

[ About May, 1945 ]

INTERNAL BULLETIN

[ Letter from a Comrade in Europe ]

The following information from a friend should prove to be of interest to you. We hope to be able to send you such information from time to time.

April 22. Somebody has just sent me a copy of this new magazine, "Politics", written, I would say, by the kind of people who spend all their day leaning on the rail around an excavation, watching the steamshovels at work. What an impudent sheet, whose solution for our ills seems to consist in a moral exhortation to regenerate ourselves. It is entirely fitting that there should be a letter from J. Corbett of Akron. He still persists in willing what he wants to see-- which is, in all cases, far from the reality. The hatred of the French for the German he passes off quite simply as exhibitionism!

I wish it were that simple, that there was a deep feeling of rapprochement between the ordinary Frenchman and the ordinary German, but at the present it is just not so. That there is a special indignation reserved for the SS is, of course, true. Well, so it goes--everybody contributing his confusion to the confusion. What a chaotic mess things are in over here. Take a Frenchman: a few years of the People's Front, the blitzkrieg and the collapse of France, the occupation, the liberation, now the economic staggering, the return of war prisoners and the forced laborers, fascism which gave a higher standard of living than the liberators are able to at the moment, socialism which is to the left of communism, communism which is the most fervidly patriotic current in the government, collaborators in power, patriots in jail, intellectual life a dizzying maelstrom, people who have lost their volition.... The confusion is explicable.

**GERMAN "GUILT"**

You asked my opinion on the question of the German nations as a whole, on the war atrocities, etc. For my part, if you start with the premise that the war is justified you can hardly stick at any means to kill the enemy. For me it's a metaphysical distinction to differentiate between killing a man through multiple shell wounds and gas. Our objections to the flying bomb are in essence that we didn't think of it first. Terror bombing--we did it! The shooting of prisoners--that's been done, too. In this respect I heard an interesting discussion between a couple of intelligent officers who were discussing the Malmody shootings which occurred during the von Rundstedt December offensive.

They took a very practical view of it, namely, that the shootings were understandable in view of the limited men and equipment available to handle them at a time when speed was the essence of the operation. Our moral criteria are simple: if the enemy did it, it's wrong. It is unquestionable that a philosophy such as Nazism should lower the whole moral level of the people who subscribe to it. So does war. The people as a whole, so far as I was able to determine when I had contact with them, even in spite of the ineptness of our propaganda, are tired, deadly tired, of the war.

The concentration camps (and I tend to keep a little reserve of skepticism on them in view of the revelations following the last war) were run by a minority of the gangster-sadist element that such a movement as Hitlerism acquires. It's very easy to say otherwise, but a soldier does as he is told, however much he may dislike it--he's forced to. The disgust of the soldier for the war must be at an all time high now; he can see no percentage in continuing and risking being killed in the last days of the struggle.

When we captured 300,000 prisoners in the Ruhr pocket, and they offered no more resistance than they did, to me it indicated the will is gone. They don't revolt openly; they just can't fight. Their wives and mothers worry about their sons, perhaps they haven't heard from them in months, perhaps they are prisoners in America and they wonder how they are eating and how soon they will return after the war's over..but hate-- some obviously exists (the propaganda had pegs to hang from and Germany is a waste) but it isn't general and all pervading. The attitude is "Friede ist besser."

But after the war what a problem there will be! Germany partitioned, Europe in economic wreckage, ideological confusion of an unprecedented madness--it will resemble the economic, political and intellectual madhouse which was the decline of the Holy Roman Empire. I understand what A. means in speaking of how hopeless everything looks, how corrupted and confused everything is. A new instrument is being heard in the orchestra now--the fear of Stalinism on the European continent. That's the basic meaning, as I take it, of the recent Borgehese article in "Life". Contradiction piled on contradiction.

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April 24.

The Germans rightly fear the Russians. In one hospital a German was placed in a ward with some Russians, who promptly got out of bed and beat the German up and threw him out--wouldn't sleep in the same room as a Nazi.

#### SOCIALIZING THE CHOW LINE

For sometime here we had to engage in all sorts of self abasement, wheedling and bulldozing in order to get two pieces of bread in the chow line. One day some new fellows were handing out food. Their immense hands would reach into the bread box and slap TWO pieces of bread in your mess kit whether you wanted it or not. The same with the oranges. It seems that they are Russian ex-prisoners who are working for us, socializing distribution in the chow line. When the fellows came up for oranges, they would stuff one in each pocket of the jacket. Some fellows who didn't care for oranges would walk by--but not far!

A big paw would come down on his shoulder and there would be the Russian with a big socialist smile on his face. He got two oranges. Occasionally the man would protest. Interpreting this in a commendable, though, wrong, fashion the Russian would nod understandingly and jam four oranges in the man's jacket. Socialism!-- it's wonderful! They are a happy gang of young fellows, always roaring Red Army songs, throwing each other downstairs, and flinging the mops around with gay abandon.

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May 11

#### MAQUISARDS

Last night I had a long talk with a maquisard. Currently he is a volunteer in the Belgian Army. He possesses many of the characteristics I have noticed among the French and Belgians. He was a prisoner for four years. He says he found more than one good person among the Germans. One man he mentioned had been a prisoner in the last war. Though this man had nothing to gain by it (quite the reverse) he brought him food, for instance, when the Belgian knew that he himself had more to eat than this man. He was an electrician in a plant, working one or two hours a day; the rest of the time he walked around. Then he got a job on a farm in order to eat better. He escaped and returned to Belgium where he worked as a saboteur. His specialty was railroad tracks.

He worked with the Communists, not because he was a Communist (he is a Catholic Christian Democrat) but because they had an apparatus which allowed him to give vent to his hatred of the Germans. He said that had Pierlot not left the government there would have been a revolution of some sort. He has no liking for Leopold, though he classes himself as a monarchist. Leopold married the daughter of a collaborator during the occupation and lost a great deal of face. This Belgian joined the Belgian army when he returned from the maquis in the Ardennes. He couldn't stand the low moral level he found, as contrasted with the heroism and self-sacrifice of the prisoners and the maquisards. Now he is a little disillusioned and perplexed, doesn't know what to do. All this time he has been married, but says that his wife understands the compulsion under which he works and is very proud of him.

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May 18

About the only thing of note is that I see by placards that the Social Democratic party is now functioning--just what its character is, I don't know. I also watched some armored processing prisoners preparatory to releasing them--that is to say, taking the prisoners' money, watches, wedding rings, etc. ... Fernand is still almost overwhelmed with earning a living (in France). He could play the black market but considers it unscrupulous. He finished Mohring and liked it. Joan reports poor food conditions in France and absolute chaos in ideas. ... A very young Polish boy who works in the kitchen talked to us for awhile today. What hatred this war is breeding and implanting everywhere! He has lost his parents, and has only a couple of uncles in Palestine. He would like to go to the United States, Palestine, or Russia, but he can go to no one of them, nor return to any of the three Polands. He can't understand, having seen so many atrocities, why we don't pillage, burn and steal in Germany. It puzzles him. Anything done against the Germans is ethical.

## CONDITIONS OF GERMAN TOWNS

May 14

The town wasn't hit badly, except for the rail yards which received an extremely accurate and thorough blitzing. The town is filled with women and children almost exclusively. The gals all have a tubular mid-section and are not very attractive. The truckloads of Yugoslav displaced people are being housed in a building near the tracks. Women, bronzed, tired, clad shabbily and bearing huge packs--the tragedy of Europe. German industry was certainly run by women and foreign labor. A Siemens-Schukert plant back of our office opened up today. When I went to work it sounded like a dove-cote with all women's voice.

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May 12

Conditions are pitiful and desperate here. Refugees stand by the messline and scrape what's left in our messkits into cans and then eat it. Or fish it right out of the garbage. English prisoners drift through--five years in the prison camps. I gave them most of the food I received from home.

I and two friends captured three Germans in uniform in town. They're all fleeing the Russians. Prisoners--in this case, Russians--break into German bakeries, shoving aside the Germans who are waiting, and take everything. The Russian armies (not as an official policy, of course, but because of the "jackal" theory advanced in their propaganda and the peasant composition of the army) are burning homes and killing Czechs and Germans alike as they advance. The Germans are deathly afraid of the Russians.

Russian officers I talked to are quite different from Russian enlisted men. The former toe the official line more, much more, and believe--or express--all the crap. The enlisted men seem cynical. They're religious, too, interestingly enough. The czarist heritage persists.