

OFFICE OF U.S. CHIEF OF COUNSEL
FOR PROSECUTION OF AXIS CRIMINALITY

INTERROGATION DIVISION SUMMARY

Interrogation of: Gottlob BERGER
By: Lt. Col. Brookhart, 19 October 1945, P.M., Nuremberg.

PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS IMPLICATED, AND SUBJECTS

1. BERGER

- a. Prisoner of War Administration (pp. 1-16)
- (1) Distribution of Red Cross Parcels (pp. 1-16)
 - (a) Hitler's orders (pp. 3-4; p. 15)
 - (b) Interference with Delivery (pp. 14-16)
 - (2) Personnel Involved (pp. 1-21; pp. 6-8)
 - (3) Visits of Red Cross Representatives (p. 10)
 - (4) Reduction in Rations (pp. 11-14)

PRISONER OF WAR ADMINISTRATION

Referring to the order of 1 October 1944 (Document F-129) which placed Berger in charge of Prisoner of War affairs under Reichsfuehrer SS Himmler. (p. 1-2) The intention was to place the Prisoner of War camps under a separate administration from that of the Concentration Camps.

At the time, October 1944, Hitler's chief concern in the matter of the PW camps related to the large stores of food which were concentrated near the camps and his fear that these food reserves might fall into the hands of invading troops. (p. 3) Himmler suggested that the food reserves should be turned over to the National Socialist Welfare organization. It was not until later that Berger discovered that the food reserves referred to were the mercy packages which had been sent by the Red Cross. (p. 4) An order was issued to the effect that all food accumulated at the camps was to be used up within a 14 day period, that there was not only the danger from the stand-point of security reasons but likewise the danger of destruction by fire, etc. The order was then changed to the extent that the food was to be used before the end of November (which was a more reasonable provision than the 14 day requirement). It was likewise intended to prevent the food coming into the hands of the local political groups--the Gauleiters. (p. 6)

In the Wehrmacht organization prisoner of war administration was under the General Department of OKW (General Reinecke) with General Westhof in immediate charge of the prisoner of war section. (p. 5)

Maurer was appointed as Berger's assistant in his task. Maurer opened negotiations with Reinecke's office and it was decided that General Westhof was to take charge of International problems involving PW affairs, Berger was to take over the management of the camps. (p. 6)

Berger, 19 October, PM, 1945

All appointments to Berger's organization were made by the Army Personnel Office. Berger had no negotiations with Juettner, of the SS. (p. 7) Berger stated that he had only one conference with Pohl relating to the matter of transferring Belsenbruck Camp (a mixed camp of concentration camp inmates and prisoner of war) to Pohl. Berger stated that he agreed in view of the fact that he was opposed to mixing the two groups. (p. 8) Although Berger had been told by Himmler to confer with Kaltenbrunner regarding security measures within the camps he never held any such conferences principally because he did not want to involve the RSHA in any matters concerning prisoner of war affairs. (p. 8)

Under Berger, representatives of the Red Cross were permitted to visit the camps every four weeks (instead of every eight weeks as formerly). During the period of Berger's office it was never reported to him that in any instance the Camp Guards had appropriated any of the Red Cross food or parcels to their own use. (p. 10)

The parcels were to be used to supplement the prisoner's daily ration which in February and March was to be drastically reduced. Berger stated that the continued distribution of the parcels on the same level as before was opposed by Hitler in spite of the reduction in normal daily ration. Berger had a meeting with Hitler in January. Discussions were held re furnishing of food to prisoners through the Red Cross-- Hitler complained that it was an "impossible situation" that the enemy prisoners of war should be better fed than the German people. (p. 11-14)

Berger stated that there were 340,000 prisoners of war (English and American) housed in the various camps in January, 1945. French prisoners were not included in view of the fact that they were employed in factories, etc. as laborers. (p. 14) Berger stated that it was impossible that there should have been instances wherein packages destined for delivery to prisoners were in fact not delivered.. It was true that strafing and other war-time interferences often times disrupted communications. However, Berger's task was not that of distribution-- merely to make certain that representatives of the Red Cross were not prevented by any agencies or officials from bringing their supplies to the various camps. (p. 14-15)

Regarding the reserves of food which existed in October, these were used up by November. Hitler's orders for distribution to other agencies, i.e. the NSV, were disregarded. For a period of six weeks from then, there was an interruption of parcel shipments. Berger stated that he made no inquiry as to the reasons for the stoppage. "My assignment was confined to the administration of the prisoner of war camps with the help of the Superior Police and the SS Officials." (p. 15) After the meeting in January Berger "just let things drift". Hitler had threatened Berger with interment in a concentration camp unless he complied with his orders regarding the handling of prisoner supplies. Berger permitted things to remain in the status quo indifferent to Hitler's threat. (p. 15-16)