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You Can't Go Home Again!

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"It had survived only as a hollow shell; it was the preserved outside structure which had deluded me. Inside it was all in pieces."



You Can't Go Home Again!

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

(Cpl. Klaus Mann, son of Thomas Mann, Germany's foremost living author, was sent into Germany by *The Stars and Stripes* shortly after the surrender of the German armies in Italy and the liberation of Austria. Here he tells about his trip through the Brenner Pass and his return to the Mann family home in Munich where he lived until 1933.)

MUNICH

THIS WAS the mission for which I had been waiting the past 12 years. I was sent "on temporary duty" to Allied-occupied Germany to gather material for an overall picture of conditions in Austria and Bavaria.

I can't write my story, however, without first explaining why this particular mission was so welcome. It so happens that I was born and brought up in Bavaria. The city of Munich used to be my hometown; I left the place in 1933 when Hitler came to power and have never set foot there since. So I was anxious to find out how the beautiful town on the Isar River had survived the storms of the past few years and months.

Besides there were a few friends—a very small group of people for whose political integrity I had certain proofs and whom I wanted to see again. And then, of course, there was our family home in one of Munich's residential suburbs—a roomy hospitable villa on the river where I spent my childhood and many a year of my adult life. The Nazis had taken it over in 1933—without so much as a pretext.

THE FIRST Germans with whom I came in contact during this trip were supposedly disarmed landers cloaking the roads of northern Italy. I say "supposedly disarmed" because I found many of them still carrying weapons. German MPs, especially, appeared fully equipped with rifles, bayonets, steel helmets and all. Their job was to keep order among the German soldiers and also to protect them against the fury of Italian Patriots.

What an amazing sight! On highways and in the streets of cities like Trento

It Was More Than An Assignment, Reporting On The Old Home Town

and Bolzano, columns of German forces and groups of American fighting men met each other—in most cases the Germans outnumbering the Americans about ten to one. There was certainly no mingling, no fraternization; but there was no friction either. The GIs told me that they didn't like to be surrounded by "Krauts" without being al-

AS FOR the Germans, they seemed to feel the same way. Their behavior may be described as correct.

That is not to say that it was pleasant or adequate to the circumstances. They did not act as if they realized that they had been defeated. Well-fed, well-clad, well-organized, they appeared as cocky as ever. Surely there was nothing humble about them.

I talked with a few of them. What they told me suggested that in their opinion the surrender on the Italian front had not been enforced on them as the consequence of a total German collapse but was rather some kind of a clever "deal" which their leadership had decided to make. One German officer—a brutal-looking Prussian with a piglike, fat rosy face—had the nerve to ask me whether it was true that we had been quarrelling with the Russians and that the present situation was only a prelude to a coming German-American alliance directed against the Soviet Union.

While telling him off, I promised myself not to forget this vicious fool in a Wehrmacht uniform. It would be helpful, indeed necessary, to remember this arrogant grimace whenever anybody, German or German sympathizer, should try to convince me that the German people were altogether harmless and innocent—just misruled by a small group of criminals. This smirking lander here in front of me had hardly belonged to the upper stratum of the Nazi hierarchy. His appearance was that of a fairly well-to-do business man dressed as a "Herr Hauptmann." But his thoughts and his suave speech were poison. There are millions like him. Our future allies indeed!

NOTWITHSTANDING the somewhat cumbersome presence of so many "supermen," northern Italy was obviously liberated. The atmosphere prevailing between Bologna and the Brenner Pass was one of exultation with a touch of confusion and bewilderment. Almost every inhabited building dis-

played Italian colors and many a wall was adorned with big, clumsily-painted inscriptions like the following one:

"Thanks for liberating us, we have waited so long."

The picture changed as soon as we crossed the Brenner. We found the highway in unexpectedly good shape with most of the damage already repaired, thanks to the efficiency of our engineers. As for railroad installations, however, Allied bombers have done a terribly thorough job. To a layman in technical matters, this chaos of twisted metal and charred wood looked like a hopeless mess which no human ingenuity could ever salvage and make workable again.

On the other side of the pass there still were plenty of flags—the red and white banner of the "before Hitler" Austria. Yet the difference between conquest and liberation was to be sensed in the air the moment we entered Austrian territory. American soldiers guarding strategic points and patrolling village streets appeared grimly vigilant, always on the alert. There was no smiling or waving.

ARRIVING at Innsbruck after dark, we found ourselves in a completely dead, ghost town. A curfew lasting from 7 PM until 6 AM was being strictly enforced. Nobody was to be seen except heavily-armed guards. Streets were deserted, silent, blacked-out. Although Innsbruck has been bombed comparatively little, marks of destruction were only too conspicuous in the pale, chilly moonlight.

The next morning, under a sunny sky and with the streets full of people, the place showed a different and less depressing aspect. I paid a visit to City Hall—the so-called *Landhaus* (country house) where Austrian Patriots under the supervision of Allied military authorities were busy carrying on and reorganizing the city's administration.

The leader of the anti-Nazi resistance movement in Innsbruck, Dr. Karl Gruber, received me with almost enthusiastic cordiality. Eager to tell me all about the efforts and exploits of his movement, he overwhelmed me with dramatic stories about risk and adventures of underground operations, fights between SS men and Austrian rebels, the

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The Germans did not act as if they had been defeated. Well-fed and well-clad, they appeared as cocky as ever. Above, a German MP.

lowed to take a shot at them; on the other hand, they all seemed to agree that it would have been a tough proposition to "mop up" a number of German divisions in this rugged terrain and that the surrender, therefore, had come in kind of handy.