

Interview with Albert Breuer: the difficulties in transporting equipment to Rome (Brussels, 28 February 2007)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Can you remember how the transfer took place between Brussels — Val Duchesse — and Rome, the transport of the documents, equipment and so on? Do you have any clear memories of this period?

[Albert Breuer] Very clear, for Mr Calmes had said to me: ‘Mr Breuer, there is something very important taking place in Rome, and you are to be responsible for the transport of the whole installation: all the machines, the typewriters and all that, in a Belgian railway wagon; you will be personally responsible for ensuring that it arrives in Rome on time.’ I replied: ‘Certainly. I foresee no difficulties there. Where are the documents, where is the paperwork?’ — ‘Well, the wagon will be loaded in Brussels with material from Val Duchesse’ — there were Roneos, typewriters and so forth — ‘The wagon will make a stop in Luxembourg, and using a removal company, you are to put in it everything else that will be necessary to have on site.’

When you organise a meeting, it is often straightforward because the organisers think of everything, but there are also those who do not think of anything and expect people who are coming to bring everything they need with them. Just one example: you are going to a meeting somewhere; you have an overhead projector, or you have a blackboard and there is no chalk, so before you can find some chalk you have to go to the High Street to look for it. This is just an example. So everything has to be foreseen, and this wagon, loaded in Luxembourg, was about to leave. I was in the train; the wagon was further back; I had the documents from the Embassy of Switzerland, because there was no free transit. Mr Calmes’s office had acquired a paper, on which it was stated: ‘It is absolutely necessary that this wagon, with its contents under seal, cross Switzerland.’

I was in my compartment and everything went smoothly until Basel: then in Basel I heard ‘Cring! Crang! Crung!’ The wagon behind had been uncoupled. I jumped out and said: ‘Listen here! Leave that wagon alone!’

‘No, no, no, we have to have the papers. It cannot be attached to a normal passenger train. It will have to be left here in Basel.’ I said: ‘Listen...’ and I started to speak German with them, French, Italian... I tried everything. But no, there was nothing doing. ‘Oh my God!’ I said: now I shall telephone Mr Calmes, but it was already ten o’clock at night... At a certain point I thought: I do not care any more. Whether it arrives or not, is not my fault. I have done all I can.

I stayed in my couchette and slept soundly while the wagon was coupled to a goods train that crossed Switzerland as far as Chiasso. There, there was another problem — the Italians: ‘Yes, but this is equipment and it is being imported — what is it?’ I said: ‘Listen. It is for Rome, and that is it’; I was annoyed. They let the wagon through, but in Milan it was uncoupled once again and left in some corner somewhere, leaving no trace. I asked the stationmaster. The stationmaster told me: ‘Well, I know nothing about it... Anyway, it is all the same to me.’ I said: ‘We shall soon see if it is all the same to you if I get the Foreign Ministry onto it...’ and so he took the trouble to do something about it. They went to look for the wagon, which was then coupled to a train, in Milan, bound for Rome. My hair did not turn white, but I had a fright nonetheless. It arrived, and once it was there, everything went as planned. The removal men were there and it all went well.