

DOOMSDAY FOR THE GUILTY



BY GEORGE TUCKER

ON THE afternoon of May 20th, a U.S. Army weapons carrier stopped before the wire-enclosed Palace Hotel at Mondorf, Luxemburg, and Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering got out.

His uniform was unpressed. His face was white. "I think you are going to kill me tomorrow," he said as the guards led him through the gate.

Inside they wrote his name in the ledger and gave him the number 13. They assigned him to a small room on the fourth floor and then they frisked him, relieving him of a small vial of potassium cyanide—the standard Nazi suicide equipment—concealed in a can of soluble coffee in his pocket.

They examined his luggage and found several thousand tablets of paracodeine, similar to morphine, to which he had been addicted for years. They took away his belt, his shoe-strings, his watch crystal, his razor and his penknife—routine antisuicide precautions.

Then they escorted him upstairs to his room. It had no mirror, no wall furnishings, no electric current. The window panes had been replaced by unbreakable substitutes. There was a canvas cot with a straw mattress and one small straight-back chair.

"This is it," Captain Hubert H. Biddle of Bremen, Ohio, commented.

Out in the garden, preoccupied by his chronic gall bladder condition and a serious heart lesion, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring paced slowly under the trees. Several rooms down the hall Dr. Hans Frank, Nazi whip in occupied Poland, lay in a half-fainting condition from his unsuccessful suicide attempt two weeks before.

These things Goering did not know. He stared at his room without taking in its detail. He was breathing through his mouth. "I think you are going to kill me tomorrow," he said again, dropping heavily into the chair. The chair, unequal to his weight, collapsed.

In this comic-opera fashion Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering, chief of the Luftwaffe, governor of Prussia and Master of the Hunt, was admitted to the place known as Ashcan.

Ashcan was the code name for the Army's great interrogation center at Luxemburg where Ribbentrop, Seyss-Inquart, Doenitz and forty-nine other high-ranking Nazi officials and Wehrmacht officers were interned prior to their removal in mid-August to the city jail in Nuremberg to await the opening of their trial as war criminals.



Stripped of their authority, confronted by the consequences of their acts, these men bore little resemblance to high government officials whose overweening megalomania led to the most idiotic war in history.

"They are perverts, dope fiends and liars," Colonel B. C. Andrus, enclosure commandant, says. "When Dr. Frank got here he was wearing a pair of lace panties. Goering brought an apple-cheeked 'valet' with him. We ordered the 'valet' to hard labor. When Ley got here he had a gonorrhoeal stricture and complained that he couldn't live without women. When Keitel got here we took his baton away from him and he went all to pieces and wrote a letter to Eisenhower. These are the eagles who planned and executed a world war."

Dr. Bohuslav Ecer, the Czechoslovak representative on the United Nations War Crimes Commission and prosecutor of Karl



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Hermann Franck, the "butcher of Lidice," says he has never seen such physical and moral disintegration. "They are cowards, so they weep. They deny and weep. Not one of them has the courage to say, 'I did it and I stand by it.'"

Ribbentrop, more than any of the others, with the possible exception of Doenitz, has been able to maintain his reserve. But even he surrendered his poise when Ecer advised him he had been listed as a major war criminal and was slated for trial. "I, a criminal!" Ribbentrop cried. "Hitler made the decisions and gave the orders. I was only the instrument of his wishes and desires."

One night last summer a fierce electrical storm came up and bounced a few bolts of lightning off the trees. Shortly thereafter the enclosure's surgeon, Captain C. L. Miller of Lees Summit, Missouri, reported that Goering had suffered a heart attack.

"He can't stand thunder and lightning. It frightens him," Miller said. "I asked him how it happened and he said, 'I was all by myself in my room when the storm came up. It worried me. Then my breathing became difficult.'"

We walked over to the infirmary for a brief examination of the former Luftwaffe commander. His vast bulk completely filled the narrow bed. He tried to lift his head from the pillow in the simulation of a bow, but let it fall back at Colonel Andrus' nod. His arms lay limply at his side.

"He's heart-conscious," Miller said. "It gets to kicking and he's afraid it won't quiet down."

Colonel Andrus said, "He is so debased by his vices that he hasn't the moral stamina of a normal man. When he becomes frightened, he goes all to pieces and wrings his hands like an old woman."

On our way out we passed through the barbershop where Ribbentrop, Doenitz and Streicher were waiting their turn. They got instantly to their feet and bowed. This was regulation. There was no saluting or handshaking at Ashcan. They held the bow until released by a nod or wave of the hand.

Ribbentrop had on an old pair of trousers and a loose lumberman's shirt, open at the throat. His gray hair was shaggy. He accomplished the ritual with an easy elegance that might have been admirable under different circumstances. Jodl was in the chair having his hair trimmed by a German barber from one of the labor battalions.

Grand Admiral Doenitz, who assumed brief authority before the Reich collapse, and who still referred to himself as "the head of the German state," wore his gold-braided uniform. When he first arrived at Ashcan he bitterly resented having his razor taken away.

"Why are you taking it?"

The prison officer looked at him coldly. "Don't you know?"

"I wouldn't commit suicide. That would be cowardly."

That night he addressed a letter to General Eisenhower, reminding him that such treatment was not in keeping with his position as the "head of a state."

"Old Fat Stuff (Goering) wrote a letter to Eisenhower, too," Andrus said. "They all want to write letters. They'd flood headquarters with letters if we'd let them. We finally put a stop to it. Fat Stuff wanted a plane and several days leave to straighten out his tangled domestic difficulties."

Atrocity Films—Plus Lecture

There was no coddling or pampering or recognition of rank at Ashcan. The only entertainment was atrocity films. Recently the internees were treated to the spectacle

of Buchenwald, but before the picture was shown, Colonel Andrus addressed a few words to them.

"You are about to see a certain motion picture showing specific instances of maltreatment of prisoners by the Germans. You know about these things and I have no doubt many of you participated actively in them. We are showing them to you not to inform you of what you already know but to impress on you the fact that we know of it, too. Be informed that the considerate treatment you receive here is not because you merit it, but because anything less would be unbecoming to us."

Then the lights went out and the saga of Buchenwald began to unfold. Its impact was so great that Captain Biddle, the prison officer, and Sergeant Arthur Michaels, an interpreter, of New York City, noted their reactions:

Dr. Hans Frank held a handkerchief to his mouth and gagged for fifteen minutes. Ribbentrop bowed his head and walked straight into the dining room. Kesselring was white as a sheet. Julius Streicher sat on the edge of the chair clasping and unclasping his hands. Goering appeared not to take much interest in the film but later commented, "That's the type of pictures we used to show our Russian prisoners."

The Palace Hotel itself, where major prisoners are interned, was only a part of Ashcan and it was so cleverly camouflaged that the local Luxemburgers were two months tumbling to the fact that most of the surviving leaders of the Reich were in their midst. In other parts of the village were two POW cages for labor battalions. These were established as a diversionary screen for the "Big House."

At the hotel, all internees, regardless of former rank, made their own beds and kept their own quarters. The records show that Ribbentrop, despite his love of elegance, was a very sloppy housekeeper and on two occasions was called on the carpet because of the general untidiness of his quarters. Orderlies were banned. If any internee required assistance in dressing or undressing, such as help in the removal of boots, he had either to change the habit or obtain assistance from another. Their rations were prescribed by law. On the first day I was there the menu consisted of cereal, soup and coffee for breakfast; pea soup, beef hash and spinach for dinner; powdered eggs, potatoes, bread and tea for supper.

Because food is essential in planning an escape, it was against Ashcan regulations for internees to carry food to their rooms. Consequently, when a small quantity of chocolate was found in the monk's cell occupied by Prince Philip of Hesse he was court-martialed.

The Prince is a slight, sophisticated type who spent nearly two years in a Nazi concentration camp. He claims kinship to King

George of England and half the aristocratic families of Europe. When the collapse came, he was picked up by American authorities and reinterned, a circumstance that shocked some Allied officials. I was told that Prince Philip was wholeheartedly Nazi in the beginning of the war but caught on fast and began to oppose them when defeat seemed probable. For this about-face the Nazis imprisoned him.

He came into the room where his court-martial was held, wearing a gray jacket and blue trousers. He wore sandals with no socks and the ends of a white handkerchief showed from his breast pocket.

"I have a report from the prison officer that chocolate was found in your room in violation of prison regulations, and I am going to court-martial you under the 104th Article of War. Do you understand all that?" Andrus asked.

The Prince said, "Yes, sir."

"You may make any statement you wish and then you will be confronted by witnesses."

The Prince folded his arms across his chest—not in nonchalance but in order to control the trembling of his elbows and knees. “I didn’t know I wasn’t allowed to have chocolate. I took it because I hadn’t seen any for two years. I wanted to eat one piece every night, to make it last longer.”

“Yes, the people of Holland and France and other countries overrun by the Nazis haven’t tasted chocolate for two years, either,” Andrus replied.

Moisture began to appear on the Prince’s face. “I haven’t been here very long. I wouldn’t have taken it if I had known.”

Andrus leaned forward and for twenty minutes the air was blue. Then he waved the Prince away.

“I don’t see fit to award you any punishment this time. But if it becomes necessary to have you in here again . . .”

Prince Philip of Hesse vanished in a hysteria of relief.

One other item concerning food is of interest because it illustrates the position the authorities have taken as regards rank. There are no big shots among the internees at Ashcan and no flunkies to wait on them. Goering learned of this one morning over an unsatisfactory breakfast.

“This porridge is execrable,” he cried. Turning to a German private who served as waiter, he added, “My dog in Germany eats better than this.”

“In Germany your dog ate better than the German people,” the waiter replied.

During the hours of sunlight the captive eagles were permitted to stroll in the garden at their leisure. Keitel, Kesselring, Jodl and Erwin Krauss, who headed the National Socialist motor corporation, formed a sort of unofficial sun cult and stripped themselves to the waist daily in order to give their bodies an even blend of suntan.

Kesselring always was in evidence outdoors. He was easily the most soldierly looking man of the group. Julius Streicher, the Jew baiter, had a fondness for the outdoors too, but was generally shunned by the other internees and walked by himself or teamed up with his buddy, Dr. Robert Ley, who alone seemed to enjoy his company.

Curiously enough, as the thought of his coming trial weighed upon Streicher, he experienced a complete change of heart toward the Jews. “When I was first captured I was beaten, kicked in the face and a Negro spat in my mouth. They starved me on potato peels. Then one day I changed camps. I was placed in a clean room. An American came in with a pitcher of cocoa and some crackers. He set them on the table and stepped back. ‘This is from me to you, Mister Streicher. I am a Jew.’ I broke down and cried. That was the most severe punishment I have ever received. I have always said there are no good Jews, but that boy proved to me that I am wrong.”

The last time I saw Streicher he was standing on the veranda in the sunlight talking to Dr. Franz X. Schwarz, a former Reichsschatzmeister, and Kurt Daluege, an active hatchet man in his palmier days. Schwarz is an old man, 78, with chronic myocarditis.

High Praise from Gestapo Chief

“Daluege—he came here May 19th in a party with Dr. Otto Meissner, who used to be Hitler’s Chancellery chief,” Andrus said. “We frisked them. We had a boy who was pretty good at that—Sergeant William Blake, Jr., of San Francisco. He has gone home now. Daluege took an immense interest in the way Blake worked. When Blake got through with Meissner, Daluege clapped his hands. ‘I see you have the touch of a professional detective. I know. I was chief of the Gestapo.’”