Capturing a Gestapo General

Organizing Metz for siege was a tough job and the Nazis chose a hard man to do it, but American troops entering the city found the big shot hiding in a brewery.

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WITH THE 5TH DIVISION AT METZ—The fat Nazi who crawled out from behind a beer barrel in the saloon in Metz to surrender to soldiers of Company E of the 10th Regiment didn't look very impressive. The men who took him knew he was an officer but they didn't know just what kind, and they really didn't care much.

He turned out to be Maj. Gen. Anton Dunckern, police president of Metz and Gestapo commander for Alsace-Lorraine. He's the first big Gestapo man we've taken; he ranks close to Himmler and is one of the prize catches of the war.

Dunckern had been the key man in a key situation. Metz was a strongpoint in the Nazi defense system. In the first week of September, great numbers of German soldiers abandoned the city in panic, leaving the garrison below strength and many big fort guns unmanned. In this emergency, Dunckern appeared. He took up quarters at No. 10 Rue Aux Ours, a chateau in the town, and established his headquarters in a Gestapo building not far from Goeringstrasse, which has since been renamed Avenue Foch.

From the beginning, Dunckern never varied from the SOP for Nazi police commanders in the movies. He organized the defenses of Metz and his own social activities at the same time, while on the side he added several pieces to his art collection. Captured Germans referred to him as "the pillaging Gestapo man."

Dunckern also fancied himself as a connoisseur of wine and women, the French in Metz say with the faint contempt of people who have always found the German style in these matters distinctly minor league.

A beautician in Metz described Dunckern as an ugly man. "Very hard on the men," she said, "but very gallant with the ladies." She once had to wait in his office while he finished a phone call, and the general, with a great deal of satisfaction, kept talking about the big time he had had the night before. It was, the beautician felt, partly for her benefit. She had a reason for coming to see him; she was being forced to go to work in Germany. She was pretty and chic and she didn't go to Germany.

But while Dunckern attended to his pleasures, he did not forget the main business at hand—organizing the defenses of the town. Already American guns were pounding in nearby Gravelotte, and they could be heard all over town.

Dunckern reorganized the Metz command, grown slack after four years, and sent the *SS* chief back to Germany under arrest.

Then he called the trade associations together to hear their suggestions for organizing labor in the defense of the town. He put into effect a plan

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of his own, however. What Dunckern did was to open the movies, closed for some time. Naturally everybody flocked to them. Halfway through the show the lights went on. One of Dunckern's men stepped onto the stage, told all the men to sit on one side of the theater and the women on the other. Then the men were marched out to the huge Bayern barracks. It was the fastest induction on record.

MEANWHILE people were pouring into Metz from the countryside—frightened, homeless, cold. All the men were put to forced labor. The women and children sat on the curbs and cried; Dunckern promised to evacuate them to Germany, but when they went to the railroad station there were no locomotives.

Tension mounted in the semi-besieged city. Members of the FFI were hunted down more doggedly than ever before. In conservative old restaurants like the Moitrier, Dunckern held private conferences with his *gauleiters*.

Out of these conferences came another labor-trapping device—a card system. If you had a card you were exempt from labor such as digging trenches in the streets. The card system went through three color changes as American pressure tightened around Metz—red, green and yellow. Each was more stringent, with fewer exceptions than the preceding one. The last, the yellow card, was really hard to get. Citizens whose applications were rejected were then and there hustled off to work in labor battalions.

Getting people to work was hard enough, but the appeal for enlistments in the *Volkssturm* (Home Guard) brought from the 80,000 population of Metz the grand total of 18 volunteers. Dunckern was fighting with every trick and threat he knew. He was losing, but his hard shell of toughness didn't crack.

A man in Metz who spoke too loudly in the wrong way to the wrong people had to face Dunckern across a desk. "Well, a real citizen of Lorraine, I see," said Dunckern. "Round-faced and curly haired. I promise you that you will not live more than three months and during that time you will enjoy a slow blood bath." The man was sent to a concentration camp, but he didn't stay three months. Eight days later the guards had run off, leaving only dogs to guard the prisoners, and the man escaped.

MEN of the 5th and 95th Divisions began their last relentless drive to capture the stronghold. Unexpectedly bypassing Fort Queleu, the 10th Regiment of the 5th Division entered Metz from the east side of the Seille River, which cuts the town in half. This maneuver left Dunckern and his garrison staff marooned on the west side, and cut off the main road of escape to Germany.

As the Americans prepared to cross the river to the west part of the town, Dunckern went down to the shore and waited while his men prepared a float. He hoped, under cover of the rain, to cross and slip through the street-by-street search the Americans were probably carrying on. But the float broke down and Dunckern retreated with 30 officers into his brewery hiding place, where the men of the 10th captured him.

When they brought him out into the rain he insisted on seeing an important officer before he would say anything, and he objected to standing around in the wet. "This fat little joe," said a soldier named Leonard O'Reilly, "was throwing off all this malarkey about getting wet and started to walk by himself over to the shed. We told him to stand still and he kept going, so we just slapped our rifles on him and he stopped."

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Dunckern was dressed in the dark Gestapo uniform. He was spotless. And he was arrogant as hell. "He wanted to know who I was," said Harry Colburn, "and when I told him I was a lieutenant he didn't believe me. He looked me over for insignia. He looked like he could spit at me. We had to push him into line because he didn't want to go with the other prisoners. He acted like he was insulted being taken by a bunch of guys as ratty-looking as us."

Taken to the PW enclosure of the 10th Regiment, Dunckern still had not been spotted as a major general of the Gestapo. Maj. Edward Marsh finally realized he had something important. He went over to Sgt. Henry Tillinger and said: "I think we've got a Gestapo general." Tillinger was skeptical but he asked for Dunckern's paybook, and there it was.

Brig. Gen. Stafford (Red) Irwin, commander of the 5th Division, didn't care to see Dunckern, and he was passed down the line to the rear, together with Col. Constantine Meyer, who had been the German garrison commander in Metz and was now also a prisoner. An officer asked Dunckern if it were true that Gestapo commanders were not supposed to surrender. Col. Meyer leaned forward, waiting for the answer.

"They had a gun in my back," said Dunckern.

"Maybe you should have resisted them," the American officer said and walked out of the room.

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