

The Man Germany Hates Most

BY W. B. COURTNEY

RADIOED FROM LONDON



A Teddy bear wins the benign attention of Sir Arthur Harris, and their lovely daughter Jacqueline

The commander of the R.A.F.'s famed bomber force is a tweedy Briton who wants someday to open a pub in Oregon . . . and dispense beer and blueberry pie. Until that day comes, he's busy pasting Germany's industrial cities

THE Germans call him "Murderer" Harris. So you might very well expect to meet an ogre—that is, if you read or listen to the news from inside Germany. You certainly don't meet a softy. You meet a man who conducted a genuine Second Front long before that phrase became a public byword, who tied up and sealed and did everything but deliver on a salver at 10 Downing Street the doom of Germany before an Allied keel or an Allied foot touched the western beaches of Europe; a man who has a stern job which he fulfills with patriotic zeal, with sharp intelligence, with outstanding technical skill and professional wizardry. That the job happens to be the systematic destruction of a nation's power to make war is not a matter of his choosing.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Travers Harris (called Bert to his face by his friends and behind his back by practically everybody) has many distinctions, including what I would say is the biggest and most useful and important single air command in this war. You wonder of which of his distinctions he is proudest. He holds the Royal Air Force Cross, Knight Commander of the Bath and The Order of the British Empire. Another is that, as Air Officer Commander in Chief of the R.A.F.'s famous Bomber Command in its mass night saturation attacks on the cities of the Reich, he is beyond doubt the Allied airman best known to the Germans. Surely it is no small distinction that Harris is the one man on this earth whom Hitler and his Nazis hate more than any other—more even than they hate Churchill. They have said so themselves.

In a rage, as the Bomber Command's ventings on Berlin grew in strength and frequency, the official German radio spokesman snarled: "It was a pleasant surprise for Harris when Churchill gave him the task of waging war against German women and children. You have only to look into his eyes to know what to expect from such a man. He has the icy-cold eyes of a born murderer."

The Man Germany Hates Most

However, it is my guess that Sir Arthur is proudest of the fact that he is the only air chief marshal of this or any other war who began his career as a bugler.

There is a nice double edge here. Buglers immemorably have been the most hated by men of their own side, the comrades they have to wake up. Now at the other end of thirty years in the army, this quondam bugler is the man on our side most hated by the other side, the nation he is putting to sleep.

Sir Arthur and Lady Harris and their daughter Jacqueline live in a gardened home in an old-print English countryside. Although Sir Arthur puts on his slippers and his notorious wine-colored smoking jacket and settles into the true frame of a relaxed father and husband, the line separating him from his Bomber Command remains fine indeed. Moments of preoccupation, the quick fadings and returnings of his smile give him away.

Perhaps there's a mission on tonight. But he has done all he can. The rest is up to his boys in smoke-gray blue. He is freed of everything—except the main thing, the responsibility. Occasionally he will pop out for a look at a target picture through the stereoscope in the sun-room. Or abstractedly thumb one of the books of huge reconnaissance photographs—a collection known in air-war circles as the "German Doomsday Book"—study it with compressed intensity and then he is quickly back at the fireside.

A third of a century ago, no one could have imagined that he would become one of the master shapers of the victory pattern in history's greatest war, for his first adult decision was taken to *avoid* a military life. Later, he sidestepped a chance to join the Royal Navy. He decided to fly simply because he hated walking.

Sir Arthur, born April 13, 1892, at Cheltenham, a small town in Gloucestershire, is what the English call a "West Country Man." Harris, Senior, was in the Indian Civil Service. Many of his friends were officers and he fancied that type of life for his vigorous, husky son. But Arthur, restless, adventurous, a lover of the wildest outdoors, felt differently. He preferred what he calls "Darkest Africa" and, in 1910, went to Rhodesia. He mined gold. He drove mail coaches, a sixteen-mule team, and the first automobile that came to Rhodesia. He hunted big game. He became a tobacco planter. He was, at twenty, a successful colonist.

The Makings of a Bugler

Then one day late in August, 1914, back from a trek in the bush, he learned that his country had been three weeks at war against Germany. The only vacancies in the first Rhodesian volunteer regiment were for one machine gunner and one bugler. He failed to convince the officers that he knew anything about machine guns. But he remembered having blasted a few wobbly notes out of a bugle once. Luckily the Rhodesians held no audition.

The Rhodesians made one of the longest slogs in the history of British forces, so that when the victorious regiment was disbanded before the war's end and young Arthur came back to England to continue fighting, he had one desire—to sit.

Like most daring young men of his generation, he had considered this new thing—flying. One could sit in planes. No record marches. So he learned to fly at Brooklands. Careening over the post-card landscape of Surrey in a training biplane twice as fast as he had ever driven a car in Rhodesia, he knew this was what he had always wanted. And his instructors grinned and knew him for a born airman. He became a second lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps.

Promotion came fast. He commanded

The Man Germany Hates Most

a flight—the smallest operational unit part of a squadron—in France. In the Zeppelin days Captain Harris commanded the first night-flying experimental detachment for the defense of London against this strange peril. An enduring interest in the potentialities of night bombing and night air warfare was born. At once his especial genius came topside. No haphazard mucking about in the darkness for him. He sat down and thought it over, then fashioned a sky map, marked off different levels for his patrols to create in effect a moving fence against the dirigibles—and one of his men, Flight Pilot Leefe Robinson, bagged the first Zep to be knocked off in an attack over England and won the Victoria Cross. A machine gun that jammed at the last moment was all that kept Harris from getting one himself.

He finished the first World War as a major at twenty-six. He began the second as an air vice-marshal, at forty-seven. Between lay fruitful experience, travel, study—fixing and gathering his massive determination behind his belief in bombing as one gathers muscles for a leap. He learned to handle all types of R.A.F. planes and flying boats, the larger the better. He fought on the northwest frontier of India and immediately perceived and incorporated into his doctrine a truth that the Germans are just now learning—that air-power cannot be used to hold a static front. Its true application is to advance an offensive front.

In the United States in 1938, as senior R.A.F. officer of the British Air Mission, he founded his many warm friendships among the American High Command. These are important to England now. Of more practical importance to England, when Germany struck in 1939, however, was his choice of American planes for the R.A.F., notably the Lockheed Hudson twin-motor bomber, one of the most useful sky bulwarks in the early days.

Years of preparation came to a head.

In February, 1942, Sir Arthur was made Air Officer Commander in Chief of Bomber Command. In March, Lubeck became the first of Germany's "missing cities." In April, Rostock left the atlas. In May, Cologne, second largest Reich city in area, began to dissolve under the first thousand-plane attack—1,043 to be exact—in history. Two years to the month from his assumption of leadership, Berlin was having its 2,500-ton nights. More than 150 heavy attacks had been made on Germany, excluding Mosquito raids, and about two hundred thousand tons of bombs had drenched her from the all-British aircraft of Bert Harris' Bomber Command alone.

To appreciate this, to realize what air warfare really amounts to nowadays, remember that "raid" is an obsolete word for heavy bombing. A thousand bombers approximate the combat strength of a land division of 12,000 men. And behind them on the ground are fifty or more men for each airborne plane. A bomber attack involves maneuvers, tactics, feints, surprises, probings, foxings—something at which Harris excels—just like a ground attack. Moreover, the air division strikes over distances impossible for land divisions.

All Western Europe is Harris' battleground. Each misnamed raid is actually a major engagement. No commanding general in modern history, not even the imaginative and far-roving Napoleon, directed so many major battles as Harris.

Sir Arthur, as commander in chief, has made numerous contributions to the technique and science of heavy bombardment. Two are spectacular. The Pathfinders are of his devising. They are men picked for superb navigational and flying abilities, who go ahead like the cavalry scouts of old to find the enemy, then stay to pin him

The Man Germany Hates Most

in brilliant light for the main hitting force. This saves time, reduces the work of the bombers and their chances for error. Second, by intensive study, organization, training and drive, he has cut down the time consumed in attacks.

Cologne had its gifts from one thousand bombers on May 30, 1942, in 90 minutes. Berlin got its 2,500 tons from a like force on February 15, 1944, in 20 minutes. Such "cascade bombing" saves crews by reducing the time they are exposed to the defenders, increases the attack's effectiveness by swamping the anti-aircraft crews and the air-raid protection system.

It takes an effort to realize that this robustly friendly man sitting here with his wife and child holds so much power under his hand. The German radio described Sir Arthur as "tall, sleek, well-groomed, with a clipped mustache. His eyes betray his blood lust and cruelty." True in one respect. He has a mustache, and there are signs that if he didn't clip it frequently, he could use it to tie his hat on. He is of more than average height, but neither over-tall nor sleek. He is large and burly. He has flaxen hair, which somehow takes on a pink aura from his scalp, which is now beginning to show through.

There is nothing military in his bearing. Put him in plus fours and you'd never guess his profession. But you could pick him for a leader in any crowd. Determination, forthrightness, decisiveness bubble from him. He likes to read, and one of his favorite authors is Damon Runyon. Harry the Horse and the rest of Mindy's graceless mob fill in many a period of waiting at the other end of the telephone from the Bomber Command. At a navy party once, he learned that, by tradition, all Harrises are "Bert," just as all Clarks are "Nobby" and all Wilsons "Tug." So, he's been "Bert" ever since.

His morning performance, as Lady Harris describes it, reminds you of Blondie's Dagwood. Less than five minutes elapse from the time he emerges from his room and bolts his breakfast till his car disappears in a lather of dust.

He and Lady Harris occasionally drop into a pub near their home, where the skilled oldsters of a craft ancient in that neighborhood like to gather and hold forth. Men who know their stuff are his favorite people and companions. The villagers reciprocate his respect, but not because of his R.A.F. job. Perhaps some of the gaffers don't even know what that really is.

What they remember is a day when the merry-go-round at the local fair got out of whack. It ran all right. Trouble was it wouldn't stop. Among the riders, the only ones who betrayed no sign of anything out of the ordinary, were a large man and a very small girl with pigtails. They whirled round and round, imperturbable and unsmiling. Finally, it stopped. Then it was as obstinate in starting again as it had been in stopping. Whereupon, the large man took off his coat. The little girl held it. He rolled up his sleeves and went to work. He soon had it going and stopping perfectly. That is how they best know the Air Chief Marshal in the pub

Chip Off the Old Block

Four-year-old Jacqueline is his principal relaxation. He talks and reads to her as to a grownup. She is not precocious, but an uncommonly intelligent, resourceful, attractive and grimly determined young lady. Outwardly and inwardly, she resembles her father, being not merely a distaff chip off the old block, but a wholly integrated fraction, a miniature.

Sir Arthur and his warm, personal American friend, Lieutenant General Ira

The Man Germany Hates Most

C. Eaker, Allied Supreme Air Commander in the Mediterranean, plan to fish the Rogue River in Oregon after the war. The Air Chief Marshal says he would like to open a pub there. It would deal exclusively in beer and blueberry pie, you gather.

That is Bomber Harris, the man whose name German mothers use to frighten their children. The Germans will remember him for many generations as the man who lifted the face of the Fatherland, emasculated its militarism, rewrote its national song from *Deutschland Ueber Alles* to *Alles mit Deutschland Ueber ist*.

A great many Americans may have cause to remember him, I think, as the man because of whom, more than any other, their sons and husbands and sweethearts had a better chance of returning home instead of remaining pinned forever in the earth of Europe by a white cross.



Collier's

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