# Ask The Depot Commander

**in DIAGRAM 18.6**
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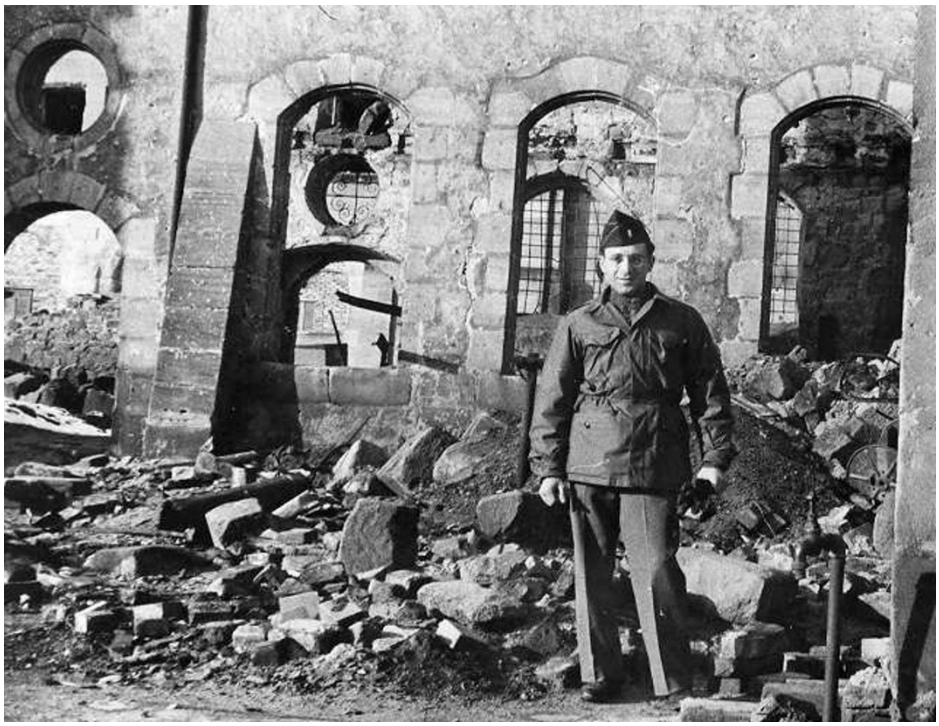
By Cris Mazza



He didn't land on a French beach, he didn't crawl through a Pacific jungle, he didn't fly through rising battlefield smoke, he didn't parachute into hostile disputed territory, he didn't stagger out of an enemy POW camp. It seems we always knew that much, just as we knew he had come home with binoculars bearing a swastika, a bronze and stainless-steel chess set machined by German POWs, and green footlockers stamped U.S. Army that went to the Sierras with us every year, packed with campfire cooking equipment. As young adults, we knew he was part of the generation that had faced, stared down, and unified to overcome a one-two punch of desperate financial ruin and a fascist crusade to engulf civilization. He returned from Germany to resume civilian life halfway through 1946 and did exactly what retrospective summaries depict about the deluge of veterans: went back to school, produced a handful of baby boomers, sent them all to almost-free public universities, and prospered in a newly burgeoning middle class that had barely existed in his Brooklyn boyhood.

He didn't tell military stories until we asked. We didn't ask for such a long time. Fifty, fifty-five, sixty years of not asking. The profoundest story now may be in what he still remembers.

He left the University of California in his sophomore year to enlist in the Army after Pearl Harbor. It might be a cliché or an obscene generalization to assume those who were drafted were more quickly sent to infantry, while those who enlisted were trained in a skill, from clerical to technology, from infrastructure and supply to entertainment and propaganda. Still, it was true for him, and from January 1942 to June 1945, from the rank of private in the Army Air Corps through 2nd lieutenant in the Army Signal Corps, he remained on stateside Army bases.

*Why didn't you go to Europe during the War?*

"Whenever I asked, I was told teaching and training were important too."

So as the European theater heightened, moved toward its obvious climax, he felt merely a cog, like tens of thousands of others in the human infrastructure of a world war. Letters to buddies were returned, stamped "deceased."

*Did you feel lucky?*

"No. I wanted to go."

Finished with officer training in '43, with expertise in radio and communications technology—from carrier pigeons to electronics—he was finally put into an officer-replacement pool between March and June 1945, then landed in France at the end of July. His assignment: prepare and repackage radio equipment being collected from all over Europe to be redeployed in damp climates of Pacific jungles.

But in the middle of August, an "exigent" verbal order abruptly changed his assignment. He was suddenly transferred to Nuremburg, Germany, by command of General Eisenhower: "Verbal orders of the theater Commander, on 20 Aug 1945, relieving the officers named below, on detached service with the 192nd Signal Repair Co and returning them to Hq TSFET (Sig Sec), are made of record, the exigencies of the service having been such to prevent issuance of orders in advance." Upon receipt of the written order, 30 August 1945, he had already passed through Reims, France, in route to Frankfort Germany, and then on to Nuremburg.

No radio equipment needed preparation for the jungles of the Pacific.

As early as 1943—six months before D-Day—planning was launched for post-war Europe. At several junctures Allied plan formulation was unduly influenced by U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry J. Morgenthau Jr. whose punitive proposal for post-surrender Germany involved destroying all industrial capability and turning Germany into a purely agricultural, pastoral territory, as well as embracing retributive consequences of ongoing drastic food shortages. In the winter/spring of 1945, the Yalta Conference took place—three months before Hitler's death—to discuss putting the pieces of Europe back together, as well as the problem of Germany itself. While the Morgenthau plan did not become authorized there, it did continue to influence the eventual Joint Chiefs of Staff policy (JCS 1067) that directed the U.S. occupation to "...take no steps looking toward the economic rehabilitation of Germany [nor steps] designed to maintain or strengthen the German economy."

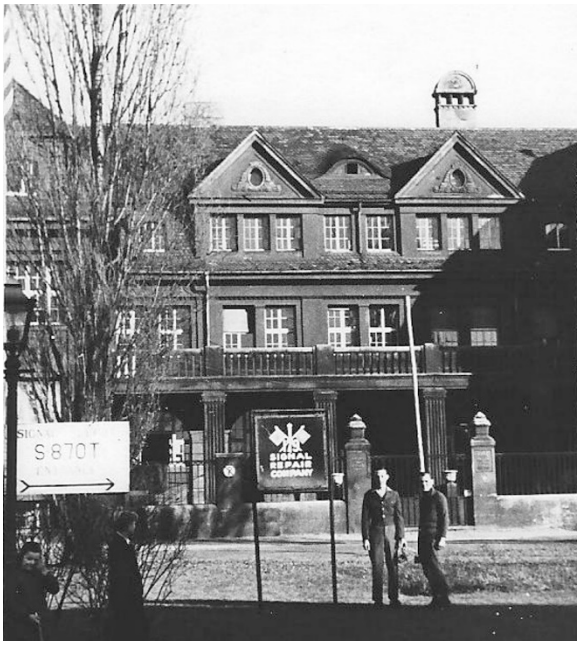
Immediately after V-E Day on May 8, 1945, redeployment plans went into effect—to transfer men and equipment to the Pacific Theater.

Concurrently, the Potsdam Conference, July to August 2, 1945, would solidify the entire Allied occupation's management of post-war Germany. Among the many world-shaping negotiations and compromises (or conciliations) involving borders, ethnic groups, and the secret-knowledge of what was about to happen in Japan, the conference determined the future of the German economy, and was *still* being influenced by the Morgenthau plan. Thus, all industry that could potentially ever be used for any military purpose was to be destroyed, plus technology and exports would be controlled, with the hope the country would become primarily domestic and agrarian.

Four days after the conference closed, Hiroshima was obliterated by the first atomic bomb. Three days later, the same for Nagasaki. Five days later Japan capitulated to a surrender already outlined in the Potsdam Conference.

The lieutenant's "exigent" order was an assignment as Depot Commander in Nuremburg, Germany, where trains arrived bringing any of the following (and more), switching one to another as 1945 turned to 1946: military equipment confiscated from the German military, German citizens expelled from former Nazi-occupied countries, coal, food, industrial equipment and machinery from dismantled German factories.

The Depot Commander's main assignment, as concerned the U.S. Army, was the sorting, repair and storage of German electrical equipment being collected and shipped to this central location. The Nuremberg depot was transformed into barracks for enlisted men under his command, which included but was not limited to the signal repair corps. His men, however, were not tasked with unloading the trains that arrived daily—and increased in number as more tracks were repaired—with



*Signal Repair Depot*

**Industry and Labor**

Certain U.S. Treasury officials working in the occupation—dubbed "Morgenthau boys"—saw to it that JCS 1067 was adhered too as literally and narrowly as possible (i.e. the production of oil, rubber, merchant ships, and aircraft were prohibited).[1] This was occurring even before another plan in 1946 that dictated German industry be lowered to half of 1938 levels, which would have meant the destruction of 1500 plants [2] (undoubtedly those with links to former military use, as well as those that could conceivably do so in the future). It's possible this target was never achieved because by 1950, equipment had been removed from [only] 706 manufacturing plants.[3]

Still, it was happening, and the deconstruction of German industry didn't stop at scrapping machinery. Technologies that were unique or superior to U.S. know-how—from microscopes and electronics to farm chemicals and food manufacturing systems—were collected, either in patent and drawings or actual equipment, and exported back to the U.S.[4] Other machinery and parts from dismantled military-material factories would conceivably go toward rebuilding other manufacturing facilities that had been damaged in Allied bombing. One report was that only 995 industrial plants existed in the American sector, although fuel to run plants was in short supply, and any factory with over 3,000 employees had to be "broken up."[5] Manufacturing—and the coal required to do it—would be needed not only to rebuild German infrastructure but as exports to offset the vital imports of (initially) food and other raw materials. Besides coal, approved exports included leather, alcohol in many forms, musical instruments, textiles, and electrical equipment.[6]

With the influx of hundreds of thousands of Germans leaving former-Nazi-occupied countries, millions of German POWs, and the remaining millions of displaced persons from other devastated European countries, there were far too many people who needed food and shelter and far too few jobs in an economy struggling to re-start.

cargos needing to be sorted, warehoused and/or shipped elsewhere. His men rounded up crews of German civilians who did this work.

*Were they Nazis?*

" They were free people. Bankers dressed in banking suits showed up to unload trains."

*Why?*

"For food. Daily work was paid in chits for food."

Like any command post, the depot also needed clerical workers. Two German women were assigned to the Depot Commander. One was a trained drafting technician. The Depot Commander asked her to create a scale map of the depot facility. He also got soap from his appropriation and gave it to the girls, to encourage them to bathe.

Decades later, the Depot Commander would go down to the local high school and demand his eldest daughter take chemistry, not typing.

In addition, there was far too much debris to be cleared and salvaged (sometimes brick by brick). The American military was not engaging in direct restoration, as under JS 1067, "Occupation forces were not to assist with economic development." Therefore, German citizens between 14 and 65 years of age (male) and 15 and 50 years of age (female) were required to register to work in whatever ways were needed or assigned, including road repairs, cleaning and repairing buildings for allied military use, repairing infrastructure, some skilled trades, and shoulder-to-shoulder human lines of bucket-passing extending hundreds of yards where there was no running water (bathing was prohibited or restricted). "The penalty for disobedience was imprisonment and having their ration cards taken away." [5] There is no evidence incarceration was ever used for slackers. Hunger likely was enough motivation.

*The Depot Commander & map of facility created by female German drafting technician.*

*German woman at work in the Depot Commander's office*

Between 100 and 150 German POWs were also quartered in and worked at the depot, as were the Polish Guard which supervised the POWs. Both were under the authority of the Depot Commander.

It was the Polish Guard that alerted the Depot Commander about a radio being built in the POW quarters. The Depot Commander went to the POW barracks and told the ranking POW officer that he understood a radio was being prepared. The POW captain conceded, did not even attempt a lie. "You understand, I'll have to take it," the Depot Commander said, and the German captain said, yes, he knew that, and forfeited the radio parts.

*Did you speak German?*

"He spoke enough English."

The simple parts were likely pilfered from cargo being unloaded from trains. The POWs also noticed metal and machinery among the German equipment arriving by train. Their captain asked the Depot Commander if his men could use it to make a chess set, so they could play in their quarters. The Depot Commander said, yes, if they also made one for him and one for his sergeant.

The scrap metal was precision turned into rounded symmetrical stainless steel and bronze pieces. Used for decades by The Depot Commander's future children, who still wonder where the matching sets belonging to the sergeant and the POWs themselves have gone.

**POWs**

All German military personnel, anywhere, who were alive after the conquest of Berlin in spring 1945, were prisoners. It doesn't make any sense to provide sources that counted them, although the highest of those suggests eleven million. Each of the four Allied powers handled the vanquished German forces differently. In the American sector, none were, technically, POWs. They were prisoners *after* war. Prisoners *for* fighting a war. They were *disarmed enemy forces*.

DEFs did not have the same Geneva Convention rights as POWs. *Prisoners in this category had their personal property impounded without any receipt being given; they had no spokesman to represent them before the Detaining Power; officers received no pay and other ranks, although compelled to work, got no wages. … Most important of all, these men had no legal status and were at the entire mercy of the victor.* [7]

There have been numerous hypotheses for why the War Department or Eisenhower decided on the new acronym: from technicality (Nazi Germany was no longer a "state" therefore could not be said to have its forces held as prisoners), to reprisal (reversing Germany's own "Hunger Plan" back onto them), to practicality (there weren't enough resources in Europe to feed the entire former Nazi military the same amount as the U.S. troops[8]). Certainly Roosevelt said some unfortunate things: "Let them have soup kitchens, let their economy sink," and, in response to being asked if he wanted Germans to starve, "why not?" [9] These quotes were supposed to have happened on March 20, 1945, a few months after a cabinet member told his daughter that he sometimes didn't understand what people said to him, and that he seemed to quickly forget what he was told.[9] Twenty-two days later Roosevelt was dead from a stroke.

At first the estimated 11 million surrendered German military personnel were put to work rebuilding the countries destroyed in the war, including clearing mines, exhuming mass graves, and creating military cemeteries. Archive photos show columns of men marched under guard, each carrying a shovel and a white cross. Initial impoundments of German DEFs, certainly chaotically inhumane, were emptied by September 1945. They were dispersed to where their labor was most needed, based on their skills or previous occupations.

*Hand turned metal chess set. Detail on knights and rooks appears to be hand drawn.*

Whenever he remembers the Polish Guard, the Depot Commander recollects that each morning at 5 a.m. the Polish unit would march vigorously through the city of Nuremberg.

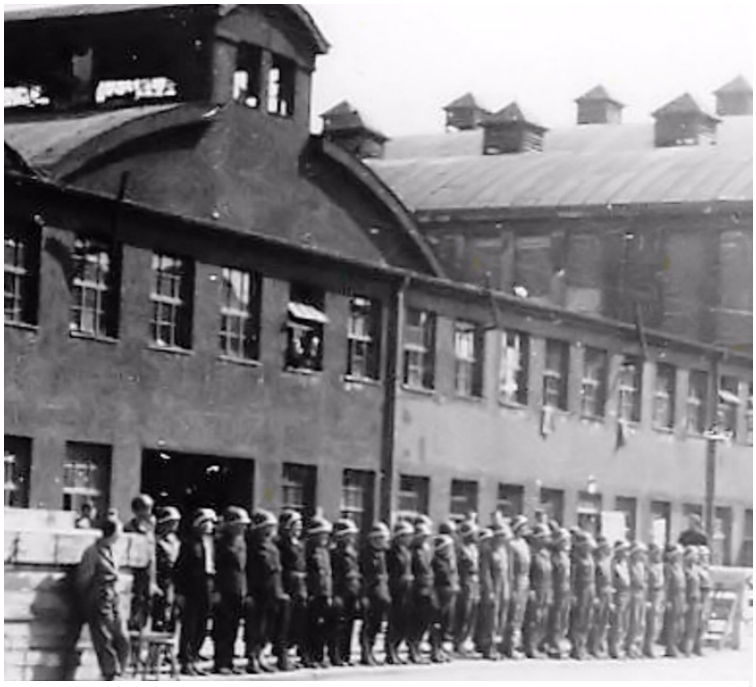
*Did they force the POWs to march?*

"No. Just the Guard."

*Why*?

"They did it to make their presence known."



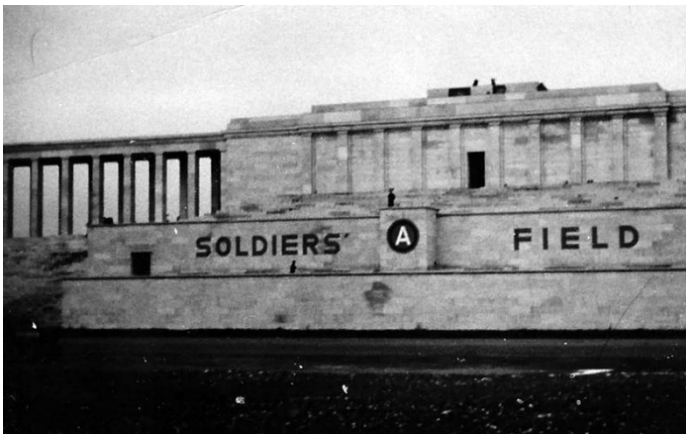


*The Polish Guard in front of the Depot. Note the casual body language of the American to the left.*

First-hand stories from surviving citizens have it that for four years, every day at noon, Nazi soldiers marched down the Champs Elysees, accompanied by a Nazi military band. In the second decade of the 21st century, deniers argue that Hitler was sensitive to causing humiliation and did not allow victory parades. However, it seems a fact that on October 5, 1939, Nazi soldiers and a military band presented a victory parade for Hitler through the streets of Warsaw, Poland.

Twenty-five years after the Commander woke daily to the Polish Guard's announcement of presence, his children found camaraderie, commitment and the pleasure of collaboration toward a goal in competitive military marching bands.

*One of the Commander's children in military band, 1973*




*Hitler's Zeppelin Field in 1946*
*(Depot Commander's photo above)*
*and 1936 (gettyimages photo below)*

*Did you know any Russians?*

"They came to the trials to witness them, and some Americans invited them to their clubhouse. The Russians became too familiar with the American officers so they were removed and sent back to Russia and a new contingent was sent. The new Russians didn't associate with Americans."

*What caused them to change?*

"It was the American occupation zone, and Russia had no business there."

**Russia & Justice**

On the day President Roosevelt died, or the day after, Eisenhower forbid the armies under his command to continue on toward Berlin. He had actually made the decision weeks earlier, and had even informed Stalin via telegram.[10] Despite disagreement from other generals, notably Patton, Eisenhower would not relent. His reasons were: (1) His armies had already taken all land that would eventually be the American occupation zone, therefore they would take causalities for territory that would be Russia's. (2) Berlin as a goal was political, not military. (3) He had concerns about his troops meeting the Russians "on the run around a corner."[10]

Russian implementation of communist governments in a zone surrounding Russia had been a loophole allowed to exist in the Yalta agreement.[11] As the war was ending, swift Russian mobilization toward this goal was profound. In fact, establishing its footprint in all of its occupied territories, but especially Germany, was fully evident by the time US. Troops arrived in Berlin on July 1.[5] Negotiations and scheming and maneuvering and foisting of new regimes and refusing to acknowledge foisted regimes also began immediately, as did shipping of disassembled German factories from Berlin back to Russia.[5] And in this context of remaking (or reallocating) the world, a "vast symbolic act of collaboration" was to take place: The Nuremberg War-Crimes Trials.[5] It could also be called a *last* symbolic act of collaboration.

Nuremberg was chosen as the location of the trials because it had a large Palace of Justice with an attached prison that had been mostly unscathed in Allied bombing. Of secondary importance was Nuremberg's reputation as the "ceremonial birthplace" of the Nazi Party[12] (or perhaps the birthplace of Nazi ceremony) because it had been the location of annual Nazi propaganda rallies. (And one of those rallies introduced the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws.) While Russia had naturally wanted the trials to be in Berlin, a compromise made Berlin the home of the International Military Tribunal authorities.[13] Each of the four allied occupiers contributed one of the four judges.

*Did you attend any of the trial?*

"Part of my duty was to make sure radio transmissions of the trials made it to the U.S."

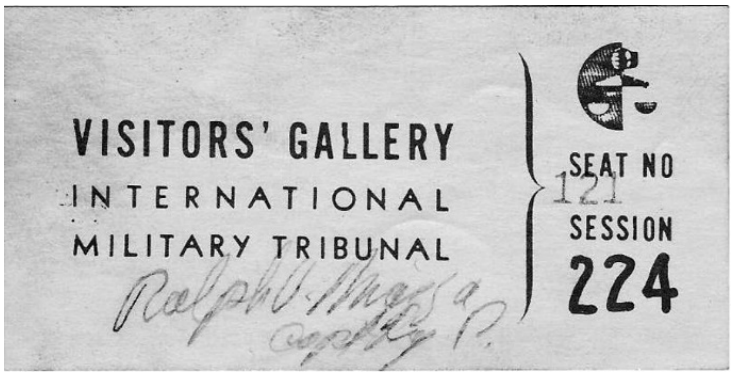
*Was that amazing to be witnessing history?*

"It wasn't history to us at the time. We just wanted to see them punished."

*Session 224 was just past the midway point. In March 1946, roughly midway through the trial, General of the German Air Force Karl Bodenschatz was being questioned by the defense concerning the defendant Hermann Goering.*

Nearby the depot was a working factory that manufactured and recycled electronic or telecommunications cable. Unused cable was being gathered and brought there to be made useful again. One day an officious Russian General came to the Depot Commander and asked, "when can we start dismantling the cable works?" The Depot Commander told him, "over my dead body." As long as the Depot Commander was stationed in Nuremberg, through July 1946, the cable factory continued to run.

There were 403 open sessions held in the first round of trials for the worst of the war criminals. The opening statement was 21 November 1945. The verdicts were read on 1 October 1946. The trials were not just concerning the indictments for war crimes or crimes-against-humanity, the defendants were also being accused of "waging aggressive warfare." It was the first time a defeated enemy would be tried for "having committed war" at all.[5]




**Summary:**
**The Signal Corps in the European Theatre**

According to the *Occupation Forces In Europe* series, in the second half of 1945, the major duties for the three signal depots in Europe were:

- Repair and packing of Signal equipment for redistribution to the Pacific (curtailed early).
- Redeployment of Signal troops
- Shipments of over 150K tons of signal supplies from western Europe to the U.S. and Germany (mostly concluded by the beginning of April 1946), including disposal of captured Nazi equipment.
- Establishment of permanent signal depots in the U.S. Zone; by the end of June 1946, permanent signal depots had been established at Mannheim, Nurmberg and Munich.

Among ancillary duties, the signal corps established communications for the *Stars and Stripes* and other press services, put in 10 VHF circuits from Altenburg Castle in Bamberg, and furnished the signal communications for the war crimes trails at Nurmberg.

At first the Depot Commander and his four 2nd lieutenants lived at the depot, but they needed to live separately from their men. The Army located a residential area to convert into officers housing. The Depot Commander and his lieutenants would live in a house occupied by two families. The families were told they had to leave.

*Did they own the building?*

"I don't know. Maybe they rented it."

Where did they go?

"I don't know. But one of their daughters who stayed as a maid asked permission for her parents to come back and get the potatoes they had stored in the basement, so I met them when they did that."

**Housing**

Early in the occupation, POWs and German citizens had been tasked with refurbishing untouched or only slightly damaged buildings for U.S. military use, including barracks for enlisted men. Finding housing already seemed bleak for German citizens. "The troops and the displaced persons always had first choice," [15] But five or six months into the occupation, the Army began "requisitioning" German housing for officers and American military families. Then it was the displaced persons waiting in line as "… [T]he Special Occupational Planning Board requested major commands to choose sites for communities to be established in their respective areas. … Among the problems which confronted the Board were disposition of approximately 100,000 displaced persons then residing in forty-five of the chosen military communities." [14]

*Depot Commander's officers' quarters*

*Displaced person (DP) or displaced German citizen*

*German citizens salvaging furniture in winter 1945-46*

The two families who vacated the residence when it was appropriated for officers' quarters had, between them, three daughters in their 20s. The three young women were left in the house to serve as domestics for the officers, to earn their food ration. The house had three bedrooms; the Depot Commander had three lieutenants. After the Commander chose a room, he told his lieutenants they could divide the other rooms as they chose. He then told the oldest of the three young women that she would be his domestic, to clean his room and care for his laundry, and the other two women would take care of the other two rooms.

The Depot Commander was a good catholic who would have been taking communion if there had been a way to give a confession. He didn't want to have to store up confessions. So in his room, the Depot Commander placed on his dresser a photo of his cousin, a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman about his age. When his German maid saw the photo she asked, "Is this your girlfriend?"

**Fraternization** [14]

Prior to VE Day, fraternization with Germans was utterly prohibited, including no conversing (even arguing) which would include all forms of bartering, no visiting German homes, no shaking hands (which seemed to cover all physical contact). A warning in the Army newspaper said, "If you … bow to a pretty girl or pat a blond child … you bow to Hitler and his reign of blood."[5]

But nonfraternization policy was, by nature, unattainable. Fraternization meant any social contact, but became code for sexual contact with German women, and VD rates were a means of knowing who violated the rule. After VE Day, these violations flourished. And yet despite the burgeoning need for antibiotics and attempts to continue courts martial for offenders, the Army realized the number of unknown violators by far outstripped its records of known fraternizers. Basically, fraternization continued because no officer had the time, means, or will to attempt a wholesale approach for controlling and punishing offenders. One officer reported that if he had made an issue of every breach by his troops, his entire command would be in jail.

The Occupation Army Chief Historian's report suggested one reason for the difficulty in enforcement of anti-fraternization policy was "the temptations which allegedly were placed before the American soldier by German women. Many persons … go so far as to say that the moral standards of German girls and women were low or nonexistent." Besides blaming Nazi propaganda for "encouraging illicit sexual relations," the Historian's report does admit that "the abject economic condition of the German population at the time of their defeat is recognized as another factor encouraging" all kinds of fraternization, including, of course, prostitution. "The 'free and easy' attitudes of the German women and her readiness to seek the company of soldiers bearing chocolates and cigarettes in their pockets undoubtedly placed temptation in the way of the American … It can at least be said that … German girls were, on the whole, willing to cooperate in his violation of the strict military orders against fraternization."

The Commander took the chance that lying about your cousin would not be a confessable offense in this case. He answered that yes, she was.

"You have a beautiful girl," the German maid said, "we won't take any chances. There won't be any romance."

*Why was she assuming there would be a romance?*

"She said there *wouldn't* be."

*What about the other two maids? Did they have romances?*

"Yes, if you could call it romance."

Other forms of fraternization were "comparatively innocent … such as having laundry and sewing done or other personal services performed." Likewise bartering for German cameras and artwork with Army-rationed cigarettes, gasoline, food and coffee had initiated a military black market, and "almost every contact to obtain a material advantage was, of course, a violation of the rule of nonfraternization." Many new directives were issued in an attempt to stanch the black market exchanges between American soldiers and German citizens. And "when the enforcement of nonfraternization became more of a problem, persons in the field continued to cast about for some method to punish the German partner."

Part of what broke down fraternization rules was the need to employ German citizens. At first German citizens were not going to be used for employment, except when deemed absolutely necessary and then only under strict supervision, and with stringent anti-fraternization policies. The Occupation had assumed displaced persons would want the available employment, but this proved to not develop, so as early as June 1945, hundreds of German civilians were working in the U.S. Army command headquarters. Between July and August 1945, authorization was given for Germans to work in entertainment (bands & orchestras), and—under control of headquarters command—as domestic servants in officers' billets.

Social contact with German children had already been allowed via a statement by General Eisenhower. The remaining nonfraternization rules were eased gradually, many without directives. One way the rule was undermined was an announcement that VD alone would no longer be considered evidence of fraternization. Another form of relaxation was when American soldiers were permitted to "engage in conversation with adult Germans in public." After that no more delinquency reports were made in the Third Army. MPs had orders to make no arrests except in the most flagrant cases (such as rape). As of 1 October 1945, all restrictions on fraternization were lifted except that marriage with Germans and "billeting of American troops with German families" would need authorization from zone commanders.

*German children, possibly orphans, perhaps going to a party.*

**Christmas** [15]

It wasn't until 1946—after the most important judgements handed down in the trials—the U.S. Occupation Army and U.S. citizens in Germany began a tradition of contributing to provide a festive Christmas celebration for German citizens. A year earlier, however, with military guidelines limiting the amount of goodwill Americans or Army personnel were allowed to provide, with tons of debris still lining roads, with food rationed and scarce, Christmas was reduced to kiosks amid the rubble selling cards, red-and-blue pencils, cardboard toys, and "trashy expensive ornaments," parties for German children (since limitations for assistance to children had been eased); and whatever other means of celebration could be foraged.

In December 1945 the Depot Commander's Sargent—Herb Schlesinger—told him that a local shop, a "manufacturer of Leica cameras," was selling out their stock of the finest German optics. So the commander paid $200 for a new 35mm camera from Stoll Precision Engineering Workshop. (Leica headquarters were in Wetzlar, Germany, some 285 km north).

He used the camera to take photos of the ruins, rubble and signs of German life in the areas in and around Nuremberg.

*Is that where you learned darkroom technique?*

"No. My sergeant did it. I didn't bother to learn."

Sgt. Schlesinger obtained darkroom equipment and set up a darkroom at the depot. He developed his own plus the Depot Commander's film, made prints, and then printed selected enlargements for the Commander. Sgt. Schlesinger took all his darkroom equipment home with him.

*Did you ever see your sergeant again?*

"I went to his wedding."

*The Depot Commander with his camera, photo by Herb Schlesinger*

In graduate school in the early 50s, Herb Schlesinger met a girl and was showing her his photos from occupied Germany. She recognized a man in many of his photos as a boy she'd gone to high school with. So the sergeant was able to invite his former commanding officer to his wedding. Four months later the Commander heard the girl had divorced the sergeant. The Commander was newly married himself; the two men did not have further contact.

The Depot Commander had returned to the U.S. and resumed classes at the Univ. of California in 1946. He used his Leica to take photos of the little town of Berkeley, the "card stunt" section in the football stadium, and later to document a trip to Yosemite in 1950. Possibly regretting "not bothering" to learn to develop film, the commander went to a photo equipment company and traded some extra lenses he'd brought home for an enlarger and a movie camera.

**Sergeant Dr. Herbert Schlesinger PhD**
This particular sergeant had a college degree from Brooklyn College [where this essay's author would attend for a graduate program]. Apparently not all college graduates chose to attend officer training. Herb's graduate studies in psychology and psychoanalysis waited until after his Army service in France and Germany. He finished his PhD in 1953, began work in psychoanalysis in Kansas, became head of an adult psychology unit, then moved on to be a professor of psychiatry in Colorado before returning to New York to head a clinical psychology training program and eventually become professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University. He authored at least seven single-author books and numerous joint-authored articles. His biography on the Columbia University website is written in present tense and does not mention retirement.



On his honeymoon in 1951, the Depot Commander took photos of his new wife, and then, gradually, the Leica became her camera and produced 20-plus years of slides chronicling a family of five babyboomers. The movie camera likewise preserved 1950s Yosemite by horseback, honeymoon scenery of 1951 California out a Studebaker window, babies crawling, pushing toy wheelbarrows, playing with white bunnies, crying on an excursion to play in snow, and birthday parties, the last movie taken in 1963. The enlarger was given, probably unused, to one of the five children when 1970s college journalism introduced silver emulsion photography.

*Sgt. Herbert Schlesinger, his new camera's straps showing on his shoulders.*

*Do you know where you got the Nazi binoculars?*

"It's hard to remember 70 years ago. I can't even remember yesterday."

But they were certainly not purchased from any German shop. He never smoked, so he had plenty of cigarettes to trade, usually with other American soldiers who had already acquired booty, perhaps nefariously.

The Nazi binoculars were not likely to be used for sight-seeing. Perhaps the Depot Commander shipped them home (to his parents' address) as soon as they were acquired. He kept all of his receipts for shipped items, but none gives any specifics for what was in the package, only how much he paid for insurance, the most being fifty cents.

The binoculars are actually German Kriegsmarine Leitz U-Boat binoculars. The Depot Commander's children used them from windows of their Southern California hillside home to try to read lighted signs in Tijuana (too little magnification for that), to watch the glow of approaching wildfires, even to monitor the high school marching band's rehearsals in the school parking lot on inopportune sick-days.

*The Nazi binoculars and detail on case (below)*

*Who is in this photo and what is he doing?*

"I think my sergeant. I don't know why he's out of uniform. It's a radio of some kind."

*Is this the radio being built by the Germans?*

"That radio was being made with razor blades. It couldn't send but only receive, but they weren't allowed any communication, so it was my duty to take radios away."

SIGNAL REPAIR CO. 9049
NURNBERG GERMANY.

DECEMBER 18TH, 1945.

TO:

RALPH V. MAZZA
1ST LT.SIG.C.
COMMANDING.

DEAR SIR,

THE SIGNAL REPAIR CO. 9049 (POW) KINDLY ASK YOU TO ACCEPT THEIR INVITATION FOR THEIR CELEBRATION OF CHRISMAS EVE ON DECEMBER 24TH 1945 1900 O'CLOCK IN THE POW-MESSHALL. THE PROGRAM OF THE CELEBRATION IS ENCLOSED.

HAUPTMANN AND CO.LEADER

16 *Invitations to the Depot Commander from the German DEA captain, referring to his group as POWs.*

SIGNAL REPAIR COMP 9049

NUERNBERG,25.DEZEMBER 45

DEAR SIR,

ON ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF THE READING ROOM FOR THE PRISONERS OF WAR WE INTEND TO ARRANGE TODAY 1900 O,CLOCK A LITTLE CELEBRATION WITH READING OF LITERATURE AND POETRY OF OUR OWN WORKS.

IT WOULD BE A GREAT PLEASURE FOR US IF YOU WOULD JOIN THIS LITERARY READING EVENING AND ACCEPT OUR INVITATION FOR IT

HAUPTMANN AND KOMP.LEADER

**Hauptmann Karrell**

Viktor Karell [16] was born in 1898 in the town of Doupov in Bohemia, which became part of the Czech Republic after the war. Before the war, Doupov was a German town with a nearly 100% German population (1600 out of 1620). Immediately following the German surrender, approximately 40 adult males were tortured and killed, presumably by the 20 citizens who were not German, or perhaps by a Russian occupying army. After expelling all Germans in the early 50s, the whole town was replaced by a military training site which now has a population of zero, as it is defunct. The German Wikipedia website lists among the defunct town's "parents," a Viktor Karell, writer and "Germanist."

Viktor served in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I, then returned to his studies. In 1930, Viktor, a scholar and professor, still lived in Bohemia, teaching and working as an archivist for his doomed home town. He was recruited again for the war in 1942 when he was 44 years old. He might have been stationed in Italy. He became a prisoner there and also reached the rank of captain (*Hauptmann*). In any of his German bios on German websites, even clumsy computer translation tools don't hide that his time as a POW is given in one sentence, not even giving the name of the city in which he was held.

After being released in 1946, he achieved his modicum of German fame for founding the first Bavarian junior high school, which is now named for him. His numerous publications, mostly about his hometown and Bavarian areas of Germany (where Nuremberg is central), include *The Poets of the Bohemian Forest*, but do not include any books of poetry or books about either war.

In 1946, The Depot Commander was promoted to the rank of Captain. On a three page rationale, dated in January, the division's Major included a bigger picture. Although the Commander was "… the best fitted officer available for the grade and position for which promotion is recommended," it also seemed prudent for the major to mention that "All officers under my jurisdiction, serving in grades higher than is warranted by the duties and responsibilities of their positions, have been reassigned or have been reported as surplus to the needs of this assignment." Translation: I need another captain, even though he'll continue to do the work he did as a lieutenant.

The officers in the depot had a larger alcohol ration than the enlisted men, so the Depot Commander asked his officers, "would you like to share with the men?" He suggested they create a club at the depot where the men could have their beer more inexpensively than in town. The officers agreed and pooled their alcohol rations, which procured delivery of barrels of beer to the club they created in a room at the depot. It was the third special room the Commander carved out of the depot facilities.

One day in his office, the Depot Commander heard a shot, followed immediately by screaming. He bolted from his chair and found, right outside his door, an enlisted man, a replacement into the occupying forces, with blood pouring from a gunshot in his neck. The Depot Commander tried to stop the bleeding, but the wound was severe and the soldier lost consciousness then died there in the hall in the Commander's arms before any medic could be called.

**Men (and women, but mostly men)** [15]

In the few months between the German and Japanese surrenders, plans were also being hastily completed for redeployment of troops. A point-system, earned via service-months, overseas-months, and battle participation, would determine who went where: home, to the Pacific, or remain in Germany. The highest points got the trip home, but after V-J day there weren't enough transport ships in enough harbors to get the numbers home who had been promised, and now redeployment to the Pacific was curtailed as well. "[E]veryone wanted to go home faster than any feasible schedule could move them and with an intensity that was not going to lie diverted by any amount of persuasion." Hundreds of thousands of American troops were in a hurry-up-and-wait limbo. Before V-J day, educational programs had been developed at colleges throughout Europe, and while only a few tens of thousands took advantage of the classes, after V-J day many colleges closed the program for lack of participation (participants also manipulated course failure so they could be sent back to their units, now waiting to be shipped home).

And yet troop departure from Germany continued to be sluggish, followed by an epidemic of low morale and bad behavior (often the latter classified as the former). Attacks, robberies, rapes and "accidents" perpetrated by U.S. military personnel became a point of concern. "The Office of Military Government for Bavaria described the death of a German boy in a hunting accident involving soldiers as 'a result of such carelessness as to be almost criminal.'"

"By mid-summer 1945, the search for morale-sustaining devices was being stretched to, and perhaps somewhat beyond, the limits of feasibility."

The problem extended into the actual occupation forces—those not waiting to go home but now deployed there to do the job of occupying. An assessment in November 1945 reported the occupying Army was overly proportioned with men "poorly trained in their duties."

*soldier with record player, possibly obtained or donated for the club at the depot.*

Since the same report said "A trained, balanced force of infantry armor and air and supporting combat troops no longer exists," and the majority of occupation forces were not armed at all, it was fortunate the surrender had been so absolute that U.S. casualties likely were close to zero during the occupation; any of the scant data on occupation casualties gives credit to the almost complete lack of insurgent resistance in the American sector.

If enough entertainment and diversion could not be supplied, at least the Army could provide the occupying forces "necessities" like cigarettes and beer. "The enormous numbers involved … made it impossible to do more than supply basic rations, such as tobacco, candy, toilet articles, and beer and Coca-Cola." In fact, "the Army exchange itself supervised production of beer, soft drinks, and ice cream, using German facilities as much as possible."[14]



It was a self-inflicted wound and the culprit was a German pistol, a souvenir the 18-year-old boy had recently traded for. He was a member of the signal repair corps, so his immediate commanding officer, one of the Depot Commander's lieutenants, had to write the letter to the boy's parents.

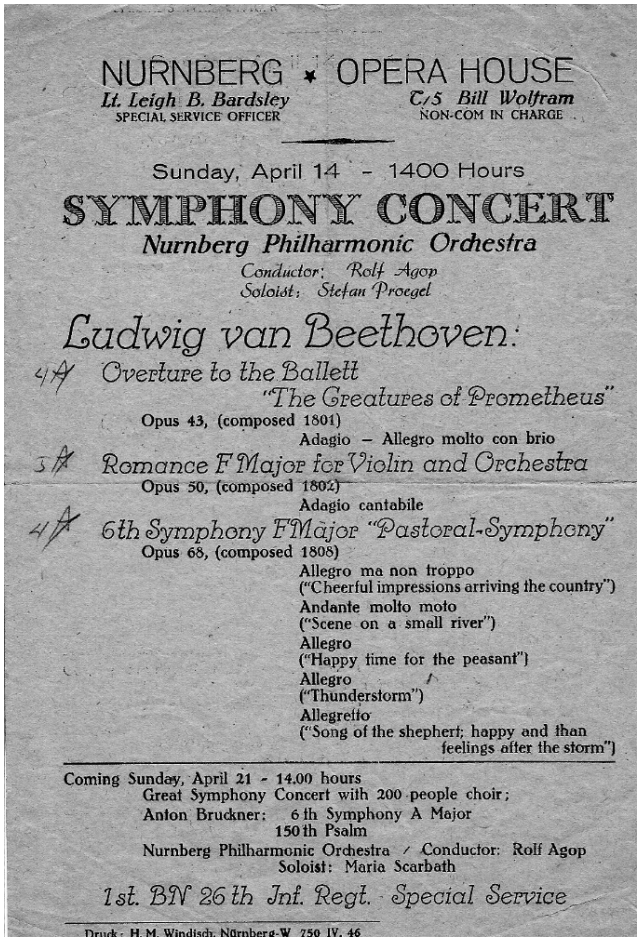
The Depot Commander made an order: "Get an [ordinance] artificer over here." An artificer disassembles, repairs, and reassembles ordnance of all types. "Make every German gun in the depot inoperable," the Depot Commander said to his junior officer, "so you won't have to write any more letters."

*Was that the last war casualty in the American sector in Europe?*

"It was the only one I knew of."

Twenty-five years later, dove-hunting with shotguns, the Commander's excited 12 year old son pivoted to follow flying game and peppered his older sister's jaw with a few stray buckshot. In future family mirth over the incident, including a perplexed dentist who saw shot still embedded in the daughter's gums on an Xray, his children never knew what the commander's first thoughts may have been when the hunting accident happened. We never asked. But the Depot Commander likely did not flashback to the dying soldier in his arms.

The Depot Commander saved his concert bills, and gave ratings (up to five stars) for each piece of music. No concert bill before March 24, 1946 remains; perhaps it took until then to reassemble musicians. The *Nurenburg* [sic] *Philharmonic Orchestra* felt free enough to schedule an all-Beethoven program in April 1946. The Pastoral earned four stars. Five stars had been garnered (on other bills) only by Haydn and Rimsky-Korsakov.



NURNBERG ✶ OPERA HOUSE

Lt. Leigh B. Bardsley — SPECIAL SERVICE OFFICER

T/5 Bill Wolfram — NON-COM IN CHARGE

Sunday, April 14 - 1400 Hours

SYMPHONY CONCERT

Nurnberg Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor: Rolf Agop

Soloist: Stefan Proegel

Ludwig van Beethoven:

4/A Overture to the Ballett "The Creatures of Prometheus"
Opus 43, (composed 1801)
Adagio – Allegro molto con brio

3/A Romance F Major for Violin and Orchestra
Opus 50, (composed 1802)
Adagio cantabile

4/A 6th Symphony F Major "Pastoral-Symphony"
Opus 68, (composed 1808)
Allegro ma non troppo
("Cheerful impressions arriving the country")
Andante molto moto
("Scene on a small river")
Allegro
("Happy time for the peasant")
Allegro
("Thunderstorm")
Allegretto
("Song of the shepherf; happy and than feelings after the storm")

Coming Sunday, April 21 - 14.00 hours
Great Symphony Concert with 200 people choir;
Anton Bruckner: 6 th Symphony A Major
150 th Psalm
Nurnberg Philharmonic Orchestra / Conductor: Rolf Agop
Soloist: Maria Scarbath

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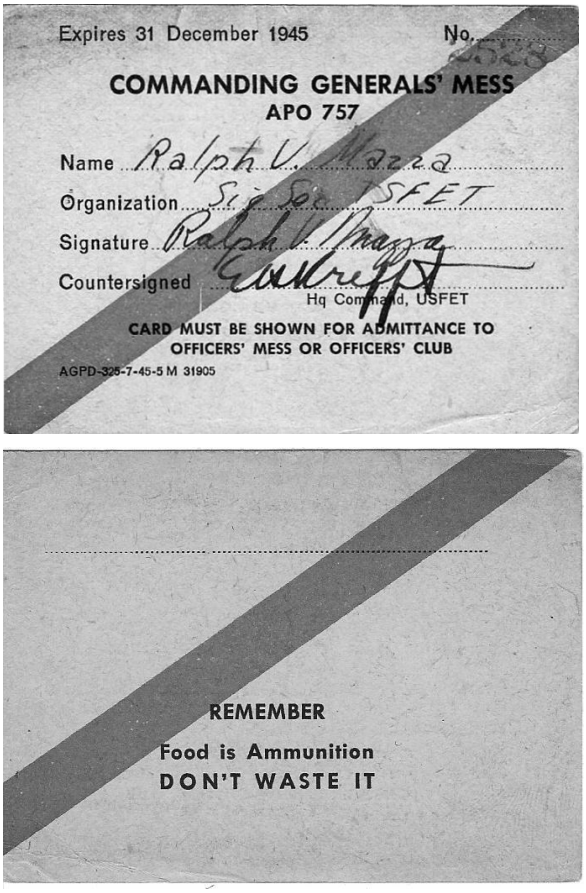
Druck: H. M. Windisch, Nürnberg-W 750 IV. 46

*German acrobats entertaining troops did not get a starred rating system.*

**Music**

Four days after the official surrender, the U.S. Military Government formed an Information Control Division (ICD), and precisely one month after the surrender a document was released requiring anyone involved with printing, broadcast, theater or music to register with authorities. When it came to classical music, the ICD said, "It is above all essential that we should not give the impression of trying to regiment culture in the Nazi manner. Such an attempt would in any case be doomed to failure. German musical life must be influenced by positive rather than negative means, i.e. by encouraging what we think beneficial and crowding out what we think dangerous."[17] Still, the ICD screened and approved every concert program. Beethoven was one of the only composers particularly named in the document, as his music had been featured in Nazi assemblies and Nazi radio had broadcast part of *Eroica* when announcing Hitler's suicide.[18] The ICD's plan to "crowd out" undesirable music, rather than outright prohibiting it, strongly recommended composers censored by the Nazis, particularly Hindemith, Offenbach and Mendelssohn, whose work was featured when the Berlin Philharmonic gave its first concert in the occupation on May 26. The Nuremburg Symphony Orchestra's website says it was founded in 1946, although the organization's history says nothing about there being an occupation at the time.

In the Army, the Depot Commander had already learned to hate scrambled eggs, oatmeal, and white gravy poured over anything. The rest of his life he never once ordered the American staple biscuits-and-gravy, too reminiscent of SOS.


Expires 31 December 1945 No. 2528

COMMANDING GENERALS' MESS
APO 757

Name Ralph V. Mazza
Organization Sig Sec USFET
Signature Ralph V. Mazza
Countersigned Goodrich
Hq Command, USFET

CARD MUST BE SHOWN FOR ADMITTANCE TO OFFICERS' MESS OR OFFICERS' CLUB

AGPD-326-7-45-5 M 31905

REMEMBER
Food is Ammunition
DON'T WASTE IT

*officers' mess card, front and back*

The Depot Commander had a fishing license dated 10 December 1945, issued by the Office of Military Government. In addition to bag limits, the license stipulated: "Hunters will not endanger the lives of civilians or troops at any time by careless shooting." And: "Hunters will not enter into conversational conversation with civilians on farms or in forests."

**Sustenance**

The world did not have enough food. For seven years, tens of millions of men had not been working in any food industry. Hundreds of thousands of European crop acres had been devastated or left fallow. Untold numbers of livestock, farm machinery, and market logistics had been obliterated. Tens of thousands of German butcher shops, bakeries, groceries, market stalls and booths, if they still existed, had barely anything to sell. All over Europe, but especially in Germany, there was little employment to obtain money to buy what little was offered or could be found on the black market. The world was still rationing. Now German citizens and POWs had their shares determined by the victors.

Army occupation orders included: *You will estimate requirements of supplies necessary to prevent starvation or widespread disease ... Such estimates will be based upon a program whereby the Germans are made responsible for providing for themselves, out of their own work and resources. You will take all practicable economic and police measures to assure that German resources are fully utilized and consumption held to the minimum in order that imports may be strictly limited and that surpluses may be made available for the occupying forces and displaced persons …, and for reparation. You will … take appropriate measures to ensure that basic living standards of the German people are not higher than those existing in any one of the neighboring United Nations ...*[5]

Estimates for the number of daily calories rationed to non-POW Germans in the second half of 1945 range between 700 and 1250. It is unclear if there even would have been surplus from strictly German-produced food that could then supply the 2300[19] calories allocated to displaced persons (of which estimates go as high as 40 million). The actual calorie ration-formula for German citizens fluctuated during the first two years of occupation, also was seldom adhered to: from 2150, the estimated average during the prewar depression, to 1500 in the first directive for the occupation.[19]

Eisenhower's deputy, Lt. General Clay explained, "… the Germans should suffer from

It was during a conversational conversation with the foreman at the cable factory that the Depot Commander was invited to go fishing.

*The Foreman of the cable factory, fishing, assisted by his wife.*

The fishing trip either preceded or followed the two oranges the Depot Commander gave to the foreman for his wife and child.

*Where did you get the oranges?*

"I asked the mess hall officer for them."

Some-time later, perhaps while on the fishing trip, the foreman told the Depot Commander that his wife and child had eaten one orange section every day. The two oranges lasted more than a week.

In the early 1960s, when the fruit trees in the Commander's yard were still sticks, seven peaches were brought home from the store each week. Each of the Commander's family members got one peach, and when it was gone, had to wait until the following week for the next batch of seven. When his tangerine tree was young and just starting to fruit, each of the Commander's children got one tangerine in their Christmas stocking.

hunger and from cold as I believe such suffering is necessary to make them realize the consequences of a war which they caused … [However] this type of suffering should not extend to the point where it results in mass starvation ..."[19]

By November 1945, perhaps Clay felt the punitive suffering he'd proscribed had been accomplished, as he attempted to alleviate the situation by announcing an allocation of 1500 calories in the American sector. Typically, this was 5-1/2 slices bread, 3 medium potatoes, 3 Tbl oatmeal, 1 tsp fat, 1 tsp sugar. [15]

He accomplished this with imports of food from the U.S., with distribution still regulated. By March of 1946, with imported supplies exhausted, Clay had to reduce daily calories to 1180, and to meet that level had to release corn products in German rations. Corn and corn flour had not previously been part of rations supplied to Germans; they did not consider it fit for human consumption, and viewed its appearance in their provisions a new act of retribution. [15]

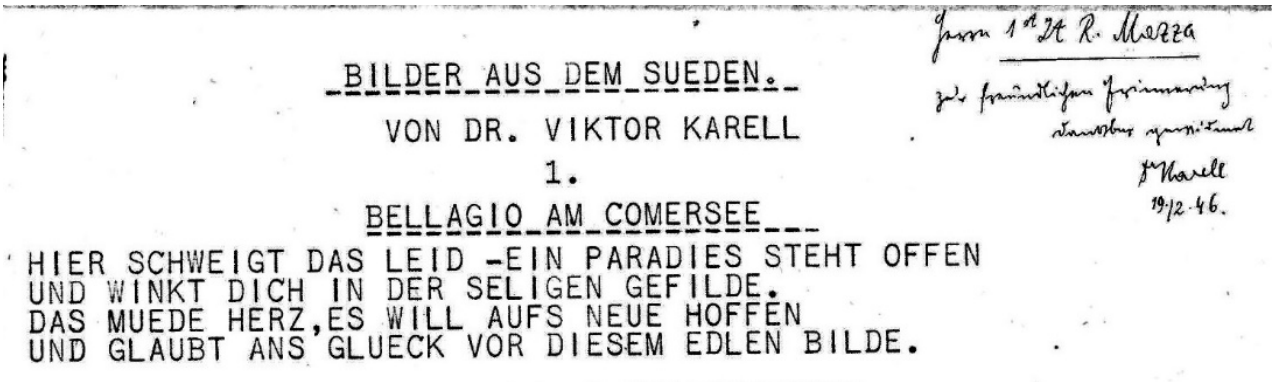
Despite U.S. Army-sponsored Christmas parties for children and soup kitchens using Army equipment [15] (and presumably Army food), U.S. military personnel were encouraged, or ordered, to not give food to German citizens. *Notice to U.S. Troops. American taxes pay for your food—it is forbidden to give, sell, or trade it to natives.*[20] This was a poster in mess halls. Sagas are plentiful of spoiled or stale food being rendered inedible via gasoline or burning or dumping into sewers, and a more specific legend: pouring cocoa into gutter drains in front of hungry German children. [20]

And yet more documented are the packages sent home by U.S. military: "… cameras, Zeiss binoculars, Meissen china, silver, jewelry—whatever was not too hot or [*was*] too heavy for luggage. In return Germans, or some of them, got food and coffee," [5] or money to buy them on the black market.

The Depot Commander's promotion may not have been official until after February 1946, and he may have missed the Christmas day sharing of literature in the POW's new reading room. On 19 February 1946, Hauptmann Viktor Karell used the same "mill" (all-caps) typewriter—typically used by radio operators—to copy a poem. He then put it into an envelope and addressed it to the Depot Commander, still a 1st Lieutenant. (The rest of Viktor's handwritten message, dated on the 21st birthday of the Commander's future wife, remains a mystery.)

Viktor's poem was a song of longing for all of the beautiful places in Italy he had presumably seen while stationed there, given to an Italian-American Army Captain who wouldn't see those places for over 40 years, when he retired from his college teaching profession and toured Italy with his wife. The Depot Commander could get along with simple German phrases, spoken in necessity, but couldn't read literary German. Looking at the first stanza now, even crudely translated by a robot, someone a generation removed can imagine that Viktor might not have realized the tacit universal mood he was exposing.





Herrn 1st Lt R. Mezza

zur freundlichen Erinnerung

V. Karell

19.12.46.

BILDER AUS DEM SUEDEN.

VON DR. VIKTOR KARELL

1.

BELLAGIO AM COMERSEE

HIER SCHWEIGT DAS LEID -EIN PARADIES STEHT OFFEN
UND WINKT DICH IN DER SELIGEN GEFILDE.
DAS MUEDE HERZ,ES WILL AUFS NEUE HOFFEN
UND GLAUBT ANS GLUECK VOR DIESEM EDLEN BILDE.

It is perhaps a credit to Viktor's character—his love of beauty as well as for his homeland of Bohemia, his belief in and work for education—that he never wrote about life as a POW in the American sector of occupied Germany; and, as far as research can tell, never again wrote about Italy. It looks like he put his war papers, photos and memories aside upon his release in 1946, as did the Depot Commander.

> Here is the silent sorrow—a paradise is open
> And beckons in the blessed realm.
> The tired heart, it wants to hope again
> And believe in happiness before this noble picture.

*Do you remember the captain of the prisoners?*

"He was a nice man."

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Supported throughout via images by the film: *After Hitler*, David Korn-Brzoza and Olivier Wievioka. And *Occupation Forces in Europe* (www.usarmygermany.com).

*Photos of the Depot Commander were probably taken by his sergeant, Herb Schlesinger. Other photos of 1945-46 Nuremberg are by Ralph Mazza, Captain, U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1945-46, unless otherwise notated as stock photos.*