

The bust of Franz von Papen, ex-German ambassador to Turkey, sits in the music room of his chateau.



A Letter To Von Papen

Wallenfangen, Germany.

Herr Franz von Papen,
Somewhere in Europe.

Dear Sir:

SINCE you are very busy these days and reported to be in every neutral capital in Europe at the same time, I think you would be interested in learning something of the condition of your estate at Wallenfangen. First, a word or two concerning the house guests on your estate at the time of my visit. They were an Engineer battalion attached during December to the 90th Division.

The engineers were very busy in the first week of December last, bringing troops of the 90th Division across the Saar River to Dillingen. Dillingen, you must remember, is directly across the river from the estate. For several nights in a row the engineers ferried men and supplies across the river under cover of darkness. This was an immensely difficult operation at the time; no bridgehead had been established, yet the entire division was continuously supplied. And always German artillery fire was heavy.

You must understand how admirable this operation was. From certain relics found in your home, it is clear that you understand military operations. I refer particularly to that trophy of your old regiment, which listed the winners of the trophy in past years. I noticed on the inscription that you were described as being of outstanding military manner and courage. You were in great company as winner of that trophy, for it also listed Von Mackensen, who became a great German general. In fact all the names were Vons—all of them aristocrats and all of them famous military men.

It was during this major operation of carrying over and supplying the division on the east bank of the Saar that the engineers decided to use your estate for a kind of combination rest camp and command post. American soldiers, as you know, have no particular interest in great names, so it did not interest them very much that the house belonged to one of the biggest names in German political life. I regret to inform you that they showed no reverence or respect whatsoever for the reputation of the place.

By the time the engineers were settled on your grounds, the fighting in Wallenfangen, particularly artillery fire from your own German guns, had begun to destroy the estate. For a while the engineers had to live in the servants' quarters,

but finally they took residence in the main building. When I arrived as a guest of the engineers, most of the rooms showed signs of both shell and machine-gun fire. The very fine mosaic floor in the central lobby was chipped. Your bust on the mantel in the music room, which stands opposite a medium-sized grand piano, showed your nose slightly chipped by machine-gun fire. Herr Hitler's bust upstairs in the trophy and collection room lay on the floor in a pile of rubble.

Herr von Papen, your caretaker made a blunder, I think, in sealing up some of the rooms below the stairs. All soldiers are curious, and American soldiers are particularly curious. Besides, these soldiers were engineers, which made things doubly unfortunate. With tools of their trade at hand, they naturally blew and crowbarred open these sealed rooms and removed your stores of cognac.

The whole house showed evidence of battle. In fact, while I was there, a German shell came right through the library window and burst. You can imagine the result. But the bookcases and all your valuable library remained untouched. Alfred Weber's "Kultur Geschichte und Kultur Soziologie" was still there; so was Richard Kuhlmann's "Gedanken uber Deutschland." The big book on the history of Catholicism in France and all the other books had neither been hit by fire nor disturbed by soldiers. It was all as you must have left it. The engineers had a fire going in the grate. Some of the men were writing letters on one of your small desks. And resting on a big, comfortable lounge were Sgt. Harry C. Digby of Long Beach, Calif., and Sgt. Edgar L. Gearis of Westfield, Tex., who had made at least 20 crossings of the river between them that night.

Your collections of photographs shed a curious light on your interests. There was that set of pictures of American troops on bivouac, on parade, etc., which had been taken before and during World War I. There was the album of pictures taken during your trip to Stockholm in more peaceful days. And there were pictures bringing things more or less up to date. They showed you with Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler, Goering and other important figures in Germany.

Music must have been another of your absorbing interests. Capt. James Owen Stinnett of Abilene, Tex., executive officer of the battalion, took a great interest in your three pianos. He is a musician. None of the pianos had been damaged at all, but concussion undoubtedly put them slightly off tune. An engineer, passing by one piano, ran his hands over the keys. It did not

sound like Wagner. What music particularly interested you, Herr von Papen?

The pictures of your daughters remained on the wall; also those of your Von Papen ancestors. Nor was the evidence of your hunting prowess disturbed. The elk and moose and deer heads which decorated the stairways and main entrances were still there, with inscriptions indicating you had hunted in the United States. Did you hunt these elk in the Rockies before or after the Black Tom explosion, Herr von Papen?

The letters found by the engineers (evidently the caretaker had been unable to remove them in time) were purely personal and therefore of no interest to Americans. A glance at one or two, however, indicated that you were a widely traveled man, that you had standard family ties and at various times you and your family had been in Washington, Stockholm, Italy and other parts of the world. It was clear from an examination of your house, Herr von Papen, that you were a man of education, aristocracy and affairs.

In Wallenfangen and Buren I made inquiries concerning you. What did they think of you, and how had you lived here in this Saar valley? The opinions varied somewhat, but I believe your reputation has declined. Of course it was mentioned everywhere that you had always been a man of charity; that you made it a habit to give all the children in this valley gifts for Christmas. The people pointed out that you lived here for a long time in the style of a country gentleman, and the *burgomeister* of Buren, who had met you at local affairs, said you were a courteous, soft-spoken man and especially concerned with local benefit drives. When questioned about your political life, he said you had entered politics when Herr Hitler came into power only to soften the blow of Nazism. He thought that your venture into international politics was merely a side line and that your real life was in the bosom of your family in the estate at Wallenfangen. From the *burgomeister* and from several other people, I formed the impression that you were considered a home-loving, peaceable, well-to-do member of the "first family" of the Saar.

But other people seemed somewhat bitter. They were not at all sure you have been an innocent associate of Hitler; that you mixed deeply into Nazi politics merely to soften the harsher aspects. From them I gathered that you had used your reputation to bring many people, particularly the farming population of Germany, to complete support of National Socialism. The American phrase for this is a "front." Because they believed you were a front for Nazi-ism, some of them investigated your property and carried off some items.

I WISH, in closing, to tell you that the trip to your home was very interesting. Who would have thought a few years ago, marching up a ramp at Penn Station into the Army, that the muddy shoes of American soldiers would ever tramp the stairs of the home of Franz von Papen? Will Herr Hitler's Berchtesgaden be like this?

The countryside around was very desolate while I was at your house. The few people remaining in the area slunk by like ghosts. In empty villages only goats pranced about. Cattle without masters lowed in muddy fields. Hour after hour artillery poured back and forth across the river. Toward evening the sky was filled with smoke and fire like a terrible painting of war. And across the river, Dillingen burned with bright fires where 90th Division soldiers pushed on in the steady, unglamorous, gripping way the Americans are traveling through this war. Every once in a while a German shell from across the river descended on your house at Wallenfangen. It was clear that the Von Papen estate could not last much longer. And with its passing would go all evidence of your life as a country gentleman. All that would be left would be the diplomatic side of your life in which you always seem to have been surrounded by bomb explosions and assassinations.

As I left Wallenfangen that evening, everything below in the valley was shrouded in battle smoke. Every time a shell burst, the sky lighted up and the whole valley seemed to heave as if Germany herself were heaving and dying.

Very truly yours,

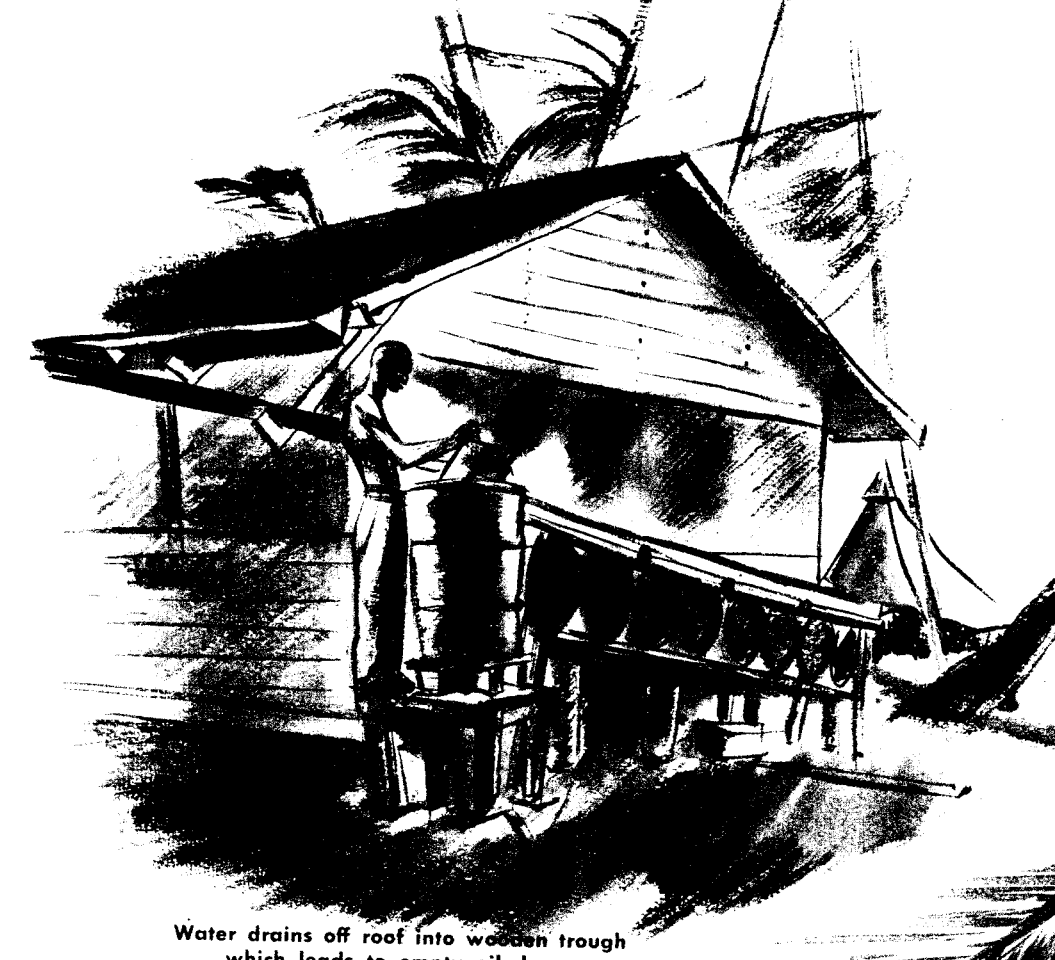
(Signed) SGT. SAUL LEVITT

YANK Staff Correspondent

P.S. For further particulars about your estate, I would advise you to get in touch with Lt. Col. Gilbert R. Pirrung, commanding an Engineer battalion, U. S. Army.




Marine vs. coconut.



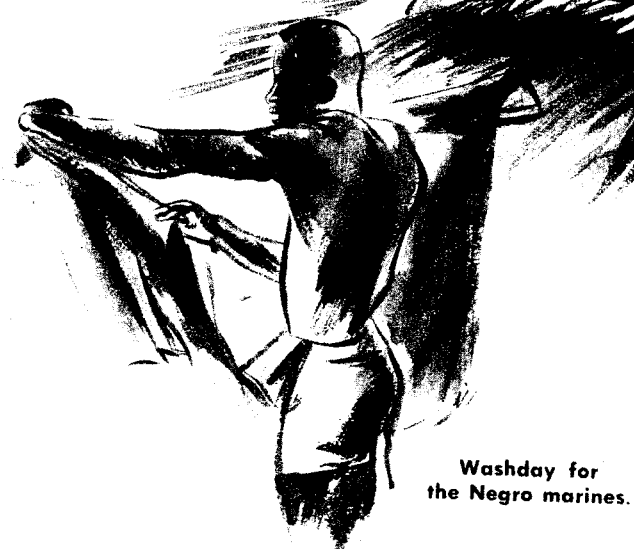
Water drains off roof into wooden trough which leads to empty oil drum.

Funafuti Sketches



Milk comes from the green coconuts, meat from the ripe.

Sgt. Art Weithas, YANK staff artist, gives his impression of a Pacific island where troops sweat out the war in more ways than one.



Washday for the Negro marines.



Church hut on Main Street.

Modern electric water fountain is covered with thatch.