

Book reviews

LES MAILLONS DE LA CHAÎNE

(LINKS IN THE CHAIN)

1939-1945

A prisoner of war's story

Tragically, the author of the following book review — Florianne Truninger — died recently. Miss Truninger was a Research Officer in the ICRC's Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement. She was a competent and highly motivated colleague who will long be remembered at the ICRC for her devotion to the Red Cross cause.

Links in the chain is the account of Henry Goldstein's "forced holiday at the expense of the Third Reich". Goldstein, a Belgian, was taken as a prisoner of war in May 1940 when the Germans invaded his country.*

Goldstein makes his situation clear from the outset. "For the Germans, I was obviously a prisoner with a difference. But that was my problem." He realized that with his Germanic, Jewish-sounding name the Germans would inevitably regard him as an enemy of the Third Reich. "This was a big difference. It followed me around like my shadow wherever I went."

Henry Goldstein was lucky to have prisoner-of-war status and thus be protected by the Geneva Convention of 1929 relating to the treatment of prisoners of war. Since the Convention prohibited any differences of treatment between POWs except on the basis of rank, state of health, professional abilities or sex, Goldstein was able to survive history's most sinister attempt to exterminate the Jews.

From the outset Goldstein was set apart from the other prisoners in the German camps. His POW identity card, for example, was yellow, while those of the other Belgian prisoners were blue. The fact that his card identified him as a Jew came back to haunt him from time to time throughout his captivity. It brought him eight terrible months in solitary confinement at Colditz disci-

* Henry Goldstein, *Les Maillons de la chaîne, 1939-1945*, Editions Dricot, Liège-Bressoux, 1992, Vol. I, *Récit vécu*, 495 pages; Vol. II, *La descente en enfer*, 431 pages; preface by Professor Yves Durand of the University of Orléans — La Source, France.

plinary camp. In violation of the Geneva Convention, the Germans separated him from his fellow Belgians at Colditz, placed him under their sole authority and forced him to exchange his military uniform for anonymous work clothes.

Then Goldstein was transferred to Eichstätt in Bavaria, where he was forced to work as an odd-job man in the German staff quarters despite the protests of the highest-ranking Belgian officer. This too was a violation of the Convention, decided on by simple soldiers.

The author gives an often humorous account of his peregrinations from Stalag to Stalag and Oflag to Oflag, and of life in the camps where vermin and boredom were his daily lot. He also describes moments of comfort at the infirmary and the comradeship shown by his companions around a Red Cross parcel.

He was eventually transferred north to Stalag XB in the very heart of the port of Hamburg and was put to work handling incoming food supplies for the city. In this, perhaps the best part of the book, Goldstein relates the more colourful aspect of his captivity. He describes the prisoners' ingenuity in making their quarters a cosy place by scrounging coal and pilfering supplies as sympathetic guards turned a blind eye. We are far removed, obviously, from the classic image of idle prisoners languishing behind barbed wire or pottering away their days on a farm.

But at the same time Goldstein impresses on us what life was like for the residents of Hamburg, constantly pounded by Allied bombs. Shared experiences such as this fostered human contacts and even friendship between the prisoners and German civilians. Goldstein paints us vivid portraits of decent German men and women — employers, guards and lovers alike — alongside the truly despicable characters he encountered.

As the war wore on, as the list of dead and wounded grew ever longer and the boys mobilized ever younger, and when even elderly men were withdrawn from the workforce and sent to the front, the POWs became "a vital economic necessity without which many activities would have ground to a halt". The result was a better relationship between the POWs and their employers and, as the German army suffered military reverses and bombs rained down on the country, the situation of the prisoners gradually improved.

But life still had its ups and downs. Goldstein's personal nightmare remains the haggard faces of the deportees he saw at the Neuengamme concentration camp, 25 km from Hamburg. These starving men in their striped uniforms were forced to do backbreaking work although they could scarcely stand. The author remains horrified by the memory to this day, knowing that the same could so easily have happened to him.

As the war drew to a close, things again took a turn for the worse for Goldstein. The German command, doubtless fearing sabotage by enemies of the Reich, transferred him to reprisal camp 1446 for French POWs at Himmelmorr, near Quickborn, where he was made to work in peat bogs under appalling conditions. It was there that he was finally liberated by the British army under Field Marshal Montgomery.

Henry Goldstein tells a fascinating story teeming with details about daily life in the camps. Vivid, instructive and rich in anecdotes both comic and tragic, the book is written in a natural, simple style. "All through those dramatic years", writes Goldstein, "there was no respite. My life was like an endless chain, each link inexorably leading to the next".

True to life, colourful and moving, *Les maillons de la chaîne* is a faithful reconstruction of five years of captivity on enemy territory.

Florianne Truninger

EFFECTING COMPLIANCE — ARMED CONFLICT AND THE NEW LAW

Do the States comply with humanitarian law?

In 1985 the British Institute of International and Comparative Law set up a group to discuss the law of armed conflict. The group's deliberations resulted in the publication in 1989 of a collection of articles on the 1977 Additional Protocols and the 1980 Weapons Convention. A second volume has now appeared dealing with various aspects of the problem of ensuring the States' compliance with humanitarian law.*

This subject was chosen in an effort to respond to the most urgent needs relating to the regulation of armed conflicts. As one of the authors points out, this is a question not so much of adopting new rules as of improving the effectiveness of those already in force. The editors of the book believe that a comprehensive approach is required, taking into account not only the role that must be played by the States as those directly bound by the rules, but also the responsibilities in this respect of other players on the international scene. Such an approach also prompts us to look beyond the framework of inter-State relations and consider the measures that must be taken by governments on the national level.

The work is divided into six parts. Part I takes stock of the general effectiveness of the law of armed conflict. *George A. Aldrich* suggests three reasons why this body of law often remains a dead letter. One reason is that those whose duty it is to implement it are often unfamiliar with its provisions. The second is the scepticism and cynicism caused by awareness that viola-

* *Effecting Compliance, Armed Conflict and the New Law, Vol. II*, Hazel Fox and Michael A. Meyer (eds.), London, The British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 1993, 251 p.