

Washington Digest

Concentration Camps Turned Men Into Brutes

Prisoners Who Survived Cruelties Eventually Adopted Ways of Their Sadistic Guardians.

By BAUKHAGE
News Analyst and Commentator.

(This is the second article on postwar Germany explaining how the Nazi "planned terror," methodically applied to the older Germans, has produced a state of mind among the anti-Nazis which vastly complicates American rule of Germany.)

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In my preceding column I described the state of mind of the middle-aged German who had been anti-Nazi or at least had no connections with the Nazi party. A study of the gestapo methods has revealed that it was planned definitely to destroy initiative and individuality. This has greatly complicated the work of the American administration of occupied Germany.

As I said, the gestapo made use of a definite system of "planned terror."

It will, I realize, be somewhat difficult for a person living in a democratic country to grasp the extent to which such methods could be applied. First, we must realize that a totalitarian government is the absolute antithesis of a democracy. In a democracy the individual is the unit. The state exists for the individual. Under Nazi-Fascist totalitarianism, it is not enough to say that the individual exists for the state. The individual as a concept does not exist at all. "The Fascist conception of the state," said Mussolini, "is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist. . . ."

It was the first task of the Nazis to destroy this concept of individuality. The terror was a part of the method employed.

Purpose Was to Break Will to Resist

Bruno Bettelheim, author of "My Life in Nazi Concentration Camps," testifies to the purpose of the camps and the achievement of this purpose by the gestapo from his own experiences. He says that among the aims were these:

1. To break the prisoners as individuals and convert them into docile masses from which no individual or group act of resistance could arise.
2. To spread terror among the rest of the population by:
 - a. Using the prisoners as hostages;
 - b. Demonstrating to them what happened to those who oppose Nazi rulers.
3. To provide gestapo members with a training ground so they could:
 - a. Lose all human attitudes and emotions;
 - b. Learn the most effective ways of breaking civilian resistance.
4. To provide a laboratory in which the gestapo could study the effectiveness of torture, minimum nourishment and medical care, and normal activities plus hard labor.

The general purpose, of course, was to create a civilian population of maximum benefit to the Nazi state. The author's study of prisoners conducted under the camp regime, supplemented by a careful self-analysis, leads him to believe that the camp treatment resulted in either death or an adaptation to camp life. The prisoner finally accepted his position and even came to imitate the gestapo in manner and conduct.

This seems a logical progression when we know that the gestapo themselves in their training were submitted to tortures almost equal to those inflicted on the prisoners. One of the gestapo games, the author relates, was for two of them to stand up and beat each other. The one who stood the longest won. Old prisoners who were thoroughly "changed" were said to indulge in the same sport among themselves.

Many Were Killed, Or Were Suicides

Bettelheim describes the three stages through which the prisoners passed. The first is the arrest; the second is transportation to the camp, which is the hardest to bear, he says. The last is prison life; after a period of transition during which, unless the prisoner either resists physically and is murdered or resists introspectively and commits suicide, he is gradually "changed" until he reaches the "old prisoner" stage. Then his previous nature is eradicated, his individuality lost and his subjection complete.

The initial shock was devastating especially to a German, accustomed

as he was to processes logically controlled by law and order. To be deprived suddenly of one's civil rights with no recourse, came as a severe blow to the prisoner's mentality.

The transportation to the camp and the initiation into it frequently is the first experience of physical and psychological torture which the prisoner has ever experienced.

Corporal punishment, says Bettelheim, describing his own observations, consisted of whipping, kicking, slapping, intermingled with shooting and wounding with the bayonet. Then there were tortures, the obvious goal of which was extreme exhaustion. "For instance," he says, "the prisoners were forced to stare for hours into glaring lights, to kneel for hours, and so on. From time to time a prisoner got killed; no prisoner was permitted to take care of his or another's wounds. The purpose of the tortures was to break the resistance of the prisoners, and to assure the guard that they were really superior to them."

Many were killed in this process. But those who lived, according to the author, were conditioned to the point where what followed—more beatings, more indignities, little food, exposure and brutally hard work—was not as bad as the initial experience.

For the rest, it was a slow but sure process of degeneration of body, mind and soul.

One thing which has surprised the Americans in occupied Germany is the tendency of the German people to deny that they knew the extent of the atrocities which were perpetrated in the camps or to appear to ignore their existence.

This is a result of a planned effect of the camp.

Dread Fear Hung Over Everyone

According to statements concerning conditions in Germany as early as 1930, most of the Germans who had committed actual offenses against the Nazi regime, had already been imprisoned, murdered or had died in the camps. Then the Nazis found it necessary to go out and arrest members of various groups indiscriminately, say a few lawyers, a few doctors, a few from one organization or another. This was done as a threat against that whole particular group.

The effect on a group was somewhat the same, though in a lesser degree, as the effect on a family. The effect on the families of the prisoners, of course, was marked. At first a great deal of money was spent in attempting to get the prisoner released. The gestapo always replied that it was the prisoner's own fault that he was imprisoned. Then members of the family began to find it hard to get jobs, children had trouble at school; poor relief was denied. Always the terror hung over them. The friends and relatives of a prisoner were considered suspects. So the influence of the camp reached out over the whole group.

As the Nazi regime became more harsh and especially latterly, when world resentment increased against it even before the war, many more Germans, passive before, became openly dissatisfied and critical. It was impossible to imprison them all without interfering with the functioning of the country's economy. Then "group" arrests increased. People in lots of a hundred or so from one profession, or trade, or affiliated body, would be jailed. Thus the effect of the "terror" was multiplied. This was the manner in which the entire population of the country was enchained.

General McClure recognizes how crushing has been the effect of "planned terror," but I doubt if the general public has any realization of its magnitude. "We shall often have to go far out of our way," says the general, "to help certain individuals who have not had an easy life these last 12 years and more, men whose broken spirits may well need our support and guidance to return to the ways of active personal democratic initiative."

It took centuries to develop human dignity, but it took only a few months in a Nazi concentration camp to destroy it.

Kathleen Norris Says: Returning Husband Brings Tragedy

Bell Syndicate.—WNU Features.



"She has loved Peter all her life. He is her ideal of a husband and father. He loves little Bob as if he were the child's own father and he idolizes Baby Mollie."

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

HERE is a real puzzler and a sad tragedy, too.

I am at a loss what to advise Rosamond Kay, who writes me a charming letter from East St. Louis. Her's is one of those problems that can be solved only in her own heart—she must weigh the claims of the two men in her life, one against the other, and decide which is the real claim.

Rosamond was married seven years to Robert. She was then 20. She loved him very truly and when he was numbered officially among the dead in Tunisia, she grieved for many months. Then she married Peter.

By Robert she had a son, now five years old; by Peter she has a daughter, just one year old. Rosamond is 31. She writes me that her heart aches for Robert, coming home tired and sad after a long and agonizing imprisonment and illness. But she says she has loved Peter all her life. He is her ideal of a husband and father. He loves little Bob as if he were the child's own father and he idolizes Baby Mollie. Rosamond has to meet Robert in a week or two, and she doesn't know what to do, for Robert is living and coming home to rejoin his wife and child.

Pete's Finer in Every Way.

"He has my letter now explaining the situation," writes Rosamond. "It was a terrible letter to write. I was prostrated with the shock of knowing that the man who was actually a ghost to me was coming back. These years with Peter have been heaven—he is the more successful man, the more popular, the finer in every way."

"Robert is of a moody, jealous nature. He was always unhappy if I took Bob to visit my mother; he disliked my having guests in the house; he made enemies in his business. We had not been married long before I spent many hours in tears and doubt and realized the extreme difficulty of the path I had chosen. To emerge from all this into the security and joy of Peter's companionship, his enthusiasms and plans, was to come out into the sunlight after a time of shadows. I really had mourned Robert; I was genuinely shocked by his reported death, but after that I learned what true married felicity can be."

"Now as to the children—Bob is a shy, affectionate little fellow who clings to me. He has all but recovered physically from a bad session with infantile paralysis, but it has left him dependent and nervous. He dearly loves Mollie, who is a fat, riotous, laughing little tyrant already. I cannot bear to separate them and yet it is inconceivable that I should take Mollie to Robert's house. Robert, as a matter of fact, has no house, no job, and not a single living relative. Also I must say that he always was devoted to Bobby and Bobby to him, although naturally the small boy hardly remembers him now."

Still Robert's Wife.

"I know," the letter concludes, "that Peter and I are not legally married. I am still Robert's wife. Shall I return to him? Or shall I ask him for a divorce and turn him over to loneliness and perhaps heartbreak? In my letter I said,

'ENOCH ARDEN' DILEMMA

Fortunately only a few wives ever have to make the decision that Rosamond must. It is the "Enoch Arden" plot—the supposedly dead husband returns to find his wife married, and happier than she had ever been with him.

Robert was reported dead by the war department during the Tunisian campaign. Many months later Rosamond married Peter, a fine man she had known all her life. She already had a son five years old. Now she has a baby daughter, Mollie, who resembles her father, Peter. This little family is quite happy together. Peter is successful, jolly and affectionate. Robert has a moody and jealous disposition.

Rosamond nevertheless realizes that Robert is really her husband, and that he has every right to her. The shock of losing her, after the bitter years of fighting, and the misery of life in a German prison camp, is almost unbearable to Robert. He is coming home soon, and Rosamond will have to face him. She doesn't know what to do. The thought of giving up the delightful life she is now leading to return to a war-weary, jobless man, who at best was inferior to her present husband, is almost maddening. Yet she knows her duty, and can see no decent way out.

"Come home and we will adjust all these matters. You will see your adorable boy and believe me, you are welcome despite these strange circumstances." I hardly could say less. He has been fighting to protect these same babies from the hell that was Nazi Europe. His answering letter takes it for granted that I still love him—perhaps in a pitying, sorrowful way I do. Peter will only say to me, "We must do what is right." What, in your opinion, is right?"

Poor Rosamond! This is a heart-breaking situation. To return to Robert is more than can be expected of poor human flesh and blood. She might make the effort, but to be poor again, hard-working again, separated from her laughing baby, missing Peter—there is a daily, hourly immolation that would call for supernatural graces of an unusual kind.

Robert's jealousy and moodiness add one more difficult note to a difficult position. Robert is not apt to give up his place generously, when he sees Rosamond's happiness or suspects it. He will not subside into the amiable family friend, willing to accept the overflow from the completely felicitous household.

So I only can recommend prayer to Rosamond. God's ways are not our ways. There are unexpected twists and turns and changes in any domestic crisis that can remove from it all the bitterness and rancor. There is a certain mysterious rightness and smoothness about the curing of those ills that are taken to God in prayer. That is the one unfailing answer.

Have a Savings Plan

For the first time since World War I many farm families are receiving incomes sufficient to provide something above necessary living expenses. These larger incomes may not continue many years into the postwar period. Certainly we can expect lower farm prices and incomes within a few years after the close of the war. To save successfully for the inevitable "rainy day," we need to make definite but simple plans and goals for savings and investments for the future.

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Uncle Phil Says:

YOU can make your mistakes steppingstones to success. But when you begin blaming other people for them, you're a failure.

The man who is afraid to begin isn't any better than the quitter.

A doctor has issued a warning against over-enthusiastic sun bathing. It's just basking for trouble.

It is generally the case that the first screw to get loose in a person's head is the one that controls the tongue.

The rest of your days depends upon the rest of your nights.

The man who doesn't trust himself generally displays sound judgment.

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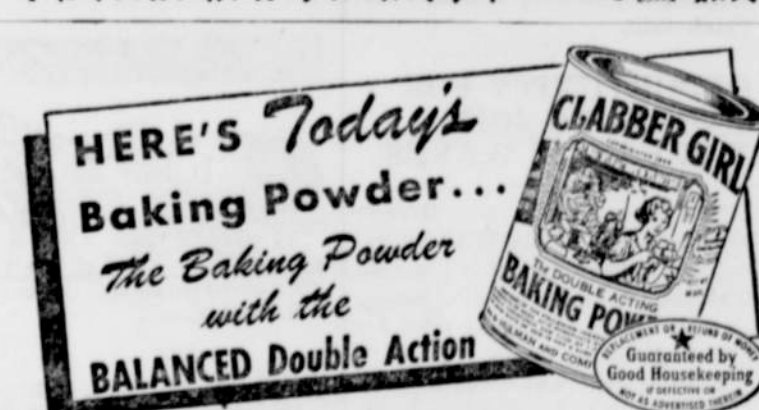
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BARBS . . . by Baukhage

There is pressure to break down the anti-fraternization rules in the American army of occupation in Germany. It is not coming from American girls.

Life is gradually returning to normal in the Berlin suburbs, says a Moscow broadcast, and a bicycle race was held in one town on July 1. We hope it wasn't a master race.

Three million barrels of petroleum products were lost by recent strikes in this country, according to an estimate made by the Petroleum Administration.

Two thousand seven hundred Liberty ships have been battered beyond use in service. A lot of them put up a good scrap before they were scrapped.

