

5,500 Nazi Prisoners at Work

Their NSS Rating Ranges from "Indifferent" to "Splendid"

About a year ago the Department of Labor and the Department of National Defense entered into an arrangement whereby German prisoners of war would be used to ease the labor shortage in Canada.

The Labor Department agreed to develop labor projects for these prisoners and at present there are approximately 5,500 in service.

The first group to be utilized were so-called "non-combatants," composed mostly of merchant ship crewmen from German registry ships captured or sunk by the Allies. There were about 500 in this group, who are looked upon as more trustworthy, from the official view, than the combatants, and are given considerably more freedom than the others. For the most part they are dispersed on individual farms in Canada, with the farmer taking full responsibility for them.

The second group are combatants who were captured during Allied thrusts into German lines, or from German warships captured or sunk by the Allies. There are about 5,000 of these in industry, lumber camps, fuel and pulp wood cutting operations, and farms, mostly sugar beet farms in southern Alberta and Ontario (a new camp is being built near Chatham for the accommodation of these sugar beet growing prisoners). About 1,200 are on the sugar beet farms of southern Alberta. Others are on "hoe crop"

farms in the irrigated areas of Alberta, aiding in the growth of vegetables, fruits, etc.

The general situation, with respect to the prisoners, according to Deputy Labor Minister Arthur MacNamara has been "indifferent" at times and "splendid" at others. On the whole though, the Government is well pleased with the arrangement which has resulted in a reduction in the cost of maintaining the prisoners.

In industry, the employer undertakes to feed and accommodate the prisoners, but the Department of National Defense undertakes to provide guards (members of the Veterans' Guard of Canada).

The prisoners receive a minimum of 30 cents a day for their work in addition to their meals. In addition, they may receive up to 20 cents as a bonus for greater production. This money is not given to them in cash, but they are credited with it and may purchase comforts and other trivia up to the amount they have to their credit. If, at the end of hostilities they have any credit to their accounts, they will receive it in cash.

Mr. MacNamara expects by the end of the summer that there will be about 7,000 or 8,000 prisoners on farms and in industry. The results have shown conclusively, he said, that the risk taken is so small that expansion is entirely possible and that is what is intended.

During the past year, the deputy

labor minister estimated, less than 10 prisoners have attempted to escape and each time they have been recaptured within a few hours. In such cases, the prisoners are immediately returned to the internment camps and are not allowed to return to industry.

The prisoners are being used in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, with a few in Quebec—the provinces where the labor shortages in lumbering and agriculture are most acute.

(There are no internment camps for prisoners of war in British Columbia, but about 11,000 Japanese are being kept under surveillance in camps in the interior and near the Rocky Mountains. Largest of the Japanese settlements are in the Kaslo-Slocan district, where former mining "ghost towns" have been revived to house the Orientals. The Japanese are those evacuated from Vancouver and other coastal areas of the province at the outbreak of war in the Pacific.)

125 For Chatham

On May 16, 125 German war prisoners arrived in Chatham—the first in a group of 300 who are to work on southwestern Ontario farms this summer.

The men are being housed under canvas at an internment camp near the town and are being guarded by members of the Veterans' Guard. Already, some of the group have

been allocated to work in the onion fields and others will take part in the thinning of sugar beets. The prisoners-of-war are returned to the central internment camp every evening. The remainder of the group will arrive in Chatham shortly and will be assigned to various work projects.

The men working in the Chatham area are said to be German merchant seamen from a Mimico internment camp, who had been working in a New Toronto canning factory during the winter.

Mitchell's Report

In a report to Parliament on April 28, Labor Minister Humphrey Mitchell said:

"... A special problem handled by the department (of labor) is that of utilizing the labor of prisoners of war, on essential work projects outside internment camps. This has been chiefly in fuel wood, pulpwood and lumbering operations, and to a lesser extent in agriculture. Other projects using prisoner of war labor include a tannery and a company cutting peat fuel (in southern Manitoba)."

Mr. Mitchell said the prisoners employed in wood operations are, for the most part, working in groups of 40 to 60 men in camps of private operators. Guards on the projects have been chiefly provided by the Veterans' Guard. And he added that

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a number of prisoners of the civilian type, such as German merchant seamen, have been individually placed with farmers.

The labor minister revealed that it was the intention of the Government to extend the use of prisoners in agricultural work during the course of the current year so far as reasonably possible, consistent with security requirements.

Employers Satisfied

Mr. Mitchell also disclosed that employers have, in general, been well satisfied with the work of the prisoners and in many instances have later asked for an increased number.

"The major administrative problem involved in putting prisoners to work," the labor minister told Parliament, "is that of security." Where the percentage of guards in relation to prisoners is high, he said, there is nothing gained in the productive use of manpower.

Mr. Mitchell admitted that some

risks as to escapes have, therefore, to be accepted in putting prisoners to work. Escapes have, however, he declared, been few in number and in every instance the prisoners have been picked up within a short time.

The labor minister went on to say that the policy followed by his department in close co-operation with the Department of National Defense, is one of careful selection of prisoners, coupled with the use of sufficient guards to ensure discipline and control and to maintain a guard patrol on the project.

Prisoners are paid under convention relative to treatment of prisoners of war, which was concluded in Geneva on July 27, 1929.

The Canadian rate is 50 cents per day; the United States rate is 80 cents a day; the British rate is one shilling per day.

(Deputy Labor Minister Mac-Namara said the daily rate of 30 cents a day is being paid to German prisoners in Canada plus a production-bonus of 20 cents, making a total of 50 cents daily.)

The Department of Labor said that "inevitably discipline and security among prisoners of war create problems, which require a good deal of planning in order to avoid difficulties. It is felt that from this point of view the experience in Canada has been very satisfactory, as no serious difficulties have arisen in connection with the prisoners out on civilian work."

An indication of the attitude the Canadians take to the prisoners was seen in a recent incident in Ottawa:

A local farmer came to town with his prisoner to purchase some requirements. While in the city, he decided to have a beer. He went into a tavern. Other customers spotted the prisoner insignia and started a hullabaloo, which resulted in the farmer and his prisoner being asked to leave—minus the beer.

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