

MIRROR FOR NAZI MORALE

by ALBERT PARRY

A soldier's letter home gives the real low-down. These messages from Nazis on the Russian front reveal that German morale really is low down



I AM MUCH PLEASED that you are destroying those rotten Russians. Do not feel any pangs of conscience—we all know that you have no right to be soft out there. Muck asks, ‘Aren’t all the Russians killed by now?’”

So runs a letter to “darling Viktor” from a Nazi woman signing herself “your loving Margueritte.” The Soviets found the letter on Viktor’s dead body, and promptly published it in the Moscow *Izvestia*—to show their people that not all the Germans are ready to give in, that the struggle ahead will be long and arduous.

Yes, a certain proportion of Germans both at the front and at home continue to be belligerently Nazi, imbued with hatred for the rest of the world and ready to fight to the bitter end—which they hope will be the better end. Here, for example, is a letter discovered on the inert form of Jupp Tilen, a Nazi soldier who was killed last winter near Voronezh. It is from Tilen’s sweetheart Mimi, a resident of Warthegau, or what used to be Western Poland. Mimi is delighted that the “Poles and Jews here die like flies.” She loves it when they congregate in lines before food shops “because then our police can work on their backs with rubber hoses.” It’s great sport when “we Germans yell and push these swine off the sidewalk if they are not quick enough to step aside at our approach.”

Encouragement of Nazi pillaging in Russia is frequent in the letters found on the battlefields by the Red army. “Don’t worry if they are soiled, or even blood-stained. They can be washed.” Frau Traudel was only speaking of children’s wear which she wanted her husband Leonhard to send her from Russia!

But what of the letters which do not end “Heil Hitler”? The Russians

Feldpost

say that these today are in an overwhelming majority. Therein—in the dreary, depressed pages of such correspondence between the German front and rear—lies our hope of victory.

“Almost every night the British come over to bomb us, giving us no rest,” read a letter found on a dead Nazi soldier from his family in the city of Bonn in the Rhineland. From Elbing in Eastern Prussia, the mother of another private in Hitler’s army wrote, “Last night Lotte said, ‘Ach, if only I wouldn’t wake up tomorrow morning!’ Just think, our Lotte who used to bubble with life and joy so, our Lotte now longs for death! Yes, Rudi, life is becoming more and more difficult. . . . Will this year, too, end without a change, without peace for our country and you poor boys?” For Rudi, however, the end of 1942 did bring both a change and peace—in the grave the advancing Russians dug for him.

Rudi’s mother and sister Lotte may not yet know of his death. The Nazi high command is not in the habit of re-translating and broadcasting those letters which the Russians now publish in their newspapers by the score.

But there are other sources for the German reader. Of late the Russians have been reprinting these letters in special German-language newspapers distributed by plane over Nazi trenches. They are the best propaganda material possible. In one such paper the potential Nazi readers were informed that the letters had been seized in a German field post office along with a note from the Nazi censor forbidding delivery of the mail as subversive. Subversive, indeed! One typical appeal from a girl in Breslau to her father in der Fuehrer’s army told how her mother and sister had been lost without a trace after a bread riot,—and wouldn’t Papa please come home and find them.

There is a sort of gloomy competition between the soldiers and the folks at home: Who is hit the harder? The wife of Corporal Karl Upheil wrote, “Remember how well I looked, what a blooming complexion I had, what rosy cheeks? Now I look old, pale, sad. I can tell you that it isn’t too pleasant to be on the home front either.” And then the anguished cry, “Oh, how I wish for your return to me! But something tells me that I cannot count on it.”

She was right. Her scribbled pages,

Feldpost

too, were picked up by the Russians near her husband's lifeless body.

HOW DEEP the troubles of the Nazi soldiers have been at the Russian front can readily be seen from the many pages in men's letters and diaries written in the late fall of 1942. Witness this message to German parents from their soldier son Herbert:

"We shudder when we think that we must fight here this second winter. Our detachment has been sent to the rear to clear and reconquer the forests. The guerrillas are in constant touch with the populace. Several whole towns are occupied by Russian partisans who leave their settlements and disappear in the woods as we approach. Day and night we set villages on fire. All food is long since gone."

How and why the food is gone, we learn from a graphic page found on a dead Nazi soldier, a man named Josef, writing to his sister Sabina:

"Today we selected for ourselves 20 hens and 10 cows. We take all the inhabitants we find in the villages, both adults and children, and send them to work in Germany." No wonder there are no peasants to produce food in the occupied regions after the initial supplies are gone. "Recently," Josef continues, "a group of natives refused to go. Such stubbornness made us angry, and we killed all of them on the spot. And then something terrible happened—some Russian women killed two German soldiers with their pitchforks. . . . We are being hated here. You back home cannot imagine the rage of the Russians against us."

The fury of the Russians at the front fell upon the Nazis with all its force, leaving the temporary survivors full of uneasy awe and foreboding. At Stalingrad the going was still tougher, and Nazi morale lower. The Moscow *Pravda* cites from a letter written but not mailed by Senior Lance Corporal Linz before he perished on the approaches to the Volga citadel:

"It is getting more difficult to advance. At some places the steppe was set on fire by the Russians, and everything around us was one terrible sea of flames. Is this the right way to fight?"

And from another dismayed Nazi, Lieutenant Hugo Wiener, come these jottings set down in his diary six days before he was killed in a fruitless attack on a Stalingrad factory:

"Even though we very well knew of the devilish stubbornness the Rus-

Feldpost

sians display in battle, we did not expect such stubbornness as they have shown here. It proved to be a too unpleasant surprise. We have still been unable to drink a toast to the Volga on its banks, as Otto wanted to do as far back as August. And now Otto and Kurt and Ernst and Seidel and all 'the flock of the furious' exist no more. I do not even know if they were buried. We have no time for the dead now. Our regiment is melting away like a lump of sugar in boiling water."

Waxing virulent, he continues, "This city is a sort of hell's meat-grinder in which our units are being ground to pieces. The smell of decaying flesh and blood haunts me. I can neither eat nor sleep. This damned city makes me vomit. My God, why hast Thou forsaken us?"

ANOTHER OF THOSE letters that were never posted reflects reluctant discouragement: "It is hard to confess even to myself, but it seems to me that at Stalingrad we shall soon win ourselves to death."

First doubt, then despair. Desertions and self-inflicted injuries are increasingly the subject of other, more official documents garnered by the Russians on the battlefields. In a secret report a certain Herr Doctor Buenger, chief surgeon of the 15th Nazi Division, noted with alarm: "Soldiers smoke tea leaves, causing panting, colic pains and vomiting. They apply kerosene, turpentine or acids to their bodies to cause a rash. Frequently they shoot their feet."

But as the Russian advance of the second winter began in earnest, Nazi soldiers were trapped. There was only a vast front—no rear to which they could be evacuated with their self-inflicted injuries. When 22 divisions were cut off by the Russians at the gates of Stalingrad, the Nazis had to rely on air transport for contact with the surrounded troops. One mid-December day a German cargo plane was shot down on its way from the ringed divisions. The wreckage yielded some three hundred letters from the doomed soldiers of der Fuehrer. The Soviets selected and published a typical one.

"We live on the steppes. Russians are all around us. Blizzards cut like knives. Falling snow hurts like pin-pricks. Our hands and feet are frozen." The Russian winter had come to the aid of the Russian counter-attack. Was it the beginning of Hit-

Feldpost

ler's end? The coming months will tell.

Throughout occupied Europe, on walls and fences, there has been appearing in chalk and paint the sinister reminder to the conquerors, "1918." If the fearless anti-Axis patriots need any documentary proof that they are right in their prophecy of approaching doom for Hitler's legions, then these letters and diaries published by the Russians are proof indeed.

