

(Handwritten date: Monday, December 2, 1940)

...TOLD BY LOUIS WEHRLE ON RETURN

Lowering Morale In England, French Hope Outlined In Interview

First-hand stories of slaughter and suffering, lowering morale in Britain and an undaunted French spirit came to Fort Wayne today through the lips of Louis (Bill) Wehrle. Returning to his home here Saturday night, Mr. Wehrle had much to tell of his experiences since his capture by the Germans while with a volunteer ambulance corps in France five months ago. Behind him is the harrowing and heart-rending experiences of aiding evacuation of war refugees, life in a German prison camp and finally release and return to America through Switzerland and Portugal.

Despite the fall of France, the French still hope and expect a return to their former status as an independent nation and give little consideration to any possible permanence of German domination. That Wehrle has to report of the French, whom he knows as well or better than Americans through his 20 years in the hotel business in Paris.

Through his observations and information, Mr. Wehrle feels that British morale is being snapped by constant bombings and attacks from the air and that many squadrons of planes and aviators from this country would be invaluable to England's chances of survival and victory. "There is also need of American troops in Africa," stated Mr. Wehrle. He feels that help in this sector would soon force Italy into submis- (cut off)...eventual downfall of the Nazi regime.

Occupied France, including Paris, is becoming rehabilitated, according to Mr. Wehrle. Theatres, operas and night spots are reopening under German supervision. Shows are all early and citizens are required to be off the streets by midnight. The dress and gaiety of old-time Paris are not prevalent, however, he said, and German officers occupy important positions. The food system has improved and Parisians are able to get their quotas of potatoes, cheese, carrots and other foodstuffs on their ration cards. Restaurants operated by Jewish proprietors must be so labelled and a few restaurants forbid the serving of Jews. Scattered at- (cut off)... the outskirts have been met and swiftly quashed by German machine guns but ...peace reigns, Mr. Wehrle said.

He described a pathetic scene to which he was a witness at Annece, Alps town in the free zone of France. There on a bench, head in his hands and a worried, lost expression on his face, sat Henri Ponset, probably not knowing where his next meal was coming from nor where his steps were to lead him, there sat the former French Ambassador to Germany and Italy and head of the French commission for the Italian Armistice.

SEES MUCH MISERY

As a driver in the ambulance corps of Miss Anne Morgan, Mr. Wehrle saw much suffering and misery before his capture and more after it. He was helping to evacuate injured civilians and was on his way with several other drivers to get some of these civilians from near the war front when he suddenly came face to face with a German tank. The group did not know that the Germans had advanced that far and were taken completely by surprise. The officer before

whom they were taken had lived in the United States as an engineer for an American company for five years and assured the Americans safe treatment and an early release.

Instead of in the two days promised, release came after more than 100 days. On the way to the prison camp in Silesia, a former youth camp, Mr. Wehrle had a chance to practically review a section of the German army one-half mile behind the front. His incarceration in the camp along with 6,000 French officers gave him a chance to see many important French personages held prisoners, including Robert Gauthier, editor of the Paris newspaper, "Temps"; John Legrande, famous criminal lawyer of the Stavisky case; playwrights and many others. The prisoners formed a university among themselves and did not lack for able instructors.

"Approximately 35 per cent of the downfall of France can be attributed to the German intelligence service," Mr. Wehrle said. Their activities in Belgium were particularly effective, slowing up the French army and permitting the Germans finally to penetrate behind the lines and take over much of the country, he said.

Future plans are uncertain for Mr. Wehrle. He plans to spend at least two weeks with his mother, Mrs. Emma Wehrle, 2915 Lafayette Street, and his sisters and brother here. After that, he does not know what he will do. Perhaps he will remain in the United States. Perhaps he will (cut off)

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(Handwritten date: Saturday, November 9, 1940)

## BERNE NEWS

Roy Schwartz, son of Mr. and Mrs. Dan D. Schwartz of Berne has been elected captain of the Berne Bears for this year. The squad met recently and made their choice, which is the first time in a number of years that the team selected a captain for the season. Schwartz is a senior.

Richard (Dick) Sprunger, 20, son of Mr. and Mrs. ?? Sprunger of Berne, has enlisted in the air corps and is now at Indianapolis awaiting his transfer to Alabama. From there he is to go to Panama, according to word received here by his relatives. Sprunger is a graduate of the Berne high school. He is the first one from Berne to enlist since the recent conscription law was enacted.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Siegrist, well-known local residents, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary at their home here next Monday, November 11. They are both natives of Switzerland and were married at Vera Cruz, in Wells county, on Nov. 11, 1880. Mr. Siegrist is 87 years old, and Mrs. Siegrist, 78, who was formerly Elizabeth Bischoff. They have one daughter, Mrs. Gerhart Steiner of Berne.

**Adams County Historical Museum**

**1940-1941a Scrapbook, image 15**

**Transcribed by Karin King**