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Mann, Klaus

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Austria, Nazi Fort?

Towering Alps May Provide Setting For Last Act Of War

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

THE RUSSIANS have entered Vienna. But with the fall of the Austrian capital the Battle of Austria will by no means be finished. Indeed, it may not even have reached its climax. For an increasing amount of evidence seems to indicate that Austria—the land where Adolf Hitler was born, the first victim of Nazi aggression—has been picked by the German leaders as the final battleground.

Hitler's famous "last stand" anticipated by many military experts will probably be made in a not exclusively, but predominantly Austrian area. This last great Nazi bastion—as visualized by some competent Allied observers—will be anchored on the high Alps from Salzburg to Lombardy, and will stretch from the eastern tip of the Lake of Constance to the approaches of Graz in Styria. The city of Vienna itself will be outside of the fortified zone.

These are the territories which the Alpine fortress may include: The Austrian province of Vorarlberg; the whole of northern Tyrol; the most southern part of Upper Bavaria, including the village of Berchtesgaden near the Austrian frontier where Hitler's personal residence is situated, (which would be the only German district in the entire "last stand" area); the whole of southern Tyrol, which was taken from Austria and given to Italy by the Treaty of St. Germain after the first World War; the northern parts of the Italian provinces of Trento and Belluno; the southern parts of the Austrian provinces of Salzburg and Upper Austria; the whole of the Austrian province of Carinthia; the greater, western part of the Austrian province of Styria.

According to this hypothetical blueprint, the territory in question has an approximate length of 280 miles and an average width of 100 miles, or a total area somewhat larger than that of Switzerland. It includes no big city but a number of middle-sized towns.

MOST FAMOUS of the Austrian communities situated within the "danger zone," is Salzburg—a mountain-side city of 40,000 people, the

birthplace of Mozart, and one of the most attractive, most picturesque spots in Europe. Salzburg shares with Vienna the glory of Austria's musical achievement. The world's most famous singers, virtuosi and conductors, along with a crowd of international music-lovers, globe-trotters and snobs, have long flocked to Salzburg for the celebrated summer festivals.

Innsbruck—another beautiful Austrian town included in the domain of the potential Nazi fortress—is almost equally popular with international tourists, especially with those interested in winter sports. Surrounded by high mountains, the capital of the Tyrol—a city of 65,000—is, as its name tells, the Bridge over the Inn River, on the very ancient and always important route of all traffic between Germany and Italy via the Brenner Pass.

Moreover, there are the cities of Klagenfurt (capital of the province of Carinthia) and Steyr, in Upper Austria—the former with a prewar population of 62,000, the latter with 31,000 inhabitants—both fairly important as centers of machine and iron industry. As for Bolzano (Bozen) and Merano (Meran)—the two lovely centers of southern Tyrol—they have not belonged to Austria for the past 25 years, but have maintained some of their Austrian character, in spite of Mussolini's efforts to "Italianize" them completely.

In addition, the territory where Hitler may have decided to "shoot it out" to the last fanatic is rich in small towns and villages, many of them situated high up in the mountains. According to recent reports, some of the idyllic localities have been allotted to fugitive quislings, while other places—the better fortified ones—are reserved for jittery Nazi bigwigs.

IT IS said that the one-time Austrian winter sports resorts have had many quisling guests of late. Practically all of the leaders of the bankrupt German-controlled governments seem to have felt a sudden urge to do some skiing in the Austrian Alps. One of these pseudo-capitals is a small townlet between Innsbruck and the Swiss frontier, Zuers, where Mussolini's Neo-Fascist Government has been established. The Croatian Government has



An impressive scene in the snow-covered Austrian Tyrol.

set up its tents about 30 miles north of Innsbruck, in a village called "Nutte" (which is, curiously, a Berlin slang expression for prostitute).

Father Tiso of Slovakia abandoned his capital, Bratislava, long before the sound of Russian guns was audible to him. He went to Kremsmuenster, somewhere in the Austrian Alps. Considerably earlier, the Rumanian and Bulgarian quislings established themselves at Kitzbuehl, one of the more fashionable resorts where the distinguished "tourists" could be sure to find modern comfort along with temporary safety.

But the section of the mountains best suited for defense and best fortified has "no-trespassing" signs on it for the quislings. This "sanctum sanctorum" stretches about 30 miles west and south of Salzburg and includes Hitler's Berchtesgaden home.

N O DOUBT, the Alpine Nazi fortress will not be an easy nut to crack. The terrain will favor the defenders on

all sides. It could be that 26 good German divisions still fighting in Italy are destined to be sacrificed in the coming final showdown in the Alps—which may be one explanation for the amazing stubbornness with which the Germans have been resisting in the Apennines. Of course, they wanted to hold the crops and the industry of the Po Valley as long as possible; but even more important, from the Nazi point of view, may be the desire to keep the Allies away from the Alps—the southern wall of their last bastion—until the battle of northern Germany is over.

Yet northern Italy will be liberated, the Allied armies will advance into southern Germany. Munich will be taken, the Russians will be in Linz and Graz, the Red Army and Marshal Tito's men may meet in the area of Trieste; in short, Hitler's and Himmler's suicide "elite" will soon be completely isolated, encircled, cut off in their rugged hiding places. It is difficult to see how

Here in the mountainous regions of southern Germany, northern Italy and Austria, the Nazi criminals may attempt guerrilla war against the Allies.



they could manage to hold out there for any considerable length of time—especially as their plans are obviously known to the Allied High Command and will not find us unprepared. General Dwight D. Eisenhower made this quite clear when saying in his recent message to President Roosevelt that he was "hopeful of launching operations at the proper time that should partially prevent guerrilla control of any large area such as the southern mountain bastion."

Quite apart from the purely tactical aspects of the situation, there is of course the supply problem. How long can their ammunition possibly last? How long will they have enough food to survive? It is true that the "fortress" zone includes some fertile valleys; but it is by no means self-sufficient, especially if an army of some 200,000 men is to be fed, together with several thousand Nazi leaders and their families.

ONE OTHER factor which should not be overlooked, and which may prove rather disturbing to the "last stand" strategists, is the attitude of the Austrian people. We may be reasonably sure that the vast majority of all the Austrians—including even most of those who used to be pro-German—would now like to get rid of the Nazi yoke and want to see their homeland's independence re-established.

The connection with the Third Reich—far from being as profitable as German propaganda had promised—brought first terror and exploitation to Austria, then war and disaster. The Prussian spirit of arrogance and rigid discipline has always been strange and repulsive to the easy-going, individualistic Austrian temperament. Seven years of Nazi domination have not



Another view of the Austrian Tyrol looking into Italy.

transformed Austria into an organic part of Greater Germany; on the contrary, the Austrians are today more conscious than ever of their own character and tradition.

Now, it would seem, according to all available reports, that the Austrian resistance movement has not had much of a chance, so far, to take any major and effective action. It is true that during the past few weeks and days there have been more stories than usual about increasing anti-Nazi activities in Austria. There were cases of sabotage in Austrian war plants. *Wehrmacht* units

with strong Austrian contingents showed a particularly low morale and had many deserters. In Vienna, there was an attempt on the life of the Nazi Governor, Baldur von Schirach, and one of the most notorious SS leaders, Ernst Kaltenbrunn, was assassinated by Austrian Patriots. Word came from the Swiss-Austrian border that thousands of Austrians had fled to the hills to avoid conscription for *Volkssturm* duty. Some of these fugitives, it is said, have formed regular Partisan units fighting the Nazis in the mountainous regions of Carinthia, Styria and Tyrol.

BUT THE most important opportunity for the Austrian Patriots to prove their prowess and determination may come in the final phase of the war, if Hitler really decides to make his last stand in the Alps. The job of holding the mountain "fortress"—difficult enough as it will be in any case, for many strategical and psychological reasons—may be further complicated, or even made impossible, through an openly hostile attitude of the native population. No army in the world could keep up its fighting spirit under such desperate conditions, if it cannot depend on the loyalty and the practical help of the people who know the terrain, who are expected to furnish food supplies, and in whose homes the guerrilla soldiers will have to seek shelter. A fortress—however well protected by natural barriers and obstacles—can hardly be held in the long run against the will of its inhabitants.

The governments of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union have announced, in the joint declaration which they made at Moscow in November, 1943, that they wish to see Austria's independence restored. But in the same official statement the three governments pointed out that "Austria has a responsibility she cannot evade" for participation in the current conflict "at the side of Hitlerite Germany." And the Moscow Declaration added that "in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her (Austria's) own contribution to her liberation."

If the Austrian Patriots can help in frustrating Hitler's plan to use their land as his last bastion, they will have contributed considerably to their own liberation and will truly deserve to have a free country again.