

GERMAN ESCAPEES.

TRIAL AT HOLDSWORTHY.

PRISONERS' STORIES.

At the German Concentration Camp, Holdsworth, yesterday a Military Court, composed of Lieut.-Col. Le Gay Brereton (President), Major H. G. Edwards, and Major G. Christie, dealt with the escape of six German civilian prisoners of war from Holdsworth on July 20. Lieut. Street attended as Court Prosecutor. The prisoners arraigned were:—Ernst Gross, Friedrich Reidel, Wenzel Fingoust, Nicholas D'Orloff, Hans Robert von Dehler, and George Schmidt. They were charged that while prisoners of war they escaped on July 20 last.

When they were called upon to plead, and to decide whether they would be tried together or separately, Nicholas D'Orloff said:— "I am unlawfully interned here, and claim to be tried separately, on the grounds, first, that I am not an alien, but an ally—in fact, a Russian—secondly, that I wish to call evidence as to my identity and nationality; and, lastly, that the evidence of one of the accused is material to my defence."

The accused's application for a separate trial was granted, and his case was remanded, the Court proceeding with the trial of the remaining five, who each entered a plea of not guilty, raising the objection that they were not prisoners of war, but interned civilian enemy subjects.

Major Percy O. Griffiths, Acting Commandant of the German Concentration Camp, said that on July 21 he went down to the compound, and was shown the exit of a tunnel 12ft from the outside fence on the western side. The mouth of the tunnel was not more than 18in in diameter, but it would be quite possible for a man to escape through the tunnel.

Ernst Gross: Why was I put in the special compound, known as Sing Sing?

Major Griffiths: It was necessary for the purposes of the discipline of the camp to put certain men in certain compounds, of which we have four, and you went into No. 2 special compound.

Friedrich Reidel: Why was I interned in the special compound without being first tried?

Major Griffiths: For general disciplinary reasons.

Hans Von Dehler asked why he was put in the special compound, and Major Griffiths replied, "Because you were an especially bad character, and twice escaped before."

George Schmidt: Why did you intern me in "Sing Sing"?—You also were a bad character, and always associating with the disturbing

and always associating with the disturbing element in the camp.

Schmidt: That is a lie!

Ernst Gross, in evidence, said that he approached the president of the camp, asking him to do his best to get two men released from the special compound, because, as far as he knew, the men had done nothing wrong. Ten minutes after he found himself placed in the special compound. The treatment at the beginning of their internment there was disgraceful. As the time went on it was bettered. They first received straw sacks, then a rubber cloth was added; then wooden floors were placed in the huts. Some men had an argument with the sentries, and these sentries shot right into the camp. One bullet went just above accused's head, although he had nothing to do with the matter. Another shot went close to his feet. On another occasion some soldiers fired for their amusement at some rats near the incinerator, and the bullets passed near the men in the special compound. As a matter of fact, he was afraid of his life, and that was why he decided to try and get out of "Sing Sing." He certainly had asked to be taken out of "Sing Sing," and was told by a corporal that they were considering his case, but, as he heard nothing for three or four weeks, he decided to get out of the compound himself.

Friedrich Reidel said that tobacco that was sent them by their friends was not received.

Otto Kussicke, called as a witness by Reidel, said that the soldiers informed them that they had instructions not only to shoot at them but to kill them if they came too close to the fence. One of their number was taken out into the bush and a bayonet stuck into him, going through some papers in his pocket and wounding him. After a visit by the American Consul some slight improvement was effected.

Peter Detley Heinrich Mueller Hamann, also called as a witness, said that when Reidel first came to the compound there was nothing at all in the place beyond the bare fence and empty tents. Tobacco that was intended to be smuggled into the compound was confiscated by the military police. An army medical man used to come and look through the wires at them, but gave them no attention or medicine.

Adalbert von Felter said that not only were there no privileges at the special compound, but the medical inspection and attention were only superficial.

The inquiry was adjourned to the following morning.