

# This Is Vienna



Clearing the wreckage from the streets is a slow job: There is not enough transport to haul it all away.

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**V**IENNA—When advance elements of our occupation troops entered this sadly battered city, once famous as a gay capital of wine, women and song, people poured out into the great boulevards to greet us, not as conquerors but as their own heroes and friends.

"They climbed all over our jeeps and trucks," GIs in that first convoy said. "They hugged us and girls kissed us, just as in Rome and Paris. Whenever we stopped a crowd immediately gathered around each man to welcome him. They would tell you how glad they were to see you, how much they loved America, and how they had always hated Nazis."

The Viennese couldn't shower the GIs with wine, flowers and fruit, as the French did, because the city is out of almost everything. But *frauleins* gave the Americans what they could.

"I never saw anything like it," said a sergeant who had been among those men selected from the de-activated 15th Army Group Headquarters to make up the new United States Forces for Austria. "There's none of that *quanto costa* stuff we had in Italy. These Austrian girls are nice to you out of friendliness. You take them to a cafe to buy them a cup of tea or lemonade and they're happy. If, after you take them home, you like to give them a bar of candy, cake of soap or cigarettes, why, you're a big-time Joe."

Naturally, Americans are taking advantage of their popularity with the natives. But they are a bit wary of this enthusiastic welcome. Of the city's prewar population of 2,000,000, Nazi party membership is said to have totaled 700,000. "Some of them cheered Hitler like this when he marched into Vienna in 1938," a headquarters clerk, previously with the 91st Division, pointed out.

Above all, the Viennese would like us to take over from the Russians, who won the city three months ago. This is part of an open conspiracy among Viennese, particularly the middle and upper classes, to emphasize to American troops that we have "liberated" the city. About the time of the British-French-American entry into Vienna, Russian and American commands were swapping some occupation territory on both banks of the Danube, and the Viennese were disappointed to learn that their city—which they regard even now, as in the past centuries, as a great bulwark of Western Christian culture against infidel barbarians from the East—wasn't in the exchange. They are downcast when our soldiers tell them that, apart from a small slice administered by the French, Vienna has been divided into approximately equal thirds among the Big Three.

It is not impossible that there was some private looting—similar to GI "liberating"—during the first day or two after the Russian seizure of Vienna, for Red Army patrols searched every house, room by room, for enemy soldiers and Nazis.

In any case, the Russian command soon ended the searches and the Red Army has been supplying food for the Austrian population since. Now, far from robbing the Viennese, the Soviet soldiers are buying what they need, and paying probably the most extravagant prices paid in any country in Europe except Greece.

**I**n the *Karlsplatz* near the Opera House there is a bustling black market. Every day several thousand Viennese can be seen milling about the big square, offering their personal possessions for sale to Russian soldiers and Russian Wacs. The market is illegal, but local Austrian police and Red Army MPs seem to look the other way.

Any article small enough to be carried in the pocket or a shopping bag is likely to change hands. The Russians pay \$250 to \$800 for a wrist watch, \$20 for a cigarette lighter, \$30 for a fountain pen, \$1,500 for a Leica camera. They buy up cheap jewelry, pen-knives, handkerchiefs, sun glasses. Russian girls go for cotton underwear and stockings, also cloth by the yard.

Some of our guys found a windfall in *Tovarich*.



Vienna was poor before the war, but now it is far poorer.

Women must hunt for usable junk in the gutters.

too, when we entered Vienna. Many of the Russians in town had just been paid off after five years of missing pay days, so their wads of money were so much lettuce to them.

"They jumped all over us," one GI said, "begging us to sell them our watches, cigarette cases, flashlights, anything we had. They dumped hundreds of dollars on us. One Russian ran up to one of our fellows yelling, 'Hey, Kamerad,' and forced \$300 on him just for nothing."

Our GIs get on okay with the Russkis despite the language barrier. The Red Army soldiers are eager to make friends and often stop us to talk in broken German or sign language. Russian is so difficult that few GIs get beyond *zdrastvuitie* (good day) in that tongue. Red Army men salute our soldiers regardless of grade; apparently they've been briefed, as we were, on this courtesy. The appearance of Soviet troops in Vienna is smarter than that of their units out in the country. Every Russian in the city always goes about armed, while only our sentries and vehicle drivers carry guns.

**W**HEN our troops entered Vienna they saw that one of the most beautiful cities in the world had been shattered by 22,000 tons of bombs which our planes had dropped on it, by street fighting in which Red Army men captured the place in April, and by fires the SS set in retreating.

Of the few people on the street, most were women and old men: the prewar population of 2,000,000 had been much reduced. Most of the buildings had been hit, but the people were still living in the usable parts of the wrecked structures. The wide streets were lined with rubble piles and the only traffic was military.

The scene of the most terrible desolation is the *Prater*, famous amusement and sports park, where SS troops made a last-stand defense for the city against the Russians who forced crossings of the Danube. There is scarcely one stone left on another in the *biergarten*, carousels and dance halls. A blackened and twisted ferris wheel rears starkly over the ruins like a fantastic war memento. In this and all the other parks and squares in Vienna today are the graves of Red Army men killed in the battle for the city, mounds topped not by crosses but by Soviet stars carved in wood or chiseled in marble. A huge bronze-and-marble monument to the Red Army is going up in *Schwarzenberg Garten*; it looks mighty permanent.

Our men found no souvenirs to buy. In any case, the command forbade all troops to purchase anything except drinks—and there were scarcely any drinks. Outside of the black market there is little business of any kind in Vienna today. On boarded-up shop fronts are pinned handwritten notices of things people want to barter. Only a few shops are open, and those only for perhaps three days a week.

The Viennese have been undernourished for years, and they look it. Now they are close to starvation. The shelves of butcher shops and bakeries are empty. Delicatessens may have only a few bags of ersatz coffee. Full daily rations for a worker are 10½ ounces of bread, 1¼ ounces of meat, ¼ ounce of cooking oil, 2 ounces of beans and 1 ounce of sugar. Non-workers get even less.

The schools have been shut for at least a month because of malnutrition and disease among the pupils. Viennese get an average of 900 calories contrasted with the 2,000 required daily for health. The reasons for the food shortage are lack of transportation to bring the food in from the country, damage to agriculture by the fighting, and military requisitions. The lack of transport is so acute that some people hike 20 miles into the country once a week to buy potatoes and vegetables from farmers. Added to the shortage of food and transport is a lack of coal, which also means no cooking gas. So every day in the beautiful Vienna woods, celebrated in Strauss waltzes, thousands of aged people are collecting wood for stoves and painfully trudging the miles back home with towering loads on their backs. People also may be seen rummaging through rubbish piles in the streets for useful junk.

On empty stomachs the Viennese are trying to carry on their traditional gay night life. Although Special Services produced nothing in the first few weeks and the Red Cross had not even appeared, there was some entertainment for a few of the first American troops to reach here.

**O**N a representative week day there are now 53 movies (Russian, old American and German films, with German sound tracks and titles), 16 plays and musical shows, 3 cabarets, one opera and one concert running in the city. Admission prices are reasonable, and even though every place is

## GIs are popular with civilians, but the capital of Austria is a far cry today from its storied past of gaiety, love and song.



This is one of the surviving cafes, once the centers of Viennese culture.

always sold out, proprietors will always make room for one of their favorite soldiers.

The Cafe Victoria on *Schottenring*, not far from the headquarters-company billet and a typical Vienna coffee house of today, became a favorite GI hangout right away. The clientele is quite cosmopolitan. In one hour there you meet not only American, British and Russian soldiers but Czechs, Yugoslavs, Poles, Greeks and Dutch civilians, in addition to the Viennese. All the foreign civilians there are displaced persons of some kind, awaiting shipment home. The place is full of people sitting at small tables. Admission is five *schillings*, or about 50 cents. Corny vaudeville goes on first for about an hour and a half—singers and dancers and native comedians GIs can't understand.

Then the older folk in the audience leave, and the remaining customers take over for dancing. The floor is so jam-packed with couples that it is impossible to do much more than wiggle in rhythm. The air is as hot and smoky as any jive joint in Chicago or Memphis.

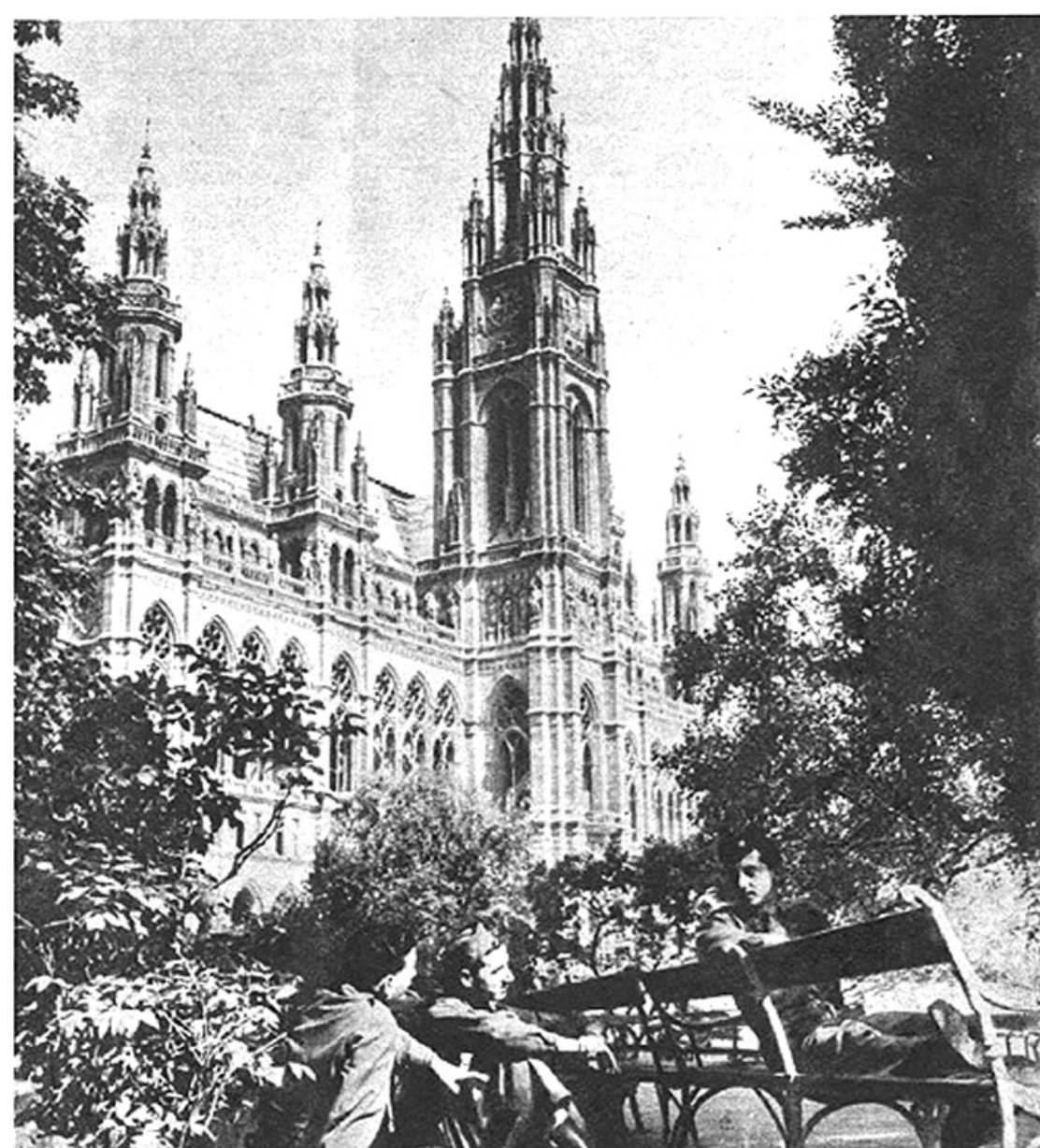
**A**ND the music is almost as groovy as American jazz, although it's funny to hear hot licks sung in German. "St. Louis Blues" gets the crowd jumping, and everybody joins in "Hold that tiger!" Our GIs wonder what's become of the "Blue Danube" and "Merry Widow" waltzes. In their first weeks in Vienna they heard plenty of American jazz, but never *Wienerwalzer*.

About the Viennese *frauleins* there are two schools of GI thought. Some prefer them to Italian girls because "they keep themselves cleaner, are better dressed and can speak English," while others say there are more pretty chicks in Italy and the *signorina* is a hotter number, too. The typical Viennese girl is fair skinned and blonde. She looks a little worn, and a scarcity of make-up doesn't help. Lipstick or even face powder on the girls is a rare sight.

Regulations allow American troops to fraternize only in public places, which means you can't go home with a girl. But during the first few weeks there were scarcely any of our MPs in town, so nobody knew the difference.

All the cafes and theaters close in the shank of the evening, 8:30 Vienna time or 10:30 Allied time, which is curfew for civilians. Military personnel may stay out until midnight our time. So far every place is on limits to everybody. Enlisted men are free to go anywhere in the city without a pass whenever they're not on duty.

During the first weeks we were in Vienna there wasn't much else to do except hang around the cafes and date *frauleins*. The Army took over a fine swimming pool in Bad Neuwaldegg in the hills a short way out of town, but August is the rainy season and you can't swim every day. The Army also plans to have some night clubs later, like those in Rome. Vienna after dark isn't romantic today. The rubble streets are dim and deserted, and our men are cautioned against wandering about at night. The air is not filled as formerly with the melodies of Mozart, Schubert, Haydn, Beethoven and Lehar. From the Russian billet you may hear an accordion playing—of all things—"Beer Barrel Polka."



The nineteenth-century *Rathaus*, or town hall, was hardly damaged.