevertheless, in splendid physical condition. Mr. "Tough Internee" proceeded to threaten and speak in an argumentative

manner about some supposed grievance. He was asked politely to leave and when he would not, the door was slammed in his face. Enraged, he battered down the door, barged in and proceeded to administer a lesson to the resident. Mr. "T.I." quickly found himself to be the recipient of a lesson in the manly arts. He discovered himself pinned to the floor after about as rough a two minutes as he had ever experienced. When the guards arrived on the scene and took custody of the offensive one he was found to be ready for commitment to the hospital for treatment of many lacerations, bruises and bumps. He received no serious injury, except to his dignity, but he apparently received a lesson in conduct, as he has never been found since to be mixed up in anything more serious than beating the dust off of his wife's rugs.

All in all the security situation was found to be similar in many respects to that found in any other community. We had our Juvenile Problem, we had our petty crime problem and we had our gang problem, but in one way or another, it was worked out. And another piece of the puzzle came out of the maze and was placed in its proper location.

As stated previously our problem of internal camp organization and setup was recognized and plans were made for the future. As time went by and the war progressed, our internee population increased, and the nature of personal services required, changed accordingly. In the beginning, our personal assistance was needed mainly in helping to locate lost personal property, securing approval for the reuniting of members of families, help in securing the transfer of personal funds and other things of a like nature. Later we were confronted with the parole and relocation of families and all its attendant problems. It was then determined that a personal services and welfare section was needed. This unit was organized and proceeded to function. As its scope of work increased, it was expanded and took on an added importance.

Many interesting and difficult situations were encountered in this phase of our work. One of our most trying situations arose when a German internee, married to a native of Panama, was interned at large. The internee was permitted to depart from the camp and leave his family behind in order to more easily find work and arrange for housing, after which his family planned to join him. The wife was expecting a child in a few months and as she had several other small children she, no doubt, had a hard job caring for herself and for them. To make matters more difficult, someone had informed Mr. Internee that his wife had been having an affair with another internee prior to joining him in the camp and that her pregnancy was as a result of her indiscretions. While he never evidenced any belief in this, he informed his wife of what he had been told. After his departure she became obsessed with the idea that he believed this tale and intended to abandon her. To make matters worse, he encountered trouble in locating suitable living quarters and considerable time elapsed. Mrs. Internee went from bad to worse and finally worked herself up to such a state of mind that shortly after her child was born, she became very unbalanced mentally. She neglected her children,

she went from here to there in the camp, she came to the office with various complaints, and to make things more difficult (if possible) she forgot what little English language she knew, thereby making it extremely hard to reason with her. She threw our whole office and organization into a turmoil with her various problems and our efforts in trying to help her out. Finally, when it seemed we could do no more, we arranged for Mr. Internee to come for her. Upon his arrival she appeared to regain some of her composure. It was with a sigh of relief that we saw the family finally off. We learned later, however, that upon arrival at her new home, she suddenly relapsed into her former state and created quite a difficult situation. At last report, however, she was improving and apparently on the road to recovery.

We were confronted from time to time with the age old problem of strained marital relations. These conditions seemed to be, in a large measure, due to the unnatural and confining conditions of an internment camp. Strangely enough, we had only one case come to our attention which might be said to have been based upon infidelity. This case was merely one of suspicion, and was finally resolved with both husband and wife apparently happy.

Another situation which caused us considerable concern was that of neighborhood "squabbles". These situations at times appeared childish or outright foolish, but were nonetheless real and serious to the persons involved. They were also the result of close confinement and of having to live, day in and day out, side by side with people with a minimum of privacy. After a bitter flareup one of the aggrieved parties would come into the office demanding that the (to them) obnoxious family living next door be moved to some other part of the camp. There would follow a series of conferences with the two families in which their obligation to get along peacefully would be explained and finally, peace would be restored. In some cases we found families who felt no obligation to maintain peace, and who would do just as they pleased with no thought of the other people concerned. In these cases, it was necessary to sternly "lay down the law", and to admonish them to refrain from the practices causing the difficulty.

Again it might be said that a book could be written around the personal problems of the internees and our contact with them regarding same, but we will not try to do that here. We will say, that they were amusing at times and at others - tragic. We saw people who were strong and bore their burdens with admirable courage and others who were weak and couldn't take it. We saw those who were made strong by their tribulations and those who lost their courage. We, who were working with these people, felt a variety of emotions from sympathy and friendliness to the opposite extreme. In this phase of our operations, we were never complacent and were always aware that we had our finger on the pulse of the "little city" which was the Internment Camp, and which could always be depended on to provide something new and interesting in the way of problems.

Last but not least, there was our official personnel. In regard to the employees of the Internal Relations Division, I wish to give to them the credit for any measure of success we may have accomplished. With regard to any failures I would like to justify them by saying that we have never found any foundation for a charge of wilfull negligence or malicious misconduct. Any mistakes they made were those of commission and not of omission. In other words, we have always had the utmost confidence that one and all would try to do something about a given situation whether it was right or wrong. And they were never very wrong. In short they were honest, faithful, cooperative, resourceful, dependable and last, but not least, human in their contacts and relations with the internees.

In closing, the writer has but one personal comment to make, i.e.: the opportunity to work with the internees and the experience gained has been of inestimable value, but if it were all to do over againwell - I believe I'd join the Army.