

American Farm School Thessalonica, Greece  
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NEWS LETTER

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It is nearly four months since those happy and exciting days after our arrival March 15th on the "Gripsholm" and they have been very full and interesting months. The fact that we have lived through four and a half years of this war in Europe, and shared some of its consequences, has brought us into contact in Washington and New York with many of the people who are making the plans for post-war reconstruction in Europe. These contacts have been of great value to us in our plans for the part the Farm School will be able to contribute when Greece is liberated.

Now that we are at home we would like to tell you, whose interest and support have maintained the school as one of America's disinterested efforts to contribute to a better world, what happened after the Germans came in and took control of the Farm School property and its operation.

In July, two years ago, we were just completing the harvest at the Farm. The problems presented by the German occupation and the famine were many. Our supply of fuel for the farm machinery was small; laborers would not work for money alone, they had to be fed; the crops were poor and not sufficient to supply the farm families with food for the ensuing year; we had a contract with the Institute of Plant Breeding to turn in our entire crop of wheat for seed, at a premium price normally, but now an almost worthless currency. In the eyes of the German military authorities occupying Greece, Ann and I were enemy aliens residing at the farm without any status and with restricted liberty. All of us were beset with the never ending problem of getting food for our families. Under the most favorable conditions we could not produce nor provide all that was needed and now all the circumstances seemed to be adverse. This made it hard for the staff to see things in their true proportion, but they stuck to their jobs loyally.

Of course these difficulties could not be met at the time they arose; they had to be foreseen to be overcome. We wanted to circumvent the German authority wherever it seemed contrary to the interests of the School or the Greek people, while remaining true to our Christian principles and the purposes of the School. We planned to make use of the authority of the Germans, where it could contribute to our objectives, without relying on their force. These were not easy principles on which to proceed in an enemy occupied country, and the heavy burden fell upon Mr. Litsas, to whom I had turned over my authority where I was first interned and who, with most of the other members of the school staff, had been retained when the Germans took over the control of the school as enemy alien property on January 17, 1942.

Our reaper-thresher combine would be an immense help in overcoming the difficulty of employing labor, but it was equipped for putting the grain into sacks and no sacks were to be had. We therefore decided to convert the combine into a "hopper" type. The pictures of this type, found in our farm machinery catalogues, served as a guide, and for material, we used old galvanized iron water tanks which were purchased after the last war and had developed leaks, and angle iron fence posts. This met the problem of the lack of sacks, but developed that of transporting the loose grain from the fields to the grain bins. To meet this problem we built a low slung wagon, using the four wheels of an old dismantled Fordson tractor, and rigged up a



hopper and elevator at the grain bins. Thus, with three men and a team of horses, we were able to get the grain from the combine in the field into our grain bins. Our contract with the institute of Plant Breeding was fulfilled but instead of money the Institute paid us with an equivalent weight of wheat not suitable for seed, plus the premium provided in the contract.

The famine conditions made vegetable gardens very desirable, but these needed water, and water needed fuel to pump it, which was very scarce. Some sixty miles away in the mountains there was plenty of wood and a large number of hungry wood cutters who could not get the wood to market because of the lack of transportation. The Germans on the farm wanted to take our fuel wood and pay us money for it. This did not suit us so we made a proposition to them that they transport 300 tons of fire wood and charcoal, which we purchased with food for the wood cutters and, in return, the Germans could have 60 tons of fire wood. The charcoal we used in a gas producer outfit which we made from old steel barrels. We were thus able to pump an extra amount of water for the gardens.

When in March 1942 the Germans allowed us to return to the farm, the responsibility for the farm enterprises had been taken over by the Commandant of the Airport but it still remained as regimental headquarters of a signal corps regiment. There was thus the Air force authority over the farm enterprises and Army authority over the place itself. There was considerable scope within the entirely separate concerns of these two military authorities to enable us to achieve a number of permanently valuable projects of plant improvement and, at the same time, engage the interest of the school staff in their execution and help us keep our minds off our difficulties.

The first major task which we undertook was to take up, clean and repair, relay and extend the whole water distribution system of the farm. This had been planned for some time. However, our immediate concern in undertaking it was that we had assembled before the war a valuable stock of water pipes which we feared might be requisitioned unless we got it under the ground. Thus more than a mile and a half of water pipe was put in first class condition and a fifteen hundred foot extension made to connect with the rest of our water system the well on our new property, purchased just before the war.

Another big job which we had on our hands was to restring our electric transmission lines. We had purchased a large quantity of copper wire before the war in order to have direct lines to our well pumps that were independent of our lighting circuits. This was lying in the store room at Sherrill Quadrangle and was liable to automatic requisition if discovered by the proper military persons. We had put nearly all the water pipe under ground except the large sizes of well piping so we decided to make poles out of this pipe and relocate our lines for the time being, for the old poles were of reinforced concrete and could not easily be taken away. This job was carried out without interference.

Such activities and the various farm and live stock enterprises kept us busy and supplied us with a minimum of essential foods. A graduate of the school advanced us sufficient wheat to cover our wheat deficit until the crop of 1943. We have heard that this crop was not good but hope that if there was a deficit, our farm families have been able to share in the food that has been going into Greece. In any event the last word we have received, written the early part of this year, reports that all are well and indicates that the school plant is still intact, and may be counted upon to do its share in the reconstruction of Greece, once it is again liberated from enemy control. We must now continue to prepare for that great responsibility.