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SUBJECT Prison Camp Conditions in the Minsk Area

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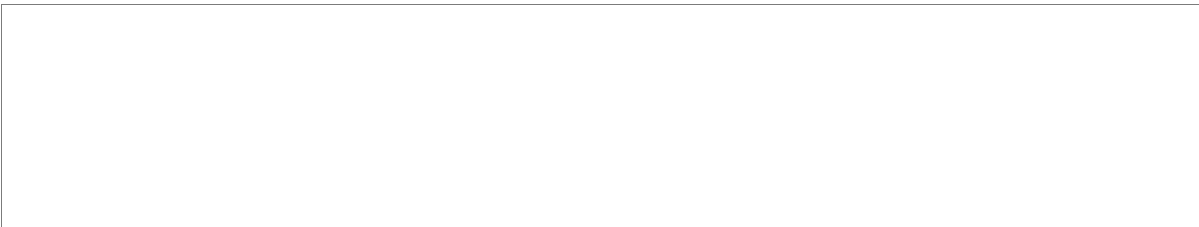
SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO. 50X1

DATE OF INFORMATION

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1. In 1949 there were still three or four POW camps in the Minsk area.

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[Redacted] This camp was repatriating its prisoners rapidly [Redacted] and by the end of 1949 [Redacted] had been closed down and the buildings "remodeled" into workers' dormitories. There were 400 Austrian POW's there [Redacted] believe that number to be quite close to capacity.

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2. The next camp [Redacted] to held about 600 Germans and about 20 or 30 Austrians. This camp was located in the heart of the city about two blocks from the city's main square. The buildings we occupied were former German barracks. Some of the prisoners at this camp had been working on a penicillin factory building nearby. They described the operation as merely experimental in the fall of 1949, but said that they were expanding for full production. The prisoners described the growing of mushrooms at the factory laboratories. Of course, at that time none [Redacted] heard of penicillin and did not take the Soviet activities too seriously.

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3. The main camp in Minsk housed over one thousand prisoners. These included Germans, Hungarians, Rumanians and representatives of other German allies, including captured members of the Spanish Blue Division.

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4. Security measures were quite similar in all three camps. At that time there was little desire on our part to escape as [Redacted] expecting immediate repatriation and [Redacted] not interested in risking an escape attempt. Nevertheless, the camps were fairly well guarded. The most typical, [Redacted] was the German camp in the center of the city. Here there was a wooden wall about two and one-half to three meters high with barbed wire strung along the top. For about four meters on each side of this wall were sections of turned soil

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neatly raked so that any footprints would show up if these strips were walked on. There were towers on the corners with guards in them at all times. These guards were armed with rifles and submachine guns. Floodlights were kept on all night and spotlights were available on each tower if needed. The guards, all MVD men, kept a group of bloodhounds handy, but these were never used. These security precautions were never tested, however, as no escapes were attempted [redacted] 50X1

5. The treatment of German prisoners deteriorated soon after World War II when the Soviet troops were replaced as guards by MVD men. At all camps the MVD guards, who were rumored to have had some "special training," would yell [redacted] constantly and push, or hit [redacted] when [redacted] compliance was not satisfactory. 50X1
6. While I [redacted] at Minsk there was some beating of prisoners going on and some of the Wehrmacht officers organized their groups for a hunger strike. This strike was surprisingly successful. It seems that it was necessary for the camp commandant to report the strike. High ranking political officials came to the camp and asked our officer spokesman about the trouble. After evidence of the beatings was shown the officials left and soon the beatings stopped altogether. The success of the strike may have been due to the fact that repatriation was under way at the time, although the high officials at Minsk actually did seem interested in keeping up the appearance that we were well cared for. 50X1
7. One time in the Fall of 1949 a high official of some health and sanitation office was making an inspection trip. For his benefit [redacted] issued clean white bed sheets. These were put on our beds for the inspection and a half hour later [redacted] had to turn them back to the guards. Another such instance occurred in the mess hall when the German colonel, who was go-between for the Soviet guards and the prisoners, was singled out to pose for a brief sequence for a propaganda moving picture. In this shot he was seated at a table with a tray of food in front of him. The meal was a complete feast compared to our usual diet. He had a full course meal with two chops of meat on the plate. He was allowed to take one bite of the meat while the picture was being taken and the tray was immediately snatched away from him. 50X1
8. The worst problem of the POW in the USSR was getting enough food. This, of course, was also true for Soviet civilians during the post-World War II period. Many prisoners died, directly or indirectly, of starvation and nutritional diseases were common. The mainstay [redacted] was cabbage soup, which was received twice a day along with 600 grams of "heavy bread." No fats were included in the diet. 50X1
9. The saving factor was the fact that each prisoner was rationed 15 grams of tobacco and 200 grams of soap per week. It was significant that few prisoners were ever seen smoking. The tobacco could be better bartered for food. The barter trade in soap and cigarettes remained good [redacted] Medicines of all kinds were also prime media of exchange when available. In each camp in Minsk captured German doctors were assigned to care for the prisoners. Their activities were directed by one Soviet doctor at each camp and he was in charge of disbursing all drugs and medicines used by the German doctors. Naturally, the German doctors obtained as much as possible and some of the medicines were "saved" and discretely entered into the barter trade. During the years 1946 and 1947 in the cities, and later in the rural areas, absolutely anything could be bartered with the Soviet civilians. The extent of their poverty cannot be exaggerated. Clothing was at a premium and all parts of our uniforms were good barter items. 50X1
10. Political indoctrination of POW's gradually tapered off after 1947, probably due to poor results. During 1946 and 1947 weekly meetings were held in the camp. Political officers would tell of the glowing success of the Soviet Union and the invincibility of the Soviet Army. Holidays were also frequent and these days were given over to parades, propaganda movies and more meetings. Hardly any of the German POW's were won over although there was the usual small percentage who turned informer in order to gain small privileges or extra rations. Typical of these were the members of the anti-Fascist committees. These were formed soon after the war with innocent enough aims for the preservation of peace. Soon, however, their real purposes became known. They were set up to get the members of the "committee" to inform on their fellow prisoners who had been in the SS, or Abwehr, or who had been very ardent Nazis. These groups became quite unpopular after 1947 as their members were pressurized by fellow prisoners. 50X1

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