

C O P Y

Translation from the French

Oran (Algeria, 11/25/42)

What a change in the political and military situation! What a decisive step toward the end of this war! Now everything seems easy which, even yesterday, seemed barred with obstacles. One sees victory itself, until now hidden within the clouds. And that this miracle was carried out quite close to us, on our African soil, that is an ulterior justification of the choice we made in 1940. Imagine the desolate situation of our comrades in France! One had almost let oneself be influenced, for I too, for example, and asked for my transfer to France. Fortunately the paths of the Administration were long.....

When speaking of proves of friendship, I am thinking especially of the fact that you have not forgotten us. That's rare, my old friend. Of all my friends, comrades, etc. who have gone to America hardly one-quarter tries to maintain a correspondence with me. Fate has even favored me a good deal in this respect, for here are some men who have not had any news at all from their friends after their departure. For the second time, at Crampel, I had received money from you, 645.-frs, through the mediation of the "Quakers" of Marseille. I had acknowledged them the two receipts of money from you: the first in the summer of 1942 (860.-fr), the second in the fall of 1942 (645.-fr). The last letter which I wrote you, dates from about the month of August; the last received from you was in the spring of 1942. I cannot give the exact dates because I do not have my little address-book with me - for we are on our way.

Well! It is this journey and everything that has happened to us that I would like to talk to you about now. On hearing this word you probably believe that we are en route for mobilization etc. But no, my dear! We are only returning from Crampel - our abode in the demi-desert south of Oran - to Boghar. Since there is such a lack of trains, we have to wait here, at Oran, for the day when the transport can be continued. I see the question on your lips: But your situation must have changed, fundamentally.... Well then, nothing, nothing at all has changed, until present. On the contrary: The day on which the Americans arrived in Algeria was for us a day of unheard-of persecutions. With us, at Crampel, for example, it was dramatic. We had - and still have - the misfortune of being placed under the command of two Frenchmen, 100% Vichy-men, declared and convinced adherents of the politics of collaboration with Hitler-Germany. I cannot explain to you here all the sufferings which we had to undergo at Crampel: the work of ten hours per day in the heat of the semi-desert, where nothing grows except these miserable herbes called "alfa"; the completely insufficient soup (for example, cooked beets as only dish without anything, neither oil, nor even vinegar; as well small fried cucumber; onions cooked in water, etc.-- these afore-mentioned dishes are meals! Besides the cooked onions, for example, there was nothing else!-- so that most of the comrades have had to sell their last personal effects, shirts, sweaters etc. which will be felt when winter comes; and the bad treatment..... Is it necessary that I tell you about it? You know all that. And then the Americans arrived. That was on the 8th of November, a Sunday. We had heard something rumoured, but nothing

precise; we didn't even know whether it was the Germans or the Americans who were in Oran. There was no news to be had from our two Vichy-men (M. Roger Auger, Chef, and M. Vincelet, Surveillant). Imagine our unrest! The Chief of the Factories of Alfa, M. Ollier, had formally forbidden the civil workers to give us news. The members of the "Legion des Combattants" (Vichy-guard) were mobilized, and we were told that anyone who left the house, took the risk of being shot. Monday morning, Nov. 9. I finally succeeded in having some news, especially the certainty that it wasn't the Germans who were at Oran. I transmitted these news to my comrades, for which I was reproached later as "having assembled my comrades in order to incite them". Monday afternoon, relying upon my exceptional position as physician of the detachment known by the Government, I talked to our chef, M. Auger, to ask him for the following (am giving below the text of the conversation between him and myself):

Muller: In case new Franco-American authorities should arrive at Grampel, I beg you, Monsieur, to ask thier authorization for me to talk to them, in your presence, in order to better explain to them our special situation as foreign refugees.

Auger: But that's conspiring with the enemy!

Muller: With the enemy?

Auger: Yes, because the Government has ordered resistance. What you want to do is contrary to its orders.

Muller: But the Americans are not our enemies. They are the friends of France, and the friends of our Spanish and German refugees, too.

Auger: We shall se about that....

The following night (Nov. 9/10, 1942), I was pulled out of my sleep by armed soldiers of the "Foreign Legion" of Bedeau (9 km. from Grampel), commanded by Sergeant-Chef Fischer, a German brute. One didn't even give me time to get dressed, dragged me across the yard, and threw me on a truck, always giving me kicks with feet and bayonets. On the truck, I was mistreated again, and threatened, with a cord being presented, with being hung on the nearest tree. Comrad Levy, Jesf, a German biologist who had emigrated to France was treated a little less brutally, for having expressed toward the Surveillant Vincelet his joy about the arrival of the Americans. We two were transported to the prison of the Foreign Legion of Bedeau where, under miserable conditions, we had to stay until the 17th of Nov. One certainly would not have let us free even then if the Government had not ordered departure for Boghar. (On the side: that evening my watch was stolen; the comrades were threatened in all possible ways and received almost nothing to eat; in Saida, also south of Oran, all Travailleurs Etrangers (Foreign Workers) were imprisoned for three days, without being mistreated, it is true). On our arrival at Oran, we were received by an armed detachment of native soldiers, surrounded, led to an old camp, locked up in a barrack (all 34) and insulted in a humiliating manner, called undesirables, etc. On the way from the station to the camp, three Spaniards (Caja, Palma, Luvas) received blows from the Surveillant Chef of our present camp "Port Gambetta", because, by reason of age or health, they could not march as fast as the others. But for this also the really responsible man is M. Auger, having furnished the camp personnel with false explanations ("undesirables") regarding our qualifications.

My dear....., please excuse my having written all this with the details which, perhaps, don't interest you. But we are in distress and I think that with this letter you might, if possible, interest some democratic friends in order to remind them that, until now, nothing has changed here as far as the interior situation of the country is concerned. The status of the Jews still exists, too. And a thousand other things that are a disgrace for a country which wants to fight against Nazi tyranny.

I hope that, even though little by little, the weight of the great democracy overseas will modify the state of things. For ourselves, however I remain pessimistic. Everybody, the Polish, the Czech, the Belgians etc. have their governments; even the Spaniards have their deputies. We others, German and Austrian refugees who, as the first ones, have fought against Hitler, we have nobody, are left to the mercy, often, of types like this M. Auger.

If possible, transmit this letter to our friend.....whose exact address I don't know at the moment (I have it in my address book with my baggage). Or have I told you his address in my last letter of the month of August 1942? You would do me another great favor, furthermore, by forwarding the enclosed letter to, with the original or a copy of your which I am addressing to you.

This letter is being sent to you through the help of the American Commission (Civil Affairs), 8 Boul. Gallieni, Oran - an organization to which one can address (perhaps) propositions or demands in our favor. If you want to write to me, take the address of Boghar-Sussoni, that's safer.

I hope to have news from you and from soon, being also very much interested in your present life down there, of which you will certainly give me some new details.

Again sending you all my sympathy, dear....., I cordially shake hands with you

Yours

Case #7589

Erwin Mueller