

## DEPOSITION

of

LE DRUILLENEC, Harold Osmond.

of 28 West Park Avenue, JERSEY, CHANNEL ISLANDS.

Occupation: Schoolmaster. Born at JERSEY 5th August 1911.

I am a British subject. On 5th June 1944 I was arrested by the Germans in JERSEY for harbouring an escaped Russian officer and listening to the BBC. I was sentenced to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  months imprisonment.

After two months of imprisonment in JERSEY and in FRANCE I came to NEUENGAMME concentration camp on 1st September 1944. A few days later on the 5th September I was sent to the Aussenkommando at WILHELMSHAVEN. My transport was the first transport which opened the camp. I stayed at the WILHELMSHAVEN concentration camp until the beginning of April 1945. I was then evacuated to BERGEN-BELSEN I was liberated by British troops.

In WILHELMSHAVEN I worked most of the time as a welder.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE CAMP.

My transport on the 5th September was the first transport from NEUENGAMME to the WILHELMSHAVEN Aussenkommando. The transport was made up of 980 non-German political prisoners; the greater part were Frenchmen. There were 20 German kapos.

The inmates of the WILHELMSHAVEN camp were engaged on work in the Westwerft, WILHELMSHAVEN, which produced ships, submarines and ships parts. We stayed at a part of the BANTERWEG camp which was wired off from the remainder of the camp.

I was told that the BANTERWEG camp was formerly a training camp for Hitler Youth, and on seeing it I could well believe it. When the camp was first opened it had a complement of 1000 prisoners made up of approximately 700 Frenchmen, 200 Russians, 20 German kapos and the rest of various nationalities. There was another Englishman in addition to myself.

After Christmas 1944 various transports arrived from NEUENGAMME so that the number of inmates varied from 1000 to 1500. When I left in early April 1945 the camp was abandoned.

The mortality rate was high, especially during the worst winter months. During December, January and February approximately 250 inmates died. The reason for the deaths of a quarter of the concentration camp inmates within three months cannot be found in one or more specified diseases, but must be attributed to the general condition of the concentration camp and to the system of German concentration camps generally - viz. deaths through work. The diseases which were the ultimate cause of death were; tuberculosis, pneumonia, famine oedema, dysentery etc.

CHARACTERS.

Hauptsturmfuehrer THUEMEL: was the camp commandant for about two months. His Rapportfuehrer was SS Sturmann DRESCHER. THUEMEL was replaced at the end of October by Oberscharfuehrer GUNTHER, GUNTHER's Rapportfuehrer was HOFFMANN. The Blockfuehrer was SS Sturmann JEPSEN. GUNTHER was dismissed and sent to the Aussenkommando MEPPEN and was replaced by Obersturmfuehrer BUESCHER a month later. The last commandant was Hauptsturmfuehrer SCHWANKE.

The Lageraelteste was Alfrid WAGNER, who was later shot in early January 1945 by Sturmann JEPSEN. WAGNER was replaced by Walter BESCH. Blockaelteste 11, who then became Lageraelteste. Another Blockaelteste was Paul NOWAK, also known as "Oma", and Emil NITZ who was Blockaelteste 111. /Ernst

Ernst PINGEL was Blockaelteste IV.

Kapos were : Albert SCHMIDT and JUP amongst others.

Oberleutnant FUNKE, Marine-Oberbaudirektor HORSTMANN and DROSSEN were in charge of the marine works. In charge of the welding shop was foreman HUBER. Foreman JANSEN was in charge of the smithy.

#### BILLETS.

As we were billeted in a former Hitler Youth camp our accommodation was reasonably good. We had a bed each and huts were in good condition.

#### FOOD.

The food which the inmates received during the first months would have been insufficient and very bad even if no hard work would had to have been done. For the first months half of the inmates had no breakfast at all; the other half received a cup of black, unsweetened coffee, no food for anyone. At midday there was one litre of swede soup.

At night one-seventh of a loaf of bread per person and a little bit of margarine.

After the first months food improved. We had a little watery soup in the morning and at midday a better soup. At night a quarter of a loaf of bread per man. No special rations were issued for heavy workers.

In our block in the last months we had sixty plates for 360 people and we had not enough time to feed in comfort as our plates were needed for the next shift. Each one had a spoon.

#### DAILY ROUTINE.

Reveille at 0430 hours; breakfast 0500 hours.

A certain number of people were left in each hut as orderlies. The majority went out to the works parade which took place from 0515 to 0530 hours each morning in all weathers, till the SS or Kriegsmarine guard turned up to collect the prisoners to lead them into the factory at about 0620 hours. We reached the factory at about 0650 hours.

The only time off during the day was a half-hour at lunch time between 1200 and 1230 hours. We worked till 1300 hours and returned to the camp at about 1900 hours. During the working day we were not allowed to sit down or to lean or rest in any other way. When we came back we had the evening parade which varied between five minutes and three hours. Communal punishments were carried out after the parade. After the parade we received our evening meal, but it sometimes happened that the kapos kept the meal back from the prisoners. On Sundays we worked until 1300 hours.

In February the shortage of materials caused a change in working hours. We worked only from 0800 in the morning until 1700 hours and finished work on Saturdays at 1400 hours.

Oberleutnant FUNKE, HORSTMANN and DROSSEN were in charge of the marine work. They imposed work which was much too hard for the prisoners in their particular state of health. Concentration camp inmates had to work with 14 lb. sledge hammers the whole day and on the food they were getting it meant certain death. They were inspecting the factory all day so they could see that the work of the prisoners was much too hard. FUNKE was also a fanatical Nazi. Although they never killed anyone personally, their regime of work was responsible for hundreds of deaths.

The main work was the lathe turning of metal and fittings, blacksmith's work and electro-and oxy-acetylene welding. This occupied about 700 to 800 in the day shift and about 300 to 400 in the night shift.

In February a number of inmates were engaged in clearing the bomb damage in WILHELMSHAVEN because there was not enough work in the factory. When the people returned from the bomb clearing party, it was an everyday occurrence that between 4 to 20 had been carried because they were either dead or in a state of collapse.

#### GUARDS.

There were about 4 or 5 German SS men in the camp who were running the camp. We were guarded by approximately 60 French SS men for the first 2½ months; these were replaced by German Kriegsmarine-guardsmen. Those people guarded us in the camp, escorted us to work and guarded the factory. The French SS guards were armed with rifles and they used to administer blows on the march to and from work. The only time we had a chance to be in daylight was on Sunday afternoons, because during the week we left before daybreak and returned after nightfall.

#### CLOTHING.

Clothing consisted of: one shirt usually tattered; one pair of under-pants thin as paper; one pair of blue and white striped trousers; one blue and white striped jacket; no overcoat; wooden soled canvas shoes; one blue and white striped cap. For the work in the factory we were given an overall, which we had to take off for the parade. During the whole time I was in the concentration camp I had only three changes of under-clothing. I remember that I received a set of underclothing just after Christmas which I was still wearing when I was liberated at BELSEN. There were no facilities for the repair of clothing.

In those four garments - shirt, pants, jacket and trousers - we had to parade every day in the open and I distinctly remember the parade on Christmas Day 1944 for the issue of cigarettes. At 1300 hours there were about 20° Fahrenheit or - 12° Centigrade of frost, six inches of snow were on the ground and icicles were hanging from the neighbouring huts. We stood to attention for approximately five hours in our garments. Some of us then received five cigarettes. Many persons died during the following days as a result of this exposure.

In the factory we were under the supervision of German foremen, some of whom were brutal to the prisoners. One could see that they enjoyed impressing their "master race complex" on the prisoners.

#### PUNISHMENTS.

There were many forms of punishment, the most common of all being flogging. Flogging was done by German kapos on the spot. These were hourly occurrences in the camp. The most common number of strokes was 25 to 50. The highest number was 200. Three kinds of weapons were used. The first was a rubber hose sometimes loaded with cane. The second weapon was an electric cable, three-quarters of an inch in diameter which used to take off the flesh. The third was a spliced rope's end, three inches in diameter. Flogging was considered a light punishment.

Another form of punishment was the "communal exercises". The kapo Paul NOWAK had the communal exercises developed to such a fine technique that he installed an electric buzzer in his block. The button operating the buzzer was by his bed. Paul NOWAK used to make us do physical exercises to the sound of the buzzer which he controlled from his bed. Every time he sounded the buzzer we had to go up and down, up and down etc., while his overseers saw to it that his instructions were carried out.

The typical punishment for stealing swedes from the big ten ton heap was as follows; the person was made to get on a stool in the "knees bent" position the arms stretched forward. Into each hand was put a large swede which the victim had to hold up. One swede was put into his mouth on which he had to bite. In this position he had to remain until he fell off the stool; then he was beaten and made to get back on to the stool till the kapos concerned thought it was enough.

In any case a punishment for any particular crime was very uncertain. For instance, a concentration camp inmate who stole a swede was made to break ice on the pond and was put into the water. I think he was drowned, but I am not sure.

The heavy punishment which was given for stealing from the kitchen or for attempts to escape was done in public before the whole camp. First the prisoner was beaten up, punched in the face till he fell, and kicked about the body until he got up again, and this lasted for about ten minutes. At the end of that time he had a quarter of an hour's respite, while the others were informed why he was being punished. That was translated into six languages. He was then made to bend over and to take a flogging of 50 strokes or more. This punishment was usually given by the kapos, but on occasions the SS leaders joined in giving some extra strokes. Again the prisoner was given a rest while the camp was given a sermon as to what would happen to them if they committed this type of offence. At the end of this the prisoner was then taken to a post outside Block 1, some twelve feet high, with a cross portion at the top, in the form of a letter T. The victim's wrists were then tied behind him and he was hanged by the wrists on to the cross portion of the post. In this fashion two persons could hang on the same post. The length of time during which he was suspended varied, and usually lasted for hours. He was always removed prior to death to the camp jail where he was kept well fed and some fortnight or three weeks later was sent to the central NEUENGAMME camp to be finally hanged.

If anybody tried to escape on the march he was shot immediately. His head was mutilated by further shots and then he was placed in a prominent position so that all inmates could see him. Most prominently engaged in administering punishments were Walter BESCH, Emil NITZ, Ernst PINGEL and Paul NOWAK, while the SS in charge of the camp watched and encouraged the proceedings.

#### MEDICAL ARRANGEMENTS.

There was a camp infirmary, very inadequate at first, where very sick prisoners slept three in one bed in a very small room. Later a complete block was used. The hospital was run by three prisoner doctors who managed as well as they could under the circumstances. They were: Guy MOREAU; TONDERS (Pole); ISAKOW (Russian). An SS doctor visited the camp infirmary periodically every fortnight. I myself was three times a patient in the hospital and I know that the hospital was most inadequately supplied with medicines, bandages and other equipment which, of course, increased the mortality rate. Sick parade was after return from work, the day shift in the evening, and the night shift in the morning. There were periodical transports of sick people to some unknown destination; TB patients etc. were despatched in convoys. People who suffered only from general exhaustion were not allowed to go to the hospital as every patient had to show an open wound or have a temperature.

#### WELFARE.

We had no canteen, no postal service, nor any other kind of welfare in the camp.

#### EVACUATION.

On 4th April 1945 the camp was evacuated, partly by train, partly by march. I was in the train convoy. JEPSEN and members of the Kriegsmarine were in charge of the convoy.

/Individual

Individual Acts of Brutality which I witnessed:

People involved in these were: SS Mann DRESCHER, JEPSEN, Walter BESCH, Ernst PINGED, Emil MITZ, and, as far as I know, Paul NOWAK.

One case concerned a young Frenchman from ALSACE in late September 1944, the official interpreter in the infirmary. He had been caught stealing tit-bits of food from the patients' plates. He was only 15 years old. I saw him being driven into Block 111 by Walter BESCH, Paul NOWAK and Ernst PINGEL. Walter BESCH informed the victim that he had committed an unforgivable crime by not only stealing from his comrades, but from his sick comrades. "For that we shall make your punishment an example for the whole camp. First of all you will be driven mad and only after this has been achieved you will be made to die".

After having been thoroughly beaten the boy was taken by the three kapos and Sturmmann DRESCHER to the camp jail. The boy was in the jail for one week and he came out like a walking skeleton, raving mad. I could observe that his blankets were taken out every evening and thoroughly wetted before he got them back. The four persons mentioned used to go into the jail three times a day. What precisely occurred I do not know. When the boy came out he had a horror of spoons; as soon as he saw one he would go into a mad fit so that he could not be fed normally. We suspected that in the bunker he had been fed with heated spoons. He was made to work in the factory on the heavy press where he had to do everything at the double. He died at the end of a fortnight in a mad fit.

BESCH was chiefly responsible for this incident as it was his idea to drive the boy mad, and he received every encouragement from the SS personnel.

At the end of September 1944 an 18 year old Russian fell asleep during the night shift and left his drilling machine running. This damaged the base plates of the drilling machine. This, I was told by the workers of the night shift.

I recognise the machine on the pictures marked Exhibits 'A' and 'B' now shown me.

DRESCHER insisted that this Russian should be hanged and had him sent to NEUENGAMME with a recommendation that he should be hanged. One month later he was returned to the camp with the necessary papers ordering his hanging in public. The rumour in the camp was DRESCHER was instrumental in bringing about this hanging. The prisoner was led into the factory by DRESCHER to be hanged in front of his drilling machine. He was actually hanged by Walter BESCH.

Walter BESCH was continuously seen beating concentration camp inmates with any of the three weapons I mentioned above, i.e. rubber hose, electric cable or spliced rope end. I cannot give any incidents because they were much too numerous. He was the worst character in the camp.

Paul NOWAK: the following incident gives a good illustration of NOWAK's character;-

We had an old Belgian in my room. For some reason or other NOWAK took a strong dislike to the Belgian. Daily he used to pick out the Belgian to beat him with a rubber truncheon. When the Belgian became ill he was not allowed medical aid. His death followed a week later. This occurred in February/March 1945.

His communal punishments were the worst in the camp. Very frequently he made the prisoners do physical exercises or he used to line up his whole block. As he was too lazy to do the beating himself, he used to get Emil MITZ or other prisoners, a Frenchman named DUC and some Russians, to beat the prisoners. He also installed a punishment room in his block, the so-called / "Stube 10".

"Stube 10" (Room 10). People who were unfortunate enough to get into this punishment room were almost certain to die as a result of the constant ill-treatment.

Emil NITZ: He was reputed to have beaten many people to death in NEUENGAMME before he came to our camp. I personally saw him beat three persons to death at WILHELMSHAVEN. The first one was a Jew, whom NITZ withdrew from the infirmary, beat him thoroughly and sent back the remains. The Jew never recovered consciousness and died two hours later. This happened in February 1945.

In the infirmary he beat up another Jew who also died as a result.

The third victim was a French university student, a good friend of mine. Because somebody had stolen a pair of boots from him he was given 150 strokes by NITZ. The Frenchman died the next day. There were so many other cases that it is impossible to give details.

Ernst PINGEL: He was not such a bad character as the others and had to lose his temper before he flogged anyone. On such occasions, however, he would flog severely. He played a prominent part in incidents which took place in the jail and also in the hanging of men by the wrists on the T post.

The kapos Albert SCHMIDT and JUPP were also keen on severe floggings and other punishments designed to lower the tone of health of the prisoners.

Signed H.O. Le DRUILLENEC.

SWORN by the said Deponent, Harold Osmond LE DRUILLENEC, voluntarily at BILD OEYNHAUSEN, on 7th April 1946, before me, Captain Anton Walter FREUD, General List, of War Crimes Investigation Unit MAOR, detailed by C-in-C, British Army of the Rhine.

Signed A.W. FREUD. Capt.

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