

NEWS LETTER

MARCH 1945

In the July News Letter Mr. Charles House, Director of the School, gave an account of how they managed at the American Farm School up until the time he and Mrs. House were sent to separate internment camps in Germany.

We have just received the first report from Mr. Theo Litsas a member of the School Staff, in whose hands Mr. House left the School when he was sent to Germany. We think you will be interested in having him continue the dramatic story of the occupation in a letter of January 26.

"In the early part of January 1942, I was summoned before the Befehlshaber Saloniki-Agais and notified that, owing to the state of war existing between Germany and the U.S.A., the School was to be taken over by the German Wehrmacht, and the present personnel would not be allowed to leave. That all farm products would be disposed of only after their orders. On January 15, 1942 a committee of German officers came up to take an inventory of all school land, equipment, machinery, live-stock, and supplies. On January 17 the Befehlshaber Saloniki-Agais took over the School, and at the end of each month we had to submit the following statements to them:

1. A statement of receipts and expenditures during the month.
2. A list of salaries and wages
3. A list of milk produced and handed over to the Military Hospitals
4. A list of poultry produced and eggs handed over
5. A live-stock inventory showing increase and decrease of stock and the reasons.

"The German commander of the Aerodrome of Sedes was appointed as a provisory Comptroller of the Farm, as he owned a farm in Germany, and until the arrival of the proper expert officers of the Befehlshaber. Unfortunately he was not able to exercise his functions properly due to his multiple duties, and appointed as his representative, a corporal to reside on the Farm and act as his deputy.

"The corporal was an uninstructed person, and due to ignorance, was always suspicious in handling a job too big for him, and often accused the School personnel to his superior as sabotaging his good efforts to increase the productiveness of the Farm. Such action on his part not only interrupted the course of the Farm work, and caused a lot of loss to it, but also made the relations between himself and the heads of the Departments and supervisors very strained. He was encouraged in carrying on his stupid efforts when he was given a German soldier as a helper, and who pretended to know about farming, but was only a tradesman. As a result the situation became more and more difficult, because both men now introduced a series of cultivations not suitable to the climatic and soil conditions, insisting that it should be possible to grow such in Greece because they were grown in Germany. Naturally their efforts were a complete failure, and they accused the School personnel of being responsible for the failure. They made every effort to fire the most able members of the personnel, in order to take over the immediate control and disposal of the School property themselves. Of course our timely intervention and representations to the Befehlshaber prevented a lot of their plots and any serious damage to the School, but they were successful in firing two or three of the School personnel for alleged military reasons.

"We succeeded in our efforts to replace first the one and then the other by persons not more educated than their predecessors, but at least less mischievous. Later on, as a result of our efforts, expert officers of the Befehlshaber took over the School. They luckily did not undervalue the ability of the School personnel, and left it to go along in its efforts to increase minor live-stock such as fowls and

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pigs. They granted us permission to carry a large amount of horse manure from the Military Horse Station for our fields, and encouraged every initiative in the work of Farm Fields.

"In June 1943, a Committee of Luftwaffe officers came up and notified us that they had an order from their general to requisition all the School buildings for the use of the Luftwaffe, and that the School families had to move into wooden barracks at a point less than half a kilometer north of the School premises. These barracks, one large and one small, were erected on the Demokritos Farm, near the well. In the meantime, all buildings were emptied of their occupants, and the Luftwaffe began to make many alterations in Princeton and James Halls mainly, and minor ones in the other buildings. They also erected three barracks in the space between Hastings House and the main entrance tree grove. In the first days of August the Staff of the Luftwaffe arrived from Athens, and immediately the Staff families went into the barracks.

"Princeton and James Halls were used by the Luftwaffe as offices, Kinnaird House as a supply depot, the Stone Infirmary and Annex for telephone and wireless operators, and the basement in James Hall for installations of the signal corps. Metcalf House was used as general's mess and guest house, Hastings House for officers' mess and Dodge Cottages as living quarters for officers. Farnham and Mosley Cottages were reserved for the general and his chief of staff. The remaining buildings were used together with the three barracks as soldiers' billets.

"It only remained to the School the Dairy, as well as the Industrial Shops to be responsible to the Befehlshaber. The Luftwaffe, however, did not like the taking over of the Farm by the Befehlshaber, and tried by every means, and probably with the intervention of High Command officers in Germany to take over the farm products. After much arguing between themselves, the Germans decided that the Befehlshaber should continue to be responsible for the Farm, but products were to be shared fifty-fifty with the Luftwaffe. The products were to be sold at prices they had fixed, and as a result this income was quite inadequate to cover the needs of the School personnel. Salaries, therefore, were unbelievably low, and the personnel had to undergo much difficulties. Their only real salary during the whole period of occupation was bread supplied by the Farm, and the very restricted food supplies on which they had to live themselves as well as their children. Nevertheless, the School personnel remained at their posts with faith and devotion to duty, and with an intention of safe-guarding the School property until liberation.

"The most critical period that the School underwent, however, was during last August when it was rumored that the Luftwaffe was preparing to leave, to be succeeded by special demolition units. Indeed, in September 1944 a great movement of officers took place and large German units began to leave, requisitioning foodstuffs, draft animals, carts, and even donkeys, so that our anxieties began to grow. But the thing that most alarmed us was that we discovered bombs had been secretly placed in the big School buildings by the Germans, probably with the intention to blow them up. I therefore at once called on the Befehlshaber and the Luftwaffen Kommando who were responsible for the buildings, and I asked them not to destroy the School property, by persuading them that the School aimed at serving the needs of the rural population of Greece and the improvement of agriculture and animal husbandry. At first they tried to convince me that they had no intention whatsoever to blow up any of the School buildings, but when I asked them why the bombs were placed in some of the buildings, they promised to investigate the matter and try to avoid damaging School property.

"Not long before the departure of the Luftwaffen Kommando, we were informed by the Befehlshaber expert officer that the Luftwaffe was entitled to take over 50% of the year's Hatched chickens, to be transported to a place near Belgrade where the

Luftwaffen Kommando was to be stationed. We tried again to convince the Luftwaffen Kommando that they ought not to do this, as the chickens were the only pure-bred in Greece and were intended for the improvement of poultry in Greece. We asked them to take over all the cockerels and leave the pullets. At last they agreed to leave us as many chickens as we had on January 17, 1941 when the Wehrmacht took over the Farm. They also insisted on carrying off with them some bred heifers and horses, but we avoided that also. Only at the very last moment they carried off two draft horses and two horse wagons. They also decided that from July 1944 on, they were going to have the products of the Farm "kostenloss", and this made the unbearable financial situation beyond any description.

"After some time, in the middle of October, German demolition units began to arrive, and this alarmed us again, in view of the fact that no steps were taken to remove the bombs placed in the buildings. The Germans then began requisitioning on a large scale all transport, carts, wagons, horses, etc. in the city and the vicinity, and some of the School buildings were emptied of their occupants.

"I again called on the Befehlshaber general in Salonika and asked him to give instructions to the demolition officers not to destroy any of the School property. As a result the next day an officer of the Befehlshaber came up and asked the head officer of the demolition units not to blow up any of the School buildings. The latter insisted that the big buildings should be blown up as the School was the only self dependent installation in the vicinity and very suitable to be used by the Allied Forces. I tried to persuade him that during the first World War the Allies never used the School premises and buildings as billets and that they were billeted in tents. Consequently, any damage to the School buildings was to be detrimental to the interests of the Greek rural population. At last, he insisted on the blowing up of the easterly part of James Hall, where some of their telephone and wireless machinery were installed. It has been the fate of the building to be destroyed in every war. One half of the building collapsed, and probably the whole will need rebuilding.

"In the meantime, the Germans began to blow up the telephone posts. Our agony was intense, as still no measure was taken to remove the bombs placed in the buildings. We had but little sleep waiting for their departure, as they postponed it from day to day, and at last, on the evening of October 27, 1944 they posted guards so as not to allow anybody near the premises, and began to fire shots at random to frighten any intruder. At 2:00 A.M. of the morning of October 28 the German soldiers in the various School buildings began to break window panes, switches, electric light bulbs, doors, windows, etc. After loading on their trucks, they left in an hour continuing to shoot wildly. In the short space of an hour they gave evidence of their hatred by causing a lot of small damages to the buildings, especially to James and Princeton Hall, Kinnaird House, and the three barracks. The rest of the buildings where officers were billeted, suffered insignificant damage.

"As soon as the Germans left the School, the personnel gathered in front of Princeton Hall, and undertook to guard the property. During the morning I called on members of the Executive Committee of the School and the secretary of the U. S. Consulate. By noon the first Commando troops began to enter the School premises. But the Germans had not yet left the city, and clashes between their rearguard and partisans which began to close on the city lasted all night. On the next day British troops were landed at Perea, and part of them were billeted in the big School buildings. The School families after 14 months in the barracks, began to return to their former homes. By that time the Germans had completely evacuated the city, and the crowds celebrated their liberation. The residential quarters of the School families were repaired as much as the supplies on hand allowed.

"The first Americans arriving at the School and still residing here were Mr. Baley and Mr. Stamer. Next, Mr. Loch arrived, and we were greatly rejoiced on seeing an old friend who, furthermore, brought us news from the Board of Trustees and Mr. and Mrs. House. We were sad to hear that Mr. and Mrs. House were unable to come here immediately owing to their many occupations, and also that Mrs. Loch was not able to come owing to lack of transport. Some days after, Mr. Gwinn, the U. S. Consul in Salonica arrived, and stayed with us; so Metcalf House was back again to pre-war times.

"I have only one thing to underline, that due to the devotion and faith of the School Staff, and in spite of the difficulties not easily described, it was possible to safeguard the School property and stick to the job. Unfortunately, due to prevailing conditions, it has not been possible to pay fully the salaries of the School Staff, and in view of the fact that from the time of the occupation up to now the School personnel has been unable to buy anything, all of them are in very urgent need of clothing, shoes, etc.

"And now the only remaining thing to be done, is work and only work, and there is plenty of it after a five year delay and war consequences."

Mr. Sydney Loch, Acting Director, was among the first of the civilians to enter Greece after liberation.

After consultations with the Staff and members of the local assisting committee, plans were made to make the facilities of the American Farm School as helpful as possible during the almost intolerable situation existing in Greece.

Mr. Loch has emphasized again and again the loyalty and devotion of the Staff throughout the occupation. It is in large measure due to them that the American Farm School has saved so much of its property and livestock. In his last report just received he says:

"I feel we are playing our part in the general agricultural rehabilitation program of the country. We are producing a certain amount of pure bred stock and when UNRRA begins to function, as it is likely to do in a few weeks time, we may be able to take up other lines-----

"Our incubators have already hatched 700 chickens. It may be possible to hatch 3,000 birds this season. We have produced and sold a lot of young pigs. The cows are giving between 100 and 150 quarts of milk a day and we are making between five and six pounds of butter a day."

We are very much pleased and encouraged by these reports from Mr. Loch and are very happy that we are in a position to be of some immediate help to the people of Greece.

We wish to express our appreciation to all of our contributors who shared our faith in the future of our work when the outlook was very dark indeed. Their gifts, placed in a Special Fund, have made it possible for us to meet this immediate opportunity. We are now faced with the rehabilitation of our buildings and the replacement of equipments in preparation for the reopening of our School. This is a big task and will require the continued loyalty and the generosity of all the friends of the American Farm School.

Craig R. Smith
President of the Board of Trustees