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The German Prisoners I met had no ideas about being 'Supermen'

by ERIKA MANN

ALL is not well with the morale of the German Army. Recent developments have caused it to deteriorate.

Not long after D-Day I talked with dozens of Nazi prisoners, and they were stubborn and capably arrogant. To-day the picture is different, owing to our persistent advances in the west and to the Russian breakthrough.

The repercussions of the plot against Hitler also have had their effect.

Recently taken German prisoners seem depressed and disheartened. Some have turned against their Fuehrer. All are talkative, and even incorrigible Nazis find it difficult to keep up a front of confidence.

I've just returned from an extensive tour of the American front in Normandy.

One Superman I saw there was Private Franz, wounded and in an American evacuation hospital. He said he was seventeen, but he couldn't have been more than fifteen.

His father was a street-car conductor in Dresden, but he was truly one of Hitler's children and had never known anything but Nazism.

"How do you feel?" a nurse asked him.

"Never mind," he said. "I'm finished."

"No, you're not. In a few days you'll be well enough to be evacuated to England."

He shrugged. "Everything's finished."

Did he mean that Germany was beaten? "She will be," he said. "It won't be long now."

But what about his Nazi convictions? What about the superiority of the German race? "But we aren't—we just aren't superior!" he cried distressedly.

"I'm No Dope"

STAFF SERGEANT KARL, from Halberstadt, was 36 and worked on the hospital premises. He wore civvies and a black cap that made him look like a Frenchman.

"I'm a deserter," he said. "I've been in this war from the start, and I'm sick of it. That's why I quit. Some of my pals had done it, so I got going, too."

How had he managed to get his clothes? "Our cook," he said, "was French, and she bought them for me with her own money. I'd promised to take her along."

Hadn't they told him he'd get killed?

"Sure!" he laughed. "But I'm no dope—not any more. I've been listening to the B.B.C. Some of us older ones have been. Go talk to Heinrich—only don't let the other prisoners hear you."

Heinrich was an architect. He, too, was a deserter. But while Karl had deserted just to save his own skin, Heinrich was foggly idealistic.

He said he was thirty-seven and had been with the Nazis eleven years. On the way from the Russian to the Western front, he had visited Berlin, his native city.

"They'd just killed my brother," he said. "The

People's Court convicted him of high treason.

"He and about 75,000 others were rounded up from all over Germany early this year. By April 50,000 of them had been killed."

What for?

"A plot—a plot to overthrow the Nazi régime. My father told me about it when I was in Berlin. They had worked out a new constitution when the Gestapo stepped in."

"The leaders were all middle-class democrats, and they were all killed. The chief surgeon of the Robert Koch Hospital in Berlin was one of them."

He said he had found Berlin half gone even in March. "Still," he continued, "the people's morale was fairly high—higher, I'd say, than it is at the front."

"The Germans believe the lies they're told until they are faced with irrefutable proof to the contrary. At the front, we've got just that sort of proof."

Why, then, weren't there more desertions?

"Because," he replied, "nearly all the men still believe the Allies are in the habit of murdering their prisoners."

Short of Men

ANTON was a Luftwaffe private—seventeen, skinny and pimply-faced.

When told that it appeared that the Russians were about to enter East Prussia, he grinned and said, "They can't. The East Wall is impregnable."

But hadn't the Germans been told that the Atlantic Wall was impregnable, too? Yes, but *that* was propaganda. "The East Wall," he screamed, "is absolutely impregnable! The Russians will never get to East Prussia—never!"

August, a bearded metal-



● Dejected, defeated, this prisoner once believed in Hitler . . .

worker from Solingen, lay in the big operating tent a few miles behind the battle lines. He had been badly injured.

Although he was forty-two, he was only a private. He had been drafted into the armed Gestapo only two months before.

"They're short of men," he said. "I'd never fired a shot before I got to the front."

"When they realised I hadn't had any training, they sent me out on reconnaissance three and four times a day. We were surrounded, our regiment, and I begged my officer not to send me out again—I was bound to get killed."

A Model Nazi

HE wouldn't listen. He told me to go, but he thought I was going to desert, because when I had gone a few steps he fired. They left me lying where I fell.

On a near-by stretcher was a youth of seventeen named Detley, who had grown up a model Nazi in Godesberg.

When the Americans came upon him, lying wounded, he was convinced that he was going to be tortured. Now he was being saved, and he raved at the deceit of his officers.

But when he learned that he was to be sent to England, he was terrified. He would be saved here only to be killed by the flying bombs! Nothing we said could shake his faith in what he had been told—that the flying bomb was visiting mass death on the British.

Although the average German soldier is disheartened, he has not changed heart, and he is likely to go on fighting desperately because surrender, he believes, means death, mutiny means death, and defeat, he fears, may mean death both for himself and for his nation.