

Victorious Germany . . .

Land of Gloom

Despair and Hunger Grip Reich's Masses De- spite Her Victories



Behind the facade of mighty victories and military parades, the people of Germany sit gloomily in their bomb shelters and wonder.

Richard O. Boyer, one of PM's correspondents abroad, has just returned from 100 days in Europe under Hitler. He is one of the few American correspondents who have come back to this country from Berlin since the war began. With this article he begins an unusually authoritative analysis of conditions in war-time Germany.

By RICHARD O. BOYER



When I left New York for Germany on the clipper on June 13, the Nazis had yet to win one of the most momentous victories in modern military annals. Twenty-two hours later, when we landed in Lisbon, we found that modern history moves as fast as modern transportation. While we were in the air, Paris had fallen and it was apparent that the war and the world had entered a new phase.

On June 28, at the very crest of the wave of German success, for already France had signed a crippling armistice, I arrived in Munich. Hitler had ordered a ten-day celebration of the smashing of Versailles, of the unparalleled victory of German arms. I thought I should see dancing in the streets and all the vociferous thanksgiving of a nation that had received compensation for a 20-year-old defeat its people had never forgotten. Instead the people of Munich were unmistakably sad, quiet and weary.

Bells Sound a Dirge

I could not understand it all and could scarcely believe the testimony of my own eyes. The scarlet banners with their black swastikas that garlanded the city everywhere in response to Hitler's orders seemed only to emphasize the worried melancholy. The victory bells that rang each day at noon acquired the sound of a funeral dirge when one looked at the tired, pinched faces of the Germans hurrying along the pavements. When German troops marched through the streets scarcely a head was turned, there were no cheers, and the people continued to go gloomily about their business.

In the Hofbrauhaus, that giant beer hall known all over the world for its lovely, creamy beer, its delectable sausage, its German boisterousness and song, I saw 1000 people sitting silently, morosely. There were none of the songs that visitors remember so well, the famous beer had been watered down until it resembled American 3.2 of other days and the Germans moodily chewed stale slabs of bread between which there was no sausage but only sliced and salted rings of white radish. When I expressed surprise to a glum man sitting near me he glanced impatiently up and only said, "We celebrated once in 1914."

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Despair and Hunger

This was the first of many surprises in a country so hermetically sealed from the rest of the world that what is common knowledge there is unknown here. There were others to come.

I found, for example, that while the rest of the world regards Russia and Germany as allied, it is generally taken for granted in Nazi circles that Germany will invade Russia in 1941. Responsible Nazi officials declare, in off-the-record but scarcely secret conversations, that the Soviet Union will either stand and deliver the Ukraine, the Baku oil regions, and the former Baltic states or Germany will seize them if and when she conquers or makes peace with England.

Despite the official Nazi party line that war between the U. S. A. and Germany is unnecessary, I found that high German officials believe that it is inevitable and the only question is when and where.

I found that the remaining 187,000 Jews in Germany are being destroyed by a new technique that eschews violence but is perhaps more deadly.

I found that food in Germany, although it is rationed sufficiently carefully to permit a long war, is nevertheless so deficient in quality and quantity that German army doctors have declared that new recruits show signs of weakness until they enjoy the better army diet.

In trips to France, Holland and Belgium, I talked to many concerning the collapse of France and the reasons for it; found that the war correspondent of 1940 is a joke, at least in Germany and German controlled portions of Europe; that American reporters are virtually helpless there; I saw Spain plainly under German domination; I visited Italy; I heard Nazis speak contemptuously of their Axis partner as a German dependency that would soon be even more dependent.

All these things will be discussed in later articles.

Civilians Listless

But the most surprising development in Germany is that a dead listlessness, akin to the disease of the spirit that caused the collapse of France, is spreading through Germany like a plague, infecting an increasing number of her people with defeatism. If the contagion is not halted, Germany itself, even in victory, may go the way of France. It must be quickly added, however, that this spirit has not yet infected the army, the Nazi party, or the Hitler youth to any appreciable degree and it is doubtful if it ever will until there is a military setback.

For ten days before I left Berlin I sat in bombproof cellars with the inhabitants of the German capital while bombs and anti-aircraft fire shook the earth and filled the night with menace. Never have I seen people with less elan, with more real depression of spirit. It was not fear. It was not the damage being done or the people being killed for the raids were still small scale compared to those over London. It was something far deeper. That something was what gave the mild, demonstration bombings of Berlin an importance out of all proportion to the damage done.

Need Cheering Up

It was, as far as the Germans themselves could tell me, that what was happening outside was a part of the entire pattern of their lives. Most of them had gone through the World War and the blockade, through revolution, street fighting, unemployment, inflation, foreclosures, famine. Now huddling in their cellars while bombs dropped outside, they could see no end to it. It had always, one way or another, been throughout their lives the way it was at that moment. It was not the bombings, neither was it the lack of food, nor the many stifling war-time regulations that robbed their lives of all grace and spontaneity and turned them into automats. It was everything since 1914, all added up together with the presentment

Despair and Hunger

that things were going to get worse and worse.

Sometimes one would feel sorry for them as they huddled in their cellars and say, "Well, cheer up. The war may soon be over."

Almost invariably the reply was in this tenor: "Oh, no, it will go on. America will come in again. We will have another terrible winter like last winter."

"But your papers say you are defeating England."

"Oh, the papers!" Often the speaker would shrug his shoulders and look nervously around as if someone might hear his unspoken thought that you couldn't believe the papers.

When my wife and I left Germany it was like leaving a prison. All the preceding day, Germans called and asked me to do favors for them when I got "outside"—as they called the rest of the world. They were simple enough little requests such as telling a relative in Chicago or San Francisco that they were well. The morning we left a little crowd of servants gathered about us in our hotel and begged for the food stamps we had not used. They were poor people and although we gave them money and clothes, it was the stamps, permitting them very small quantities of extra meat and butter, that made tears come to their eyes. One woman said, and it would be funny if it were not tragic, "Oh, take me, take me with you. Hide me in your trunk. Do anything!"

Hitler's Worried

When they shook hands they had the attitude of people remaining in a desperate situation bidding farewell to one fortunate enough to escape. Those we left included many kinds of people but the common denominator of all of them was a kind of passive hopelessness. More than once during my last twenty-four hours in Germany, a German speaking of Hitler's last speech said, "He's worried. We could tell it by the way he spoke."

And official Germany is worried. During the latter part of June and July, officials often said, speaking about the war against England, "It will all be over in three weeks." The phrase got the currency of a slogan and as the weeks slipped into months the prophecy proved a boomerang. The same officials who had been telling me that it would all be over in three weeks, two months later were telling me to remember that they were fighting the world's strongest empire and that such a foe could not be reduced without a hard struggle. For the first time many Germans began to feel that Hitler had slipped up. For the first time, one heard it whispered that Hitler's timetable schedule had been disrupted. Every day of English resistance causes more German civilians to say, with a sort of long suffering, passive despair, "Ach, it will never be over. We shall have another terrible winter. No food, no heat, and bombings every night."

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