'The Berliner'--Americas' Pride--Is Also America's Headache

By BOB FRAZIER

One hundred and twenty miles of railroad track running across the North German plain is in the news this week as the latest of the world's trouble spots. This is not surprising. The access line from Western Germany into the city of Berlin has been America's headache—and America's pride—for nearly three years.

The Russian truculence in demanding the right to inspect the American trains running over this track is not anything new. They have been extremely hard-nosed about this rail line ever since the Americans were allowed into the defunct capital of the fallen Reich in July 1945.

I was in on much of the negotiation that made this rail line possible in the first months after the war, and I can testify that the present trouble is nothing unexpected. A little of the history and background of this rail line, and of the Russian attitude toward it, should be interesting.

First it is necessary to understand that Berlin, the seat of the "quadripartite" control council set up by the Potsdam protocol, is more than 100 miles behind the "iron curtain." There are some 8000 Americans in there, as well as similar numbers of British and French, several times that many Russians, and close to three million Germans. The 8000 Americans are not all soldiers. Probably half of them are civilians, many of them women and children.

Heretofore there have been three ways of getting from Western Germany into the capital. You could fly, landing at Templehof airport in the American sector or at Teltow in the British sector; you could ride in by motor vehicle from Helmstedt in the British zone; or you could ride "The Berliner," the finest train in Europe. The two first mentioned methods remain today (or did at last reports.)

Berlin itself is divided into four "sectors," and Berliners and allied personnel alike are free to go and come across sector boundaries without showing passes, obtaining visas, or going through any other red tape. They just walk across the street. It's like going from Dolph Park to Irvington. Germans living in the Soviet zone of Germany can thus enter the American sector of Berlin without trouble.

So much for geography. Now for history.

When the Americans first landed in Berlin in July 1945, they came under invitation of the Russians, true enough, but under an invitation on the "four-power" level. The Americans in Berlin are in territory conquered by the Red Army, just as the Russians now occupy the states of Saxony and Thuringia, much of which were conquered by American troops. It's all part of a big deal.

The first Americans came to Berlin about the fourth of July by air. Thousands more followed by truck, across the autobahn from Hanover. There were probably 30 or 40 thousand Americans, most of them military personnel, in the capital by the end of that first summer. But rapid "redeployment" of troops cut this number steadily until only a token garrison of troops. and military and civilian personnel on the four-power committees were left. The families came later. All this time there was no train service into Berlin.

In the early autumn of 1945 the Americans got permission to move one train a week to and from Berlin. This was "The Berliner," and it was the finest train in the ETO. The best railroad equipment in the fallen Reich was collected to make up this puffing example of American efficiency and power. It was the envy of the powers governing Germany.

At first the Russians insisted upon inspecting this train, but they were argued down, and agreed to leave it alone if the cars were "sealed" from the British sector into Berlin. More trains were added to the run until the present (or recent) daily service was made possible, carrying allied soldiers and civilians to Frankfurt and Bremen.

There was no other way out of Berlin. If an American in the capital wanted to travel to Munich in Bavaria (American Zone), an air distance of some 325 miles, he had to go by way of Helmstedt and Frankfort, a distance of more than 600 miles. That was just the way things were. Negotiations with the Russians to provide a similar corridor south from Berlin to Bavaria proved futile. The Russians wouldn't even discuss it.

Meanwhile the Berliner had been causing no end of grief. Wild rumors swept Berlin, practically every week, that there had been clashes between train guards and Soviet soldiers along the right-of-way.

The Russians don't trust anybody, and the agreement about the sealed cars could work only if there was mutual trust.

Here's what the Russians may be afraid of:

Suppose there is a political big-wig in the Soviet Zone who has opposed the Russian policy. The Soviets are not renowned for their tolerance of minority opinion. Suppose this man is marked for a quick trip to Moscow, or for sudden suicide in one of the canals or rivers in Eastern Germany. It is conceivable that the political figure could come to Berlin—all very legally, and walk over into the American sector—still very legally.

It is possible then, that the Americans or the British, could load this man aboard the Berliner, perhaps under false papers, and spirit him away to the Western zones, or perhaps to the British Isles or America.

It is safe to say that we have never done that. It is probably just as safe to say that we don't plan to. But the Russians don't trust anybody. They want to be sure.

Maybe something of that type is what is bothering them, If it isn't something of this type, it is probably a simple desire on the part of the Russians to wreck the four-power government of Germany. This is by no means improbable, either.

Americans don't relish the idea of being awakened in the middle of the night by Russian soldiers who are looking for fugitive Germans. To permit inspection of a sealed train, from eclave to enclave, is in a sense a surrender of national sovereignty.

General Lucius D. Clay, whose unpleasant job it is to meet thrice monthly with the Russians on these matters, is now faced with a new problem:

Is the Berliner and this "face" worth American lives? If he tries to run his train tomorrow without permitting Soviet inspection, there will surely be some blood—American blood—shed. His temporary halting of the train service and his decision to provision Berlin by air, is probably the wisest move under the circumstances. Our forces are so pitifully small in Europe—especially in Berlin that it would be futile to try to resist the Soviet demands by military force at this time. It might read very well in the history books—just as Bataan and the story of the Lost Battalion read well. But it would be of little practical value, and a lot of Americans would get hurt. It ain't worth it.

Fosdick, Where Is Thy Sting?

By MARYANN THIELEN

The battering rams of modern educational and psychological theory are sounding again against the walls of one of our sacred American traditions—the comic strips (or funny papers, if you prefer). Once more voices can be heard raised in protest against the doubtful moral and ethical value of the hair-raising adventures of iron-jawed Dick Tracy or his more death-defying counterpart Fearless Fosdick. 'Tis said that little children will warp their tender minds by following such "trash;" that they will resolve into juvenile delinquents while trying to copy the antics portrayed in the comics or will be frightened into early insomnia victims by viewing Lena the Hyena. The rapidly rising juvenile delinquency rate is often used as proof of these statements.

Well, now wait a minute. It was around 1900 that the Yellow Kid first made his appearance and heralded the beginning of the comic strip era. Our generation has been exposed to a lifetime of funny paper characters, and in looking around it's impossible to find someone cringing along campus paths because he was frightened at an early age by B-B Eyes, Flat-top, or Tillie the Toiler. The comic strips are more likely to have a beneficial effect on the shaping of moral and ethical standards for children. Kids, like adults, want to be heroes. Many a backlot squabble has developed over who are to be the cops and who are to be the robbers in that venerable childhood game. Cartoon artists have been faithful in carrying out the old axiom that right always triumphs, even though the test is often severe. As a result the average boy would rather be a Junior-G-man than the gruesome-looking No-Face who gets killed.

Cutting out the comic strips or reducing them to fluffy bits concerning a carefree life that actually doesn't exist is only shutting the child up in an unreal world of make-believe which will be exploded all to soon when he discovers with a shock and no preparation that there actually are live bogey-men about in the world.

Nor are the comic strips the sole habitation of the bad people and evil ogres. From the time children are old enough to enjoy the music of words, their parents read to them from well-illustrated books telling of the trying times of Hansel and Gretel, thwarting the horrible designs of the cackling old witch—certainly not a creature to inspire delight. And when

(Please turn to page three)

Nellie Lutcher Has It

By MICHAEL CALLAHAN

Five years ago a whisper-voiced crooner named Dooley Wilson sat down at a piano in a bit scene from "Casablanca" and made himself an overnight sensation with a wistful ditty titled "As Time Goes By." Today, a brassy lunged gal named Nellie Lutcher

is drawing equal raves with a bouncy style straight out of New Orleans.

Like Dooley Wilson, Lutcher had to keep plugging for more years than she shows before someone "discovered" her. A Capitol scout caught her "Hurry on Down" original early last year when she was fighting smoky corners and noisy parties in a side-street Hollywood nightery. Only weeks later her "Hurry on Down," "He's a Real Gone Guy," and "The Lady's in Love With You," were enagging nickels on the nationwide jukebox circuit.

After that, it was only a matter of inking contracts and racing the record ban deadline before her first album hit the dealer windows.

Eugene shelves saw the first Lutcher collection during spring term, and the title "Nellie Lutcher Sings" was all the ad plug needed to start sales booming. Included are Nellie's barrelhouse vocal and piano arrangements of "Sleepy Lagoon," "Chi-Chi-Chicago," "The One I Love Belongs to Somebody Else," "Reaching for the Moon," and a pair of odd (very odd) fillers. The Lutcher throat-choked style is either the hottest thing on discs in many a month, or just mush-mouthed screechings. Depending on how you look at it, these are the best numbers she's waxed either way.

Single lines: Vaughn Monroe is doing it again. With "Ballerina" still holding down top spots on the Hit Parade, and the Monroe version outselling others 2-to-1, another dance number by his once-shaky ork is booming its way up the same Parade lists. "Matinee —Seats for Two" is the latest, and the Monroe velvet style draws the nod over Gordon MacRae's rival disc any time. . . .

Columbia is shrewdly following up Eddy Howard's popular "Happiness in Love" with an album of his best old-timers. These numbers, all waxed before his 1946 star making disc of "To Each His Own," featured the robust Howard tenor that always reminds us of the late golden-voiced Russ Columbo. Offered in the Eddy Howard Sings" collection are "Stardust," "Miss Me," "Song of the Islands," "Exactly Like You."

Well worth placing an advance order for now is Tommy Dorsey's latest album, "Tschaikowsky Melodies for Dancing." We haven't heard this one yet, but TD has picked the better themes from Tschaikowsky's works, and preview notes have it that this debut of the new Dorsey orchestra compares with the smoothest jobs by his old groups. We look for excellent dance stylings of the famous "Tonight We Love," "On the Isle of May," "Moon Love" (Fifth Symphony), "Our Love," (Romeo and Juliet love waltz), "None but the Lonely Heart," "Story of a Starry Night" (Pathetique Symphony), and several other melodies from the great Russian composer. Keep checking for this one.