

Maedchen In Uniform

The girls who served in Adolf's army are a sorry, slovenly looking lot. In a PW camp near Florence they spill their gripes to GI guards.

**By Sgt. GEORGE BARRETT
YANK Staff Correspondent**



Most of the PWs, like these four sunbathers, had contempt for Americans.

WOMEN'S COMPOUND, PW ENCLOSURE 334, FLORENCE, ITALY—"Those bitches, they're too smart to talk," the guard said, and as we walked into the large cage three SS girls, sunbathing in shorts and halters, pointedly looked the other way. "They hate us, and they don't hide it," the GI laughed.

The fence around the compound was high and boarded, topped by huge coils of barbed wire, but through the wide slits in the fence German male PWs marching past from a neighboring cage looked in at the women and smiled—and the SS women smiled back. One of the grinning young blondes scowled quickly, however, when an American MP happened to catch her eye.

There were 684 women in the cage; some were SS, some were just Germans, the rest were Italians, French, Yugoslavs and other nationalities who had served with the Nazi Army. Many of them slouched on the ground, or leaned in slovenly fashion against the barracks; others stared down with sour looks from their hard, wooden bunks; still others, who worked on scrubbing details, moved in deliberate and insolent disregard of any person who passed by, unless he were a German. These were, for the most part, women who had been left behind in the PW cage after other prisoners had been screened and released. Some were vicious, some were colorless, and all were being held for special investigation. One solemn, gentle-looking creature had been indicted for a war crime.

While most of the female PWs were contemptuous, a few were not at all arrogant; these were frightened and showed it, and when a guard walked through they stepped aside for him. They jumped to their feet and stood at attention in their rooms; they volunteered to work in the camp administration offices. It almost seemed that these few went out of their way to be humble and submissive to the PW authorities.

"They are nice, all right—and cooperative," said one GI. He made a grimace. "They're the opportunists; they get along with anybody, and they were just as nice and cooperative when they wore the skull-and-crossbones of the SS on their uniforms."

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There were two GIs in the orderly room inside the women's cage, but the daily life of the compound was pretty much run by the women. There was little work to keep them busy, and aside from the few who were mopping floors or washing their clothes in outside tubs, they dozed lazily in the sun or just sat and talked. According to one SS girl, the talk was mostly about when they were going to go home and about politics. She said that the fanatic Nazis there were still spreading the gospel among the girls and keeping them in line. Nobody was particularly concerned, however, for as one officer put it, "They're not worth bothering with, and you couldn't re-educate them anyhow."

About a dozen male PWs were roaming around the compound when we entered, and one of the guards said they had been let in to shift some



These women, washing their clothes in the PW enclosure in Florence, all served in the German Army.



of the wooden bunks, as the male prisoners do all the heavy work in the women's cage. An officer came through and blew up.

"What the hell!" he shouted. "This is highly irregular, all these men here. Get rid of half of them, and soon's the other half finish the job get them the hell out of here, too."

There has been no sex problem so far, the officials said, although one girl was put into solitary confinement when she stood naked before her window to tease the men. Once or twice, naturally enough, a German girl has tried to get an American guard inside.

"Nobody falls, though," a camp officer said. "The SS girls would play ball, all right, but they would do it and then report the guard." He smiled. "Hasn't been anything more serious than a little footie-footie, I'd say."

The women were a widely assorted group, from 16 to 50, and there was an oppressive, morbid atmosphere in the cage. With so many females closeted together, and men being seen only at a distance or during official visits, the women were unconcerned about their appearance and walked in and out of showers and latrines with an easy disregard for male visitors. Most of them had their civilian clothes with them when they were captured, but a few of them wore standard PW blues in the cage. Some of the women were incredibly ugly, like the caricatures cartoonists draw of SS women; one 25-year-old prisoner shuffled listlessly in her dirty slippers, a stained smock dragging from her shoulders and a rolled cigarette dangling under her dark mustache. She couldn't have looked much worse.

The German prisoners are still following their super-race nonsense, and the SS females object to living in the same cage with other nationalities. They complain to their guards about "those filthy guineas" and "those filthy polacks" and "those filthy French." They get 10 cents a day and free PX rations of soap and tobacco, but they squawk because they have to roll their cigarettes and because they get no nail polish, powder or cold cream.

"Let 'em bitch," a combat veteran guard said. "They don't need no paint and powder here."

The women admit they are eating better than they ever ate in the German Army, and getting white bread and coffee for the first time in many years, but they don't think they should be made to roll their own cigarettes because "it is so difficult." And they don't smile when they say it.

Some of the SS girls tell you they were forced into service. A 31-year-old clerk who worked in the finance section of the SS said she was working in an office in Berlin when one day an SS

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inspector walked in and checked off on his special list the names of girls there who were to transfer to the SS for duty. Her husband was dead, and she said that was the reason she was drafted, for all single girls were made to work or join the Army.

As she spoke she seemed assured and calm. She had an air of assurance as she sat quietly in her neat blue waist and trim slacks, with a military watch still on her wrist, but her neck and cheeks were flushed slightly with nervousness and she kept drawing the skin of her left hand together in quick gestures.

"It's not good to keep us here," she complained. "It makes the girls bitter and they don't even try to cooperate. We should all be sent home. It's not fair, either; just before the war ended a lot of SS girls—at least 50 percent—had their records changed so that when they were captured they would not be known as SS girls and would be quickly released. We here just didn't change our records."

As an SS girl, she admitted, she had had a hell of a good deal. She made 325 marks a month, and received a daily allowance of 100 lire extra while she was in Italy, all of which added up to pretty fair dough. She said she had her own apartment both in Germany and Italy (in Italy, incidentally, SS girls were not permitted to fraternize with civilians) and in the privacy of her rooms she was able to listen to Allied broadcasts. That's what she said. Only the day before, though, the women in the cage had replied to a questionnaire asking if they had ever listened to Allied broadcasts while in German service, and not one of them admitted having done so.

"It wasn't easy to refuse SS assignments," she said. "Once I had trouble in Berlin. In a street car I asked a girl friend if she thought we were going to win the war. Another girl heard me and reported it to headquarters. I was suspended and investigated, and it could easily have been my neck, but I 'knew someone.'"

Three more girls entered the room and turned things into a cow session. One was a fat, stolid 21-year-old SS girl who had volunteered for the skull-and-crossbones outfit because her brother was an SS officer. She worked in headquarters and had been a Nazi for many years, ever since she was a child. Her small, dull eyes blinked slowly. She never smiled, and when we asked her whether she was sorry now that she had served in the SS the question had to be repeated.

When she understood she looked angry and red.

"Nein," she said shortly.

One of the older SS girls spoke, excitement in her voice.

"You see. Ever since 1933 the German youth have been so militarized they think the Nazis are still in power, that the Nazi world they knew is still there. They must be re-educated."

The fat girl stood against the wall, her stringy red hair uncombed and her out-sized body looking as though it had been suddenly blown up out of proportion. She had no expression, though the other SS girl had as much as called her a Nazi dupe. The whole thing looked like an act.

We talked about babies, for a couple of male PWs were bringing in two small wooden crates, their ends carved into duck-heads, to be used as cribs for twins just born in the compound. There were 18 pregnant women in the cage, and almost all of them were unmarried. All of the SS girls gathered in the room dismissed illegitimacy casually. They seemed to have no shame about

"It is state policy," said one. "The mothers aren't sorry."

An Austrian girl—pretty, blonde, young, smiling—was very much at ease. She wore tight shoes and a loose, gay-colored bra, which curiously revealingly as she moved. She knew it, but didn't bother her. She sat between two SS girls and interpreted with an air of authority, tapping her pencil confidently on the table as she talked.

She admitted that most of the SS girls hated the Americans, but hated the Russians and the French and the British more. She jumped when we said the French had taken full control of Innsbruck, her home town.

"No, that's not so," she protested, her eyes watering. "The Americans are still there—they must be there." She said she prayed that the Americans would go back, because they were nicer than the other Allies. We asked her then if she thought Americans were such complete suckers as to swallow that kind of talk. She looked up quickly, but did not answer.

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Later she said some of the girls were planning to go to America after things quiet down.

"I shall get a job with the Americans somewhere," she smiled, uncrossing her lovely legs.

"We're too easy with them," a GI at the compound said as we walked around the cage. "We have no single, strong policy, and it's hard on us here to know just what to do. Well, it's a little late now to change; we've made things easy and they know it."

Outside by the washtubs women were scrubbing clothes, and some of them started to walk away as we approached. A guard called to them to halt, and a blonde tried to duck behind the barracks, but he called her back and ordered her to keep scrubbing clothes. She bent over the tub cursing him in loud whispers.

"You soon learn to stop asking them to do things, you've got to command them," the guard said. "They're bitches, and they've got it damned good for my money."

As we left the compound chow was coming up. Three fat girls, bulging offensively from their rolled bloomers, leaned against the chicken wire strung around the kitchen. Their messkits were open and waiting. The guard looked at them a moment before he left the cage and locked it.

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