

COLLIER'S

THE NATIONAL WEEKLY
FOR AUGUST 19, 1944

Land of the Free

LIBRARY
OLA, KANSAS

BY VICKI BAUM

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM PACHNER

Do we know how to treat German prisoners? Are we stamping out their fanatical belief in their Fuehrer? Here Vicki Baum (who took us inside wartime Germany in *Hotel Berlin*—1943) again makes use of the underground to draw a terrifying picture of the captive Nazi

PRISONER of War Gottfried Schlegel held Marga in his arms, and the fierce happiness of the moment was almost unbearable. While he was swept away in it, he wondered what it had been that had worried him so much, and why he had thought that he would never see his wife again. But they are going to kill me, he remembered. They had killed him several times before. This time they did it with a black cloth pressed over his mouth until he choked. He struggled free of it and was awake.

Slowly the dream receded and he was back in Barracks F. The black cloth changed into the darkness, into the sounds of fifty sleeping men—fifty German prisoners of war. Schlegel wondered how late it might be. Biedelmann, who was snoring in the lower bunk, had taken his wrist watch from him and crushed it under his boots; it had died like a living creature.

Biedelmann had also taken his wife's photograph and torn up the only thing that had relieved his loneliness. Biedelmann was the enemy—hated, despised and feared. When Biedelmann told a man that he was a traitor, such a man was doomed.

He had told it to Schlegel not one time but a hundred times.

All that was left, then, was to wonder how it would happen and when. It might come as a blow out of the darkness this very minute. It might come as a slow torture and last for months. It might come as a numb sort of craziness whispering insistently that suicide was the only way out. If it weren't for Lieutenant Coulter, Schlegel would have made an end with himself, as two others had done before. Among the American officers and noncoms, Coulter was the only one who understood some German, the only one to hold out some hope to him.

SCHLEGEL crept from his bunk, anxious not to wake Biedelmann, and tiptoed on bare feet to the door. As he stepped outside into the icy air without having been attacked on this most perilous stretch of the way, his pent-up breath exploded from his lungs with relief and hung as a steamy little cloud in front of him.

Carefully he avoided the black shadows along the barracks, keeping himself well within sight of the sentinels who walked their beat along the barbed-wire fences of the stockade. As long as they could see him, he felt safe and protected. But the moment he arrived in the darker area behind the latrines, he was gripped by panic again. Behind the open door of the coal shed, he heard the voices of the two men on fire duty. Kruger belonged to the lukewarm ones and was harmless. The other one, Weyrich, was the only friend in Barracks F who held openly to him, with the desperate courage it took to be not-a-Nazi among Nazis.

"What do you want this early? Can't you wait till the water gets warm?" Kruger asked, as Schlegel opened the door of the shower room.

"I like cold water," said Schlegel.

"Ach, you're crazy," Kruger said, ambling off with two pails of coal.

Weyrich waited till he was gone. "Think it's dangerous to take a shower with the others?" he asked in a whisper.

"You know what happened to Traub," Schlegel whispered back.

Traub, an Austrian with a frightened rabbit face, had been carried out of the showers with a fractured skull. For a man like

Biedelmann threw the beer bottle on the floor and raised his arm in mock salute. Schlegel bent down and gripped the broken bottle. "Just one more word," he said



Schlegel, the shower room was a place of intense danger. It had a hard, slippery floor onto which they might throw you; it had hard, narrow concrete walls against which they might beat your head. He could not afford the luxury of warm water in the rude, hustling company of the other prisoners.

"Just go in; if anyone comes, I'll whistle," Weyrich whispered.

Schlegel stepped gratefully into the musty dankness, switched on the light and turned on the shower. He was shivering most of the time now, from lack of sleep, from fear and the foul things they did to his food to keep him starved; he lacked the energy to step under the cold stream. Gingerly he rubbed his hands and face, feeling unclean and defeated as he slipped into his clothes again. Outside, the air seemed still colder, and the night had become thin and liquid.

Weyrich was whistling in the coal shed, but the little signal did not penetrate Schlegel's preoccupied mind. He picked his way from one fan of light to the next, fervently hoping to reach the barracks before the tumult of reveille. Twice he turned around with the instinct of the front soldier and the hunted animal, to make sure that he was not followed.

There were not more than a hundred yards between him and his goal when something happened. Something exploded inside of his head, the ground rose up to him, and he crumpled on it. . . .

"There's been more trouble with this fellow Schlegel," Captain Wilson, commanding officer of the area, reported to Lieutenant Walsh at 8 A.M.

Wilson was a handsome young animal, living in an aura of boastful masculinity. He had an influential father and a pretty, young wife, and he seemed to consider his military duties as something especially designed to interfere with his pleasant private existence.

"What? Schlegel again?" Walsh said with a tremor of irritation in his voice. He was the camp commander's adjutant, a little man with eyeglasses, determined to hang on to his soft job. "Every time there's trouble in Barracks F, this man is mixed up in it."

"Seems he got beaten up. Missing at roll call. Prisoner Biedelmann found him behind the latrines with a bad cut on his head."

"Who beat him up?"

"He doesn't know."

"He never does. I'm telling you, Captain, this Schlegel is a troublemaker of the first order," Walsh said. Walsh had been somebody's right-hand man in civilian life, and now he was the right-hand man of the camp commander. Instinctively he hated anything that might upset the smooth routine and annoy the colonel.

"Coulter seems to think they're ganging up on this fellow because he's anti-Nazi."

"Anti-Nazi! They're the worst ones. Communists, agitators. I know that kind. If Lieutenant Coulter had handled as many people as I have, he wouldn't fall for that stuff."

"I know one thing: Five companies of real Nazis don't make as much trouble as one anti-Nazi," Wilson concluded moodily. "Well, here's the sergeant's report."

"I don't think it's worth while bothering the colonel every time this fellow gets into a little brawl," Walsh said, with disgust. He

shoved the report into his dispatch case and left. Wilson took up the receiver to say good morning to his wife.

"Bring him in, Joe," the officer of the day, Lieutenant Coulter, told Sergeant Holt.

"Okay," Holt said, with that complete informality of the U. S. Army which more than anything else convinced the German prisoners that the Americans could never win the war.

The prisoner Holt brought in looked gray in the face, and a large strip of adhesive tape stuck to the base of his skull. Sweat oozed from his forehead, as if standing at attention without fainting were a supreme feat.

The lieutenant sighed. "At ease," he said, holding out his cigarettes.

The prisoner took one but did not presume to light it in the presence of an officer.

"The Med returned you on duty?" Coulter asked.

"Yes, sir. Doctor Brenner did."

"H'm," said Coulter. Doctor Brenner was one of the German prisoners who helped their American colleagues in the hospital. "Now tell me why they beat you up again, Schlegel. Any special reason this time?"

SCHLEGEL tried to answer in correct English; he was studying the foreign language, but it still stood like another barbed-wire fence around his lonely self.

"The old story, sir. They call me traitor, deserter, swine. So—they beat me. No special reason, no."

"Look here, Schlegel. I'm your friend and I'm getting worried about you. Do you have to provoke them?"

"I do not provoke, sir. It comes out of my pores, I think. That they do not permit. I speak the truth. But truth is *verboten*. I read forbidden books, forbidden newspapers—"

"There are no forbidden books or newspapers. Man, this is the United States. You can read and think and say what you please."

"Yes, sir. But not in German prison camp. The Gestapo knows."

"Sometimes I think you have a persecution complex," Coulter said, in exasperation. "You think there is a Gestapo agent in every corner."

"There is," Schlegel said. "Gestapo in every barracks. In every town. In every country. I know it. They report me to Gestapo headquarters of the United States and I am—" Schlegel dropped his hand like an ax.

Coulter was angered by the absurd notion of a United States Gestapo headquarters. "This is not Germany, you know," he said sharply.

"Yes, sir. But the terrorism goes harder here than in Germany. The Nazis are among themselves, and the Americans do not help us, excuse me, sir."

"But that's just what I'm trying to do—help. I strongly recommended your request for the segregation of you anti-Nazis. How many, would you say, are there in your barracks?"

"Perhaps one dozen; perhaps two dozen. I cannot know. They are afraid of Biedelmann."

"Why Biedelmann?"

"He is Gestapo."

"Have you any proof for such an accusation?"

"Proof, no. How do you call it? Symptoms, many."

"Look here, Schlegel, if you believe that, why don't you lie low for a while? Play possum, you know. Oh, heck, I don't know how to explain it to you."

"I understand, sir. The English word is appease, is it not, sir?"

"Hell, no!" the lieutenant cried angrily, then tried to explain in helpless German.

Schlegel shook his head. "You are an American officer, sir," he said, switching with relief to his own language. "How can you tell me not to fight? The day I was taken prisoner I was happy. Now I am going to America, I thought. Now everything will be good. I learned your anthem, sir; it is beautiful, sir. The Land of the Free. I wish to fight on your side, sir. I am not a coward. I fought on your side long before the war, and that was no job for a coward. Now you must help me. Land of the Free! Why don't you help us, sir? Why don't you? I am very disappointed with America, please excuse me, sir."

"Now look here, Schlegel," Coulter said, not sure he had understood the torrent of German correctly. "We have 170,000 prisoners of war. We can't study each case separately. We observe the terms of the Geneva Convention. That's the best we can do."

"Yes, sir."

"But if you have an official complaint to make, go ahead and make it," Coulter said.

SCHLEGEL stared sadly into the lieutenant's young, open face. How can I tell you? he thought. They threaten me, they hit me in the dark, they spit into my food and foul the water I want to drink. They stole my wife's picture and did unspeakable things to her letters before they threw them into the latrine. They choke me, they beat me, and you don't help, they're going to kill me. You boy, you American—how can I make you understand it all?

"I have no official complaint to make, sir," he said.

The lieutenant stared at him for another moment and sighed, deeper than before.

"Listen, Joe," Coulter told his sergeant, after the prisoner had left, "either this guy

(Continued on page 40)

"Men," Coulter said in his halting German, "there have been cases of mistreatment among you. . . . Any prisoner who wishes to be transferred to a company of anti-Nazis may step forward without fear"



CANADA'S

BY FRANK GERVASI

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY HUSTON-PIX

One of the world's worst headaches afflicts our neighbor, where Canadians fight Canadiens

DEMOCRACY at its legislative labors isn't ever quite as enthralling a spectacle as the ideals it represents—as anybody who's watched Congress at work in Washington knows. The session in Canada's oak-paneled Victorian House of Commons in Ottawa wasn't an inspiring exception. It was remarkable only for the studied antagonism in the voice, manner and questions of a French Canadian member of the Opposition.

The member was short, swarthy and wore thickish eyeglasses. His sparse hair was dark and oily and was parted in the middle. He spoke French, although he obviously understood English. The Speaker, enthroned in his black gown at one end of Commons, was politely annoyed at the member's routine but gimlety questions.

The member's queries were addressed pointedly to the French-speaking Canadian Minister of Justice, Mr. Louis St. Laurent, a gray, sharp-nosed and meticulous man with a tolerant face and manner. He translated each question at the Speaker's insistence, replied in French and translated each reply for the rest of the House.

No angry words were spoken, but you could almost feel them rising in the throats of the justice minister's English-speaking colleagues on the government side of the House. Only once did the palpable antagonism recede—when a government official announced the Canadians' break through the Gustav Line in Italy. Then they were no longer Britishers and Frenchmen, but Canadians. For about thirty seconds, they thumped their desks and celebrated together.

Such moments of unity between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians are rare. On every issue, from birth control to the war, they are as far apart as Hitlerism and democracy. The conflict between Canada's 3,500,000 French and 5,000,000 people of British origin constitutes, in fact, one of the worst minority problems in the world. The country has only 11,500,000 people, the remaining 3,000,000 being of racial origins as mixed as those of the United States. "These," say the British Canadians, "are no trouble at all—they've become Canadians."

But the French don't assimilate. Many do not learn more than the absolute minimum of English needed to sell their vegetables or get a job in a factory. They marry, mingle and worship only within the boundaries of their race and religion. They've remained for nearly two hundred years a compact French and Catholic island in a sea of British Protestants, an unconquered and unconquerable people, hard-working, frugal, fiercely independent and prolific. They've grown from a colony of 65,000.

The British conquered the French empire in the New World on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 and acquired the French colonies by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, but a fragment of the old France of Louis XIV, mortal enemy of the British, remained. This is French Canada, which clings still to the traditions and religion and folkways of the mother country.



Not to the France of Robespierre, Marat and the Third Republic. But to the France which once was a greater imperial power than Britain.

French Canadian rabble rousers needle their British fellow citizens by reminding them of the mottoes on Great Britain's coat of arms. These are in French, *Honi Soit Qui Mal y Pense* and *Dieu Et Mon Droit*.

"They were inscribed there," the French hecklers say, "by our Norman ancestors, who conquered England and founded the heroic race which gave birth to Canada."

This residue of old France in the New World still fights the British. The French Canadians opposed Canada's entry into a "foreign war." They refused to be conscripted for overseas service. They balk at taxes and oppose rationing. Some are outright Nazi sympathizers. They burned a synagogue in Ontario. Until about a year ago, most French Canadians thought Marshal Pétain a great hero, for he represented a France opposed to Britain.

The French Power Bloc

In a sense, the French Canadians rule Canada, whose politicians, aware of the solid voting power of the French minority, spend all their pre-election time wooing them, and their terms in office appealing them. This behavior on the part of the politicians has intensified the bitterness of English-speaking Canadians against the French minority, and the division between them has become Canada's great problem.

The chasm between Canadians makes national unity impossible, impairs the Canadian war effort, complicates relations between the Dominion and the rest of the British Commonwealth and retards the progress of Canadian-American relations. If French Canadians are anti-British, they're only slightly less anti-American, for they see the possibility of an eventual merger between Canada and the United States, with the danger of becoming a small minority in a big country instead of a big one in a small country.

I had my first inkling of the seriousness of the split between Canadians on the way up to Canada in the smoking room of The

(Continued on page 73)

A band plays to warm French Canadian patriotism and to attract recruits to the Army but the crowd in Quebec is indifferent, a cause of national discord

Poor living conditions such as these, however, are partly responsible for the low rate of French Canadian recruiting. Their rejection percentage is high

