



RUSSEL WRIGHT

In Lower Silesia new nationals of Poland, like this girl, are pressing every member of each farm family into the task of making "recovered" territories pay off



PRESS ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hitler's former arsenal in Upper Silesia is the core of Poland's new industrial life. Here molten steel runs from a furnace that was captured by the Soviets

THE POLISH DREAM

BY ERIKA MANN

MY VISA to Poland was granted within two days. With it, I received a letter from the Polish embassy at Prague warmly recommending me to all Polish authorities en route and giving assurance I could cross the boundary by automobile at whatever point I saw fit. My trip seemed to be getting off to an incredibly good start.

My road map indicated that a point near Jelenia Gora, formerly known as Hirschberg, would be the most logical spot for crossing the border. When I arrived in my ancient German Adler (vintage 1932) the usual formalities were quickly disposed of. My Czech visa, which was valid for a single journey and no more, was canceled and I proceeded through four kilometers of weed-infested no man's land toward what appeared to be a minor Maginot line.

The edge of Poland was spiked with a three-ply fence of wicked-looking barbed wire. From behind it Polish soldiers shouted a stern refusal to let me proceed. I demanded to see the commandant. In due course he appeared on the scene, elegantly dressed in an outfit of black and silver. The young man perused my credentials, commented politely on the excellence of their quality as diplomatic papers, and informed me, with regrets, that no one, not even an ambassador, would be permitted to cross the frontier at

Jelenia Gora. The place to go, he said, was Frydlant, some 70 kilometers distant.

History repeated itself at Frydlant; the Poles refused to be moved by my plight. Once again frustrated Czech customs officials had to be talked into permitting me to cross back into their country.

Then, on the second day of what had begun to look like a really hopeless venture, I encountered a Czech patrol that was better informed than the officials with whom I had previously had contact. These men told me there were just three crossing points that were open to automobiles along the entire 758-kilometer Czech-Polish border. The nearest authorized frontier, they said, was at Nachod, 90 kilometers away. An hour after my Adler had limped into Nachod I was permitted to enter what Poland calls her "recovered territories."

The former German region in what is now western Poland, an area smaller than the land ceded by Poland to Russia but vastly more valuable, is the dreamland of the much-partitioned neighbor of the Soviets. The grant of 61,000 square miles was made at the Potsdam Conference in compensation for the 104,000 square miles in eastern Poland that went to Russia.

The new addition is rich in raw materials, in developed industries, and in agricultural assets. In the face of

the destruction wrought there, the actual value of Poland's gains is hard to assess and probably lies below the Potsdam estimate of \$9,000,000,000. Even so, this acquisition is worth substantially more than the lost lands behind the Curzon line, estimated to be \$3,600,000,000. Potentially, at least, Poland is today one of the wealthiest countries in Europe.

Dispute Over Lands Foreseen

But these so-called recovered territories were likely to be among the most hotly disputed issues when a peace treaty with Germany came up for discussion. Would the land exchange agreed upon at Potsdam be considered permanent? The Poles, who stand ready to fight for their new hopes, would say yes—most emphatically yes. The Russians, who have never been popular with the Poles, would not hear of any further changes either. Germany, on the other hand, and with her, Poland's Anglo-American allies, were inclined to question the finality of the Potsdam settlement.

In defending her claim to what constitutes a third of her entire postwar territory, Poland was ready to insist that these territories are ancient Polish soil, which in the course of eight centuries the Germans acquired illegally by means of aggressive warfare; that they are indispensable to Poland,

whereas Germany can manage without them; that while Germany never derived the greatest possible benefit from her eastern and northeastern possessions, Poland is eager and able to develop and exploit these lands properly, to her own advantage as well as to that of Europe.

For the first couple of driving hours after you get over the border, Lower Silesia does little to justify the last claim. Although villages, farmhouses and country hotels in the areas near the border are comparatively intact, they seem all but uninhabited. Abandoned hamlets, untilled fields and roads disfigured by pits mark the face of a spooky landscape. More than two years have passed since its inhabitants fled. All German street names and signposts have been replaced by Polish letterings, which, of course, bear no similarity to corresponding markings on available maps. You can easily get lost in the silent maze.

Finally I became hopelessly mixed up and decided to park by the side of the road and wait for help to come along. Night had fallen and I felt none too cozy. An officer who was passing by stopped at my hail and came over to the car. He was not entirely sober. He squeezed his body halfway through the door window and unceremoniously attempted to open my coat. When I resisted he suggested, with a broken accent, that since it was getting

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Ilse Lachmann, 27-year-old war nurse and one of the last of the Germans left in Wroclaw, works at collecting scrap iron for the Polish government steel trust

WIDE WORLD



RUSSEL WRIGHT

Even though it seemed to the author that Polish farmers were well treated, men like this peasant resented their government and the "Russian archenemy"

New lands wrested from Germany by Russia make Poland potentially one of the wealthiest countries in Europe. Startlingly, a well-known journalist finds that hatred for the Soviet Union is almost universal among Poles in this hotly disputed territory

late I had better join him in his quarters.

I declined, and the man became so persistent that I was forced to jerk my car into motion with enough abruptness to shake him loose. He was slightly hurt in the process, I was soon to learn. The street down which I fled was dead-end and when I turned back to find another way out I encountered not one but eight officers, including the persistent one.

"Stop!" they shouted. "Stop, or we shoot!"

Long after I had halted they were still pointing their weapons at me and I didn't like the nervous way in which they did it. I decided on a small offensive of my own. Jumping out of the car I raised my letter as if it were a shield and at the top of my voice screamed:

"Watch out for yourselves, or you'll be exceedingly sorry!"

Unwelcome Escorts

The men were taken aback and lowered their firearms. But they would not let me proceed until four of them had manned the running boards and the rest had formed an outer, walking barricade against the danger they said the night contained. I felt anything but secure and it was not until they had gone, suddenly, at the entrance to a forest, that I considered myself safe.

Collier's for December 27, 1947

After numerous false turns and detours in the black woods I reached Walbrzych, the first sizable town on my route. It was breakfast time and I was very hungry. The embassy Poles had said I would be well fed wherever I went, but if this prediction was to prove no more reliable than their information on the boundary, my chances were slim.

I went into a restaurant, sat down and when the waiter approached asked doubtfully, in English first, then in French and finally in German:

"Eggs?"

"Ja wohl," replied the waiter. "Ham, too?"

He brought three eggs and a portion of ham the equivalent of the weekly ration of a large English family.

At a neighboring table two men were reading the morning papers. Secretary Marshall figured in the headlines. We got to talking.

They spoke German without an accent and, when they learned that I was a newspaperwoman, they wanted to know for what sort of newspaper I was working.

"A conservative one," I said, curious as to how they would take it.

The two smiled nostalgically. "Conservative, oh, beautiful!" one of them said with great feeling.

They were not Germans, they stated. They were "autochthones"—

Polish by ancestry and blood, although, like their parents and grandparents, born under German domination. More than one million autochthones live in the recovered territories, Germans who, owing to some remote Polish background, have been nominated Poles.

Of the 32,000,000 Poles Hitler set out to enslave, not more than 24,000,000 survived. Over 6,000,000 civilians including 3,200,000 Jews perished under the Germans.

Many Germans Stayed On

An acute man-power shortage prevented the postwar government from relieving the recovered territories entirely of their German population. The majority was expelled according to the provisions of the Potsdam agreement, but an admitted 400,000—specialists, mining engineers, technicians—were allowed to stay. Together with the autochthones they form about one third of the present population of the reclaimed areas.

My neighbors in the restaurant didn't like their government and said so fairly soon, if in very low voices. Nor, for that matter, did they like the Russians, whom they considered beasts.

"But we are at their mercy," they lamented. "Look at the Marshall Plan and the chances it offered our country.

We wanted to go—even the government knew that we had better. But then the Soviets said no."

It deserves to be noted, though, that while in the early days of the Marshall talks this attitude was widespread among thinking Poles, including Socialists, it altered quickly and radically. By the end of August most Poles seemed to feel that the reindustrialization of Germany was America's real objective and that whatever aid non-German Europe might eventually receive would be too little, too late and too dearly paid for by a German power renaissance.

Figured at the official exchange rate, breakfast was expensive. The dollar rates 117 zlotys, and I paid 380 for my meal. Unofficially you can get up to 700 zlotys for one greenback, if you are ready to break the law and to search at great length for one of the few spots where such transactions take place. Poland's currency black marketers can be sentenced to death if they are caught, and consequently they are not too easily found.

Except for a few beer-drinking soldiers, the autochthones and myself were the only guests in the place.

"People can't afford these prices," the waiter told me. "A skilled worker makes about 9,000 zlotys a month, just enough to buy twenty decent breakfasts."

(Continued on page 34)

IT WAS forty years ago, when Ella and I were only in the second grade, but I remember it vividly because it was the first time either Ella or I ever saw an automobile; it was the first time our Uncle Steve ever saw Miss Nancy Hilton; and it was the first time Miss Nancy saw either Uncle Steve or Rosebud, the housebroke hog. It is impossible to say now who was the most impressed, but there is no doubt it was a remembering day all around.

Neither Ella nor I knew Miss Nancy Hilton would come to our house in an automobile, but we knew she was comin'. The day before—that was a Friday—she had kept us after school. "I think it is necessary," she said, "that I call on your family."

I couldn't see any benefit in that. "We ain't got any family," I said, "except Uncle Steve."

Ella giggled. "And Rosebud," she said. Ella was my twin, and because we had been raised so close together I looked on her as another boy, or almost. Her hair was cut short (or at least as short as mine, which was cut whenever the spirit moved Uncle Steve to cut it) and she wore overalls the same as I did.

"Rosebud?" Miss Nancy said. "Is she your aunt?"

"No'm."

"A little sister?"

Ella started to giggle again. "Rosebud ain't kin," I said.

Miss Nancy colored faintly. "Very well," she said. "Tell your uncle that I wish to talk to him. I will drive out to your house tomorrow afternoon."

So the next day, eating midday dinner, Ella and I were telling Uncle Steve how all of us ought to go fishing, right away. We had neglected to mention Miss Nancy's prospective visit. "The Plutney kids caught a trout as big as a hog this morning," I said. "They caught so many they had to throw 'em away."

Uncle Steve was a man who worked hard when he worked; he owned his ranch and maybe five hundred head of cattle and he looked after them almost without help. But it was no trouble to talk him into fishing on a Saturday afternoon. He said, "All right. You and Ella dig some worms, and—"

He stopped. He tilted his head to one side, listening.

We all heard it. It was a noise something like the wind rattling palm fronds, and more like a bunch of hogs eating corn. It kept getting closer and louder. "What in hell?" Ella said.

"Don't cuss," Uncle Steve said, still listening. He was puzzled, even though he was a man who had traveled as far as Jacksonville and Tampa more than once; he had even been to Gainesville to school one year and he knew a lot of things. But all at once he yelled, "That's an automobile!" and ran to the door.

Ella and I took one look at each other. "Miss Nancy!" Ella said, and we went out the back door, fast.

WE CIRCLED the house and headed for the front, keeping a bunch of guava bushes and some palmettos between us and the road. But we got to the guava bushes in time to crouch down and watch the car go past. I still remember it. It looked big as a train engine, black and shiny, and there was nothing pulling it and nothing pushing it. Miss Nancy Hilton sat high up on the front seat. She had a scarf wrapped over her hat and tied under her chin, and the ends of the scarf whipped in the breeze. There was a man driving. He wore a cap with green spots on it and a pair of goggles so big they hid most of his face.

The car stopped right in front of the gate; it sighed and went quiet, kind of settling down like a dog going to sleep. The driver took off his cap and goggles and got out, and I could see he was Mr. Elbert Adams whose father owned the bank in Tonekka. He opened the car door for Miss Nancy and she told him to wait and went up the walk to our house.

Ella pulled at my sleeve. "Come on!" she whispered.

We ran back to the kitchen. Uncle Oscar was at the wood stove, and he was beginning to sing, but not louder than a whisper yet. He always started to sing on Saturday afternoon. He was an old Negro with white hair and only one eye and he used to say he didn't need a calendar to keep time: He said he would know Sunday anyway because he woke up with a hang-over. But he was a good cook and he'd been with Uncle Steve since Uncle Steve was born. "What devilment y'all up to?" he asked.

The hog was housebroke—
the household was heartbroke



THE HOUSEBROKE