

Ex-Prisoners Say Conditions Not Bad

Former Captives Relate Experiences For Relatives of Men Still Held

By HARRY AMON.

Conditions in Jap prison camps and "the stories you people in the States read about atrocities in the camps are greatly exaggerated," Cpl. Willard Hall, who spent 32 months as a prisoner of the Japs after Batán fell, told 2,000 persons in Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

"Of course there were cases of one as First Lt. William Higgins, men receiving brutal treatment at Cpl. Willard Hall and Sgt. Harold F. Shahan relived their days in the hands of the Japanese, but they were spread out over a period of two years," Hall said, reporting on his imprisonment in Cebu and then on his subsequent escape when a Jap transport was torpedoed.

Crowd Is Surprised.

Hall was one of 10 repatriated and two escaped war prisoners who spoke at the Auditorium during a Palm Sunday gathering of families, relatives and friends seeking word of soldiers missing in action or held as war prisoners. The program was presented under the auspices of the Army Air Force and the Louisville chapter of the American Red Cross, and was in charge of Capt. Ragnar Barquist, Flying Fortress pilot who was a Nazi prisoner for eight and one-half months.

The crowd, which filled the main floor of the Auditorium and part of the balcony, showed surprise when the sandy-haired corporal minimized stories of Jap atrocities, which were carried in a number of large national magazines with pictures and which have been published widely in newspapers.

One could sense the feeling of relief that permeated the audi-

Lieutenant Higgins, a B-17 pilot who spent 18 months in German camps and hospitals before being repatriated, was the first. He offered a word outline of the camps, reported on medical and food supplies and regaled the group with humorous tales of camp life.

Food Insufficient.

"Food furnished by the Germans was insufficient for the men, and many would have died of undernourishment if they had not received a parcel from the Red Cross each week," Higgins said.

Higgins brought laughter from the solemn crowd when he told how the Americans made wine for Christmas from raisins sent in the packages.

The Germans discovered about from those areas.

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C.J. Photo.

NEXT OF KIN of prisoners of war, civilian internees and those missing in action heard repatriated and escaped prisoners tell of their days in prison camps yesterday. Three of the speakers at Memorial Auditorium were, from left, Sgt. Donald McPherson, Lincoln, Neb., Capt. William Gentry of Harrodsburg, Ky., and Cpl. Willard E. Hall, of Portland, Ore. McPherson and Hall escaped from the Japs.

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the beverage so we decided to have our Christmas before they had chance to confiscate the wine," he related.

"This complicated matters more because after we finished the wine we decided to exchange compounds with the British prisoners who were held prisoners nearby. We managed to get through the barbed wire entanglement and machine gun barrage and cause the Germans several weeks of trouble trying to straighten their rosters," he continued.

The laughter continued when Higgins told of receiving a telegram while imprisoned informing him that he was the father of a 7½-pound boy. "It took me quite a while to figure that out because I wasn't married," he explained. "It developed that the message was intended for another man."

Higgins and Hall reported food and living conditions were better than had been pictured generally. At times, the food furnished in prison camps was not much in quantity or quality, but the supplies sent by the Red Cross compensated for this shortage, they said.

Prisoners Raised Vegetables.

Higgins said the greatest problem confronted by the men in German camps was how to spend their time. This was solved when athletic equipment, cards and other recreational facilities were sent to Germany by the Y.M.C.A. and other organizations.

Davao and Cabanatuan, Jap camps in the Philippines, were old penal colonies and living quarters were fairly decent, Hall said. At Cabanatuan, the prisoners raised all native vegetables and fruits and some other products, he added.

Individual camps did not have extensive medical supplies, but when men were seriously ill they were evacuated to larger hospitals, Hall said. He was held a

prisoner with Capt. William Gentry, Harrodsburg, and told of his experiences with Gentry.

At this point the people from Harrodsburg were literally sitting on the edge of their chairs as Hall started to tell of serving with Harrodsburg's famed Company D and Captain Gentry. They breathed a sigh of relief when he told of the quality of food and the recreational facilities offered in the camps.

"The food was good and when we didn't like it we bought chow from the natives. When we ran out of money, we swiped tires from the Japanese and sold them to the Filipinos."

Became Vicious Circle.

"After a while this became a vicious circle—we stole from the Japs, sold to the Filipinos, the Japs took them away from the natives and then we grabbed them again," he related.

"The camp was a fine place. There wasn't any distinction between officers and enlisted men and they worked together in the rice paddies. Often I worked with a major or captain next to me."

"He explained that the accepted costume for the fashionable prisoner was a G-string and a hat, and then, glancing at Captain Gentry, he added, you should see Captain Gentry in a G-string."

He Got the Lifebelt.

Hall evoked applause when he told of liquidating a Jap while floating in the water after being thrown from the transport. "I had an injured leg and knew I couldn't swim to shore when sudden like I saw a Jap with a nice lifebelt. I managed to reach land with the lifesaver," he tersely recounted the episode.

Hall urged the relatives to continue writing and sending packages and not to give up hope. The boys over there are worried about only one thing—"you at home," he concluded.

Teaching a German band to

play an old American hit, "Der Fuehrer's Face," was the highlight of Sgt. Harold F. Sheahan's 11-month stay in the Reich.

This happened when Sheahan, a steelworker, told the Nazis he was a musician, and was placed in the band as a drummer. He told the group he got tired of seeing Hitler's face in front of him at every concert, so he decided to teach the band some American numbers.

"I'm sure thankful they didn't learn what the song was until after I got back to the United States," he said.

'Chicagoan' Quizzes Chicagoan.

He told how the Germans had taken great pains to get men who had lived in America to question the prisoners. A German who lived in Chicago (Sheahan's home town) questioned Sheahan about military information and about Chicago.

"Berlin sure has taken a beating from Allied bombers," Sheahan said. "I sure wouldn't want the same thing to happen to any city in the United States."

Other repatriated or escaped prisoners of war on the program were First Lt. James N. Groves, Bayfield, Col.; 1st Lt. Cecil B. Fisher, Washington, Penn.; 1st Lt. Stewart E. Cooper, Cedar Grove, N. J.; Staff Sgt. Azzan McKagan, Milwaukee, Wis.; Staff Sgt. Martin W. Nissen, Oakland, Cal.; Staff Sgt. Edward P. Troy, Houston, Tex., and Staff Sgt. Ralph J. Tomek, Flint, Mich.

Lt. Col. Joseph B. Kavanaugh, assistant director, American Prisoner of War Information Bureau in the office of the provost marshal general, Washington, addressed the parents and relatives of men reported missing in action. He cautioned them not to become depressed because their soldier-relatives have been reported missing. Thousands of the boys have been considered missing and later turned up in prison camps or neutral countries, he said.

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