

To Nuremberg and Home

In January, 1946 Theatre Headquarters sent down an order for our Group at Furth, near Nuremberg in Germany, to submit a Fraternization Report for the period May 1 to December 31, 1945. As Group Adjutant, I was responsible for its preparation. The report was to describe and compare fraternization during May 1 to July 15, when it was expressly forbidden by Theatre Directives, to the period July 16 to December 31, 1945 when it was no longer prohibited. We had no statistics to rely on, so I had to create descriptive sets of numbers of various violations based on my own limited observations. In plain English, I made it up. I prepared a three page report which satisfied HQ, and thought no more about it.

In December, 2000, before leaving office, President Clinton granted one of his better pardons to a Roscoe C. Blunt of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, who had been convicted in 1945 by a Court Martial and served 3 months at hard labor for fraternizing with a German woman. What was his crime? At the request of his Captain, while they waited to cross the Rhine, he had gone into town to find a washerwoman to do laundry. Later, a 2nd lieutenant heard about it and had him charged. Blunt was a decorated foot soldier (Purple Heart and Bronze Star) and he had applied for a pardon to clear his name "because of family honor." The stain had been a blot on his record for 55 years.

We still had to deal with the Soviets. Our airfield served Nuremberg, and the Allies, including the Soviets, were preparing for an historic War Crimes trial of the 20 top leaders of Nazi Germany, scheduled for November 20, 1945. On a late September evening before the trial, a Soviet C-47 plane landed at Furth airfield. On board were about a dozen Soviet officials, mostly military, on their way to Nuremberg to prepare for the trial. Our troops surrounded the plane with guns at the ready and took all the occupants into custody. They were told that the plane did not have the “proper entry papers.”

In addition to my other duties, I was the Officers Mess Officer, and it fell to me to provide the Soviets with an evening meal and quarters for the night. I looked out at my “guests” and asked if any of them spoke German [I had a very rudimentary feel for the language from my childhood Yiddish.] The young pilot raised his hand and spoke up. It was immediately apparent that he was speaking Yiddish and I could understand him. The pilot was Jewish, from Moscow, and his name was Cohen [Kagan in Russian]. I made all the necessary arrangements for dinner and overnight accommodations. As we were on our way to the Officers Mess, we passed the German middle-aged couple we had recently hired to work at the Mess. The Soviets and the couple readily recognized who was who, and exchanged looks that I can describe only as poisonous darts filled with venomous hate. Nevertheless, our “guests” were well fed and harbored for the night and all was made right the next morning.

The trial was eight miles away at Nuremberg and I was able to attend four sessions. I was assigned a seat in the small balcony above the Press seats, with a good

view of all the proceedings. Headphones were provided which rendered all speech in English. I could look down at all the defendants; nearest to my view were Goering and Hess.

Most vivid was the session of March 15, 1946, when Goering was cross examined by Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson. He was Chief of Counsel for the American Prosecution. Jackson was not a skilled prosecutor, and did not do well against Goering, who was very sharp, and knew more intimately than Jackson the facts about which he was being questioned. Jackson is reported to have broken down in private after his failure to make the case against Goering. The day was saved by Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe who, among other questions, pressed the agile Goering on the narrow issue of the murder of 50 RAF officers after their escape from prison and recapture. Goering was found guilty on all four counts of the indictment and sentenced to death. To avoid hanging, he managed to commit suicide by poison.

I later learned that Furth is the birthplace of our illustrious former Harvard Professor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. I finally said goodbye to Furth on March 28, 1946 after having been commanding officer of the Headquarters Squadron for two months. All my seniors had gone home before me and now it was my time. I sailed home on the S.S. Texarkana Victory and reached New York harbor on April 19, 1946. Our Skipper, Carl O. [Hurricane] Johansson counseled us in the mimeographed publication Victory Express to be "careful to be tolerant and unhurried and kindly with respect to the great changes in our communities and friends." The publication also told us

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that the Boston Red Sox were tied for first place in the American League. But it was very early in the season.