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Berlin Is a Dead, Burnt-Out City of Silent People —Eye-Witness Account of Nazi Capital Last Month

Traveler Finds Civilians Losing Morale Under Allied Bombings

By MRS. CELILE BULAYIR
As Told to Alan Reitman



"I could sense their fears of bombing and disgust with the war," says Mrs. Celile Bulayir after observing the people of Berlin last month. Here Nazi soldiers help ARP workers clear away debris after an air raid.

This is an exceptional story written under exceptional circumstances. The writer was in Berlin only a month ago. She may well be the only person to have reached this country from Nazi Germany in many months. She is almost certainly the last. She has written her story exclusively for PM.

Mrs. Bulayir, a Turkish national, is the wife of Ali Ekrem Bulayir, noted poet who governed the Island of Rhodes and the City of Jerusalem in the early days of this century. She is now living in Princeton, N. J., with her daughter and son-in-law, Ziya Enata, former script editor and head of the Turkish desk of the Office of War Information.



I spent three days in Berlin last month on my way to the U. S. A. from my home in Istanbul.

Berlin seemed to me a dead city. Many of its buildings are burned or destroyed; the people impressed me as tired and constantly in fear of bombing. I saw them fleeing the city daily. High Turkish officials told me they consider that Germany has already lost the war.

I arrived in Berlin on Aug. 9, traveling from Vienna by train. The train was old and uncomfortable but clean. From my compartment I could see only German officers and men. There were no women in the coach.

Soldiers Waiting to Be Shipped Out

The train was absolutely silent. There was no singing or noise. The officers in the train looked well dressed.

Through a Turkish diplomatic courier, with whom I was traveling, I asked the conductor if he was Viennese. He replied indignantly: "Oh no! I'm a German. Viennese are lazy."

I arrived at the Berlin station at 10:30 a.m., where a car from the Turkish Embassy met me. There were no taxis, and I learned that taxis were used just for military purposes and emergencies. The station was not crowded, although some people were waiting to board trains or greet incoming passengers.

Police were stationed there, but no soldiers. I saw small groups of soldiers, evidently waiting to be shipped out of Berlin. There was nothing being sold in the station; no candy or magazines.

Riding from the station to the Esplanade Hotel, I saw several moving vans containing large crates. People were continually loading them and moving out of the city. Some of the vans were on their way out, others were loaded and ready to go.



Mrs. Celile Bulayir

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"They seemed to be robots, just following daily routine." Berlin civilians stand in line for buckets of water from an emergency supply after bombs blasted the mains.

I was told by the courier that the richer class had already moved out, and now the middle class of people were evacuating the city. The evacuation was unsupervised and no soldiers or policemen prevented the loading of trucks.

There Was No Soap in Berlin

I was met by no one at the hotel. The chauffeur from the Embassy had to call inside for help with my luggage. The manager did not greet me, and the courier announced our arrival at the desk. I was steered toward the stairs by a clerk and climbed three flights to my room, although there was an elevator.

The immediate impression I got in the hotel was the cold atmosphere that prevailed. There were a few people in an anteroom drinking, but they didn't even look up. Even the clerk who showed me my room didn't speak a word.

My room was simple but clean. There was a bed, closet, bureau, writing table and telephone. There were hot and cold running water, and two towels daily, but no soap. There was no soap in Berlin, I learned, and even the dishes and silverware were washed in soda.

The room was kept clean and the bed sheets were changed. My chambermaid was a middle-aged woman, and I learned that chambermaids and women who cleaned the hallways were the only female employees. There must have been a shortage of help, for the doorman, dressed in a long coat, doubled as the elevator boy.

She Saw Ruins of Bombed Buildings

The people in Berlin were unfriendly and distant. Although I cannot speak the language, I could sense their fear of bombing and disgust with the war. They seemed to be mechanical men, robots, just following daily routine.

Their chief terror was bombing attacks. At sundown lights were dimmed in the hotel and at 10 p.m. all lights went out, whether or not there were air-raid alarms. In the hotel people always hurried to close their shutters and draw the black blinds. Even the lights in the ladies room had been taken out to prevent illumination. Fortunately, there were no bombings while I was there, and the Embassy was pressing me to leave quickly to escape the raids.

As I stayed in my rooms for two days, I had little opportunity to see the effects of Allied bombings. However, on Aug. 11, I walked to the Embassy by way of Unter den Linden and the Friedrichstrasse, and on the side streets I could see the ruins of six buildings. Some were burned, others destroyed. On the Friedrichstrasse, I was told, workmen are constructing anti-aircraft positions.

The courier told me that the air-raid shelters in Berlin were poorly built, and only one or two good ones existed. When the raids came, it was a case of first come, first served. (This information was received from a representative of the Anadolu Agency, Turkish news organization.)

In Hamburg, the Pavements Caught Fire

Before I left Istanbul a son of a friend told me of being buried alive in a Berlin shelter which had collapsed under the heavy British bombardment. The streets I saw were clean and there were no wrecking crews at work.

Both Unter den Linden and the Friedrichstrasse were heavily camouflaged. I saw pines covering many buildings to give the effect of parks.

From Turkish officials, who had authentic information, I heard first-hand reports of the effects of Allied bombings of Hamburg.

They told me that the raids were so terrific that even the pavements caught fire.

I was told of the fate of several people in Hamburg, who, to escape the flames, jumped into a water-filled basin. They came out blinded, their eyesight destroyed by the waters which had been poisoned by chemicals in the bombs.

There was no laughter or gaiety in the streets of Berlin. I only saw about five or 10 children. There were no soldiers in the streets, only the moving vans carrying their crates.

The people in the streets were dressed simply. Their clothes were neither fine nor shabby. The weather was cold and rainy, and they all wore overcoats. But I could see that the coats were far different from the one worn by an officer I saw on the plane to Stuttgart. His was heavy and looked warm.

No People in Stores — for a Good Reason

While walking to the Embassy on Aug. 12, I passed many shops and stores on side streets off Friedrichstrasse and Unter den Linden. Their windows contained no merchandise, only vases and books for decorations. No one stopped to window-shop, and I saw no people inside.

Once I asked the courier to buy me some handkerchiefs, but he came back and said he couldn't get them. They didn't have the material to sell.

In the three days I spent in Berlin, I didn't hear or see Hitler's name mentioned once. There were no signs or posters of him or other German officials visible anywhere.

Berlin Is a Dead



"Their chief terror was bombing attacks." This is an RAF hit on Tanentzeinstrasse, Berlin.

This sullen, gloomy air could be felt at the Esplanade, a first-class hotel. The people appeared to be working people, who left early in the morning and returned late in the afternoon.

The second night there I went downstairs for a drink. There were several standing around, dressed in their work clothes. They did not dress for the evening. I asked for mineral water and beer and got both. Beer was drunk by everyone, and it seemed the only thing still plentiful in Berlin.

People conversed in small groups in low tones under dimmed lights. I could feel in every corner a sense of fear over the bombings. I didn't have to ask. I could see the fear, and the people looked as if they knew the war was lost.

There were no music or radios in the hotel; only gloom. Even though I heard some small laughter over a joke, there were few friendly gestures among the people.

Berlin's Food Situation Horrible

The food situation in Berlin is horrible. At the hotel there was no choice on the menu. You either ate what was there or went hungry. I did not come down for supper two evenings I was in Berlin.

There was no bread or butter served at the hotel, but I managed to get some after obtaining special coupons from the Turkish Embassy. I didn't ask for coffee, because I knew it was bad, but even the people in the dining room weren't drinking coffee.

My lunch the first day in Berlin consisted of a vegetable puree soup, which was served cold; creamed potatoes, which I couldn't eat; and ice cream, which looked tempting, but tasted like nothing. It was just something cold in my mouth.

The service was good. The waiter was Italian, and I wanted to question him, but after serving the food he disappeared.

I rang a bell for breakfast on the second day, and a man answered, asking me if I wanted some coffee. I took some tea which tasted like grass. I didn't ask for bread or butter as I knew there was none.

For Lunch, Soup and Vegetable Stew

For lunch we had the same puree soup, and a stew, made up of boiled vegetables. Ice cream again was the only dessert listed, and when I asked for some compote, I was told that only the army, children and sick people received this.

The courier asked for some Rhine wine, and when I inquired if it was real Rhine wine, the waiter became offended, and said, "of course." I replied that I had drunk such fine wine in France, and he stormed back: **"Leave those French alone. Their wine is like vinegar."**

After I explained that I was Turkish, he quieted down, and when I promised him some Turkish cakes, he wrote his name on a piece of paper and was pleased. I lost the paper somewhere.

On Aug. 10, I received the special coupons from the Embassy, and for breakfast the following morning was given two pieces of white bread and butter which were quite good.

My lunch on Aug. 11 was quite different, for I was taken to the secretary of the Embassy's home outside the city. All their food is sent from Turkey and we had plenty of everything. I remained there for dinner. My breakfast on Aug. 12, the day I left Berlin, was again bread and butter.

Touch of Formality — Head Waiter's Dress Suit

The portions were about average. The tablecloths were fair, and the silverware clean, although not shiny. The dining room was usually crowded and beer always appeared on the tables.

There was a head waiter in the dining room, wearing a full dress suit. The waiters wore black pants and coats, but this was all the formality.

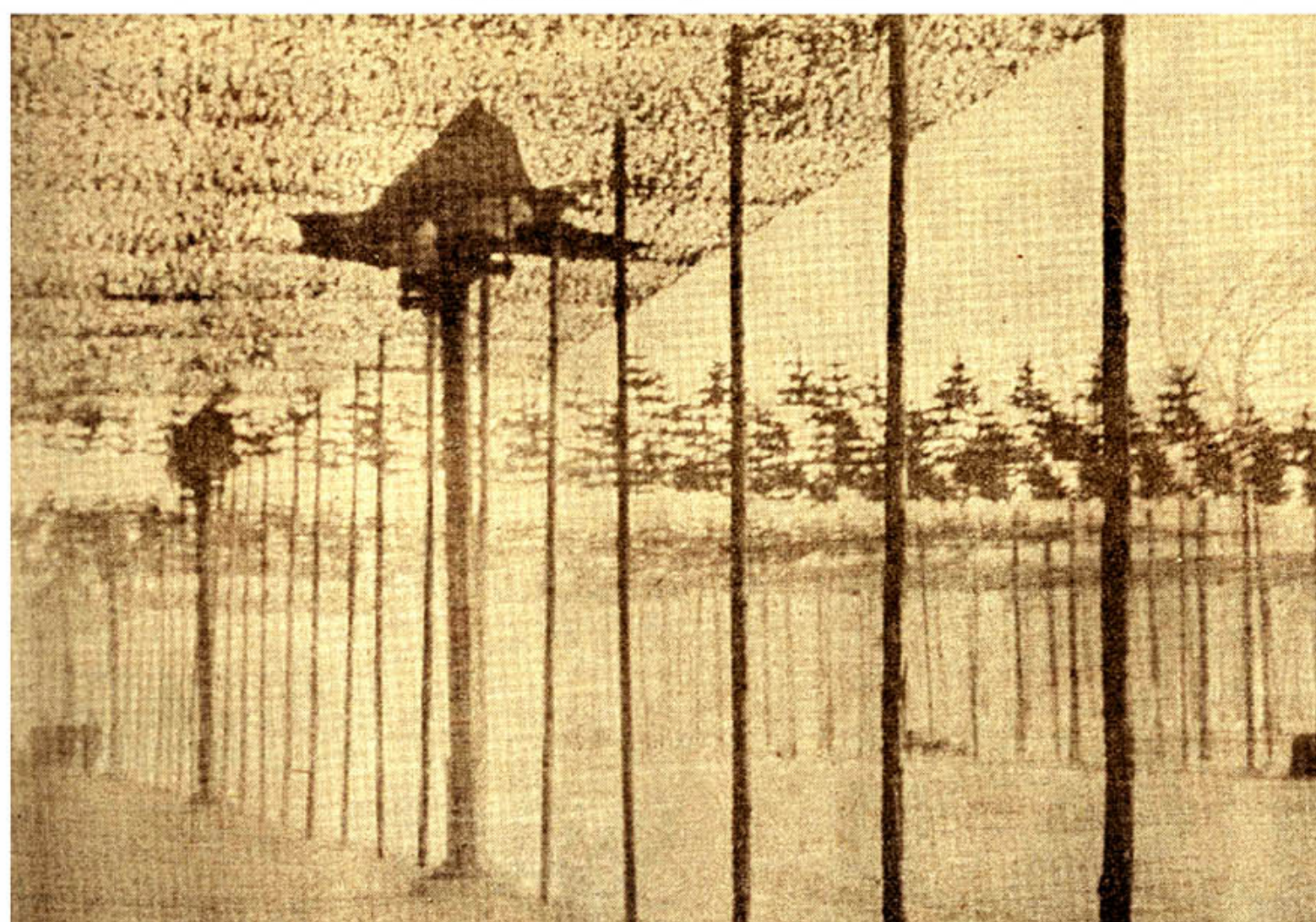
Mail delivery evidently is poor because a Turkish student visiting me warned that I would have to show my passport and suffer other formalities if I wanted to mail a letter. It's not as simple as in America.

The airport outside the city where I took the plane to Stuttgart had only a few planes. There were no magazine or candy stands, but at a small coffee shop I managed to get some bread and butter with my special coupons.

Vienna, which I had seen briefly before going to Berlin, presented a similar picture. The capital of Austria looked dejected and fed up. The streets were filled with German wounded, who, I imagine, were sent there to recuperate instead of inner Germany.

(continued)

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"Both Unter den Linden and the Friedrichstrasse were heavily camouflaged. I saw pines covering many buildings to give the effect of parks," says Mrs. Bulayir. This Berlin street has a canopy of "leaves" over the sidewalk, a strip of "spruce trees" crossing above it.

Food and Cigarets in Great Demand

There seemed to be a longing in Vienna (and in Berlin, too) for food. When I gave the chambermaid some Turkish pastry, she eagerly grabbed it. Cigarets were scarce, and you could have easily bribed anybody for one.

My trip had begun in Istanbul. From there I went to Sofia, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Stuttgart, Lyon, Barcelona, Madrid and Lisbon. I came to America via clipper from Lisbon.

Europe, to me, looks tired, bored, and fed up. It anxiously awaits peace.

I do not believe Turkey will actively enter the war. However, she will open the Dardenelles when the Aegean Sea Islands, now occupied by the Germans, are cleared.

I think Turkey will play a leading role in Balkan affairs after the war and will brook no interference by foreign powers.

I am convinced she will support the Balkan Entente, planned with Rumania, Greece and Yugoslavia before the war to insure Balkan security and eliminate tariff barriers. All participating members were to have uniform armies with standard equipment and arms. Turkey and Greece were to be dominant figures in the movement, which was quashed when war broke out.

Turkey wants the Balkans as they were before the war. I don't think she will intervene for the establishment of republics in Greece or Yugoslavia.

In Turkey, most people think that an Arab federation would present a serious threat to Turkey's Near East border, and would be vigorously opposed. My country looks to the west. She desires an independent Syria, Iran, Iraq and Egypt, free from foreign control, so that her borders will be secure.



This map shows Mrs. Bulayir's route across Europe to Lisbon.

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