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Drama Of The Reich Capital.

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BERLIN



The impressive night display on Unter Den Linden in Berlin (right) on Hitler's 50th birthday is in striking contrast to today's picture.



Drama Of The Reich Capital

By Sgt. KLAUS MANN

Special to The Stars and Stripes

Former Citizen Of Germany Writes About A City Everyone Is Watching

THE FALL OF Berlin may not immediately or automatically bring about the end of organized German resistance, but it will be the decisive blow to Hitler's political prestige and military power. Most Germans will realize and admit that they have lost the war, once the enemy has occupied the capital. A free German government established in Berlin by Field Marshal Paulus, or some other prominent anti-Nazi, is likely to be recognized by the majority of the nation.

It is true that the Soviet Union would not have been defeated if the Nazis had succeeded in taking Moscow—just as the United States might be able to survive politically and militarily the loss of Washington. But both the Russians and the U. S.—in contrast to Germany—have the dimensions of continents; they command vast reserves of space on which they can fall back if necessary. Neither country depends on any particular nerve center for the maintenance and functioning of its national energies. Germany, however, though less centralized than France and England, depends upon such a nerve center: Germany needs Berlin.

The importance of Berlin has been increasing steadily ever since 1871, when the old residence of the Prussian king was established as the capital of the newly-founded Reich under the auspices of the "Iron Chancellor," Bismarck.

IN THE BEGINNING, the political and cultural hegemony of Berlin over the rest of Germany was by no means absolute or undisputed. If the Emperor resided and ruled in the capital, there remained the minor German monarchs—kings, princes, grand dukes—who jealously defended every bit of their independence. In certain parts of the Reich, especially in Bavaria, the sovereignty of Prussia and Prussian Berlin was rudely, if at all, accepted.

With the disappearance of the local princes in 1918, Berlin's position became more predominant. Under the Weimar Republic, the Reich capital for

the first time was actually the center of Germany's political, social, cultural and economic life.

That is not to say that the traditional animosities and antagonisms among the various German regions and races disappeared together with the monarchies. Berlin and the Berliners remained unpopular with inhabitants of most other major German cities. Particularly in Munich—at that time the citadel of reaction and obscurantism in Germany—the capital was despised as an international Babel ruled by a rotten gang of bankers and Bolsheviks. If Berlin previously had been disliked by many liberals as the symbol and center of Prussian power policy, it was now hated by reactionaries as the representative of the new democratic State.

HITLER, the Austrian, began his career in southern Germany. Even before Berlin was aware of his existence, he was a local celebrity in the Bavarian capital.

As soon as he came to power, however, it became obvious that his flirtation with Bavarian regional patriotism had been only one of his many demagogic tricks. His most influential backers were not the Bavarian reactionaries but the Prussian Junkers and industrialists. His ideology had its roots, if any, in Prussian militarism and Pan-German imperialism, rather than in southern German provincialism. Munich had just been a stage on the road to power: Berlin was the goal.

It was a cheap gesture, almost resembling mockery, for Hitler to "honor" Munich with the title of "capital of the movement." In reality, there had been, since the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933, only one German capital—Berlin. The individual German states were to lose whatever independence they had maintained; in fact, they ceased to exist. Berlin was omnipotent. From Berlin, the authori-

tarian government controlled all activities, public as well as private, within the realm of Greater Germany. From Berlin, the masters of Greater Germany intended to control Europe and, finally, the world.

BERLIN WAS NOT a beautiful city. As far as picturesque surroundings and architectural monuments are concerned, the capital of the Reich could not compete with Paris, Rome, Vienna, Prague nor, indeed, with some of the more ancient German cities such as Munich, Dresden, Hamburg or Frankfurt-on-the-Main.

Of course, Berlin too had some lovely districts and some fine old buildings, like the famous Zeughaus (Arsenal) and the stately cathedral. Also, there were impressive squares and avenues: the broad representative gala street, Unter Den Linden (even though it fell short of the glorious Champs Elysees in Paris); the sumptuous Pariser Platz (Paris Square) on which the French Embassy, the swanky Adlon Hotel and the massive Arch of Brandenburg were situated (although it could not be compared to the matchless Place de la Concorde in Paris or to the magnificent Piazza del Popolo in Rome); the busy Leipzigerstrasse and Friedrich Strasse (whose business appeared a trifle provincial in comparison to Wall Street or the London city); the glamorous Kurfürsten-Damm and Tauentzienstrasse, main arteries of the city's new center to the west (whose glamor seemed rather on the phony side to anyone who knew New York's Park Avenue or the grand boulevards of Paris).

But most of the city's residential and business quarters—both proletarian and middle class—were drearily devoid of charm and character. The style typical of Berlin architecture was that of the so-called *Gründer Jahre*—the "years of foundation"—the two or three decades following the German victory over

France in 1871 which was one of the most prosperous but also one of the most vulgar periods in German history. Indeed, the physiognomy of Berlin, in all its grandeur and stateliness, had irritatingly vulgar features.

ON THE OTHER hand, it would be unfair to ignore the city's more attribute qualities. Its surroundings, however plain, were not without a certain austere, unassuming charm. Life in Berlin, at the time I knew it, was pleasant enough. There was something crisp and vigorous about the intellectual and physical atmosphere of the place. Berliners prided themselves on their flippant wit, their skepticism, their efficiency, their speed or what they used to call "tempo."

Berlin was an inordinately ambitious city—always vibrating, quivering with somewhat hectic pretensions and aspirations. An upstart among the great capitals of the world, she tried frantically to outdo all the others. Everything in Berlin had to be colossal—parades and pleasure, business and culture—everything had to be "bigger and better" than anywhere else.

UNDER EMPEROR Wilhelm II, Berlin managed to be more imperial and more imperialistic than any other metropolis. During World War I, she was the most martial, most hysterically chauvinistic capital. After the collapse of 1918, she abandoned herself to apocalyptic moods. Always given to excesses and exaggeration, she now revealed, as it were, in depravity and utter wretchedness—parading her prostitutes, beggars, criminals and sexual degenerates as she had previously paraded her goose-stepping grenadiers. *Blauer and better!* The Berlin of the inflation period demonstrated that it could produce bigger and better vices, bigger and better misery, bigger and better despair than any rival inferno.

With the stabilization of the German currency, the capital gradually regained its psychological equilibrium. During the following years, Berlin assumed a more mellow, more mature cosmopolitan aspect. The period from 1924 to 1931—from the end of inflation until the time shortly before Hitler's coming