

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Artikel in: They Were There. The Story of World War II and how it came about. Ed. by Curt Riess. G.P.Putnam's Sons. New York 1944.

Two Worlds.

Mann, Erika

1944

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From: "THEY WERE THERE". The Story of World War II
and how it came about. By America's Foremost Corres-
pondents. Edited by Curt Riess.
G.P. Putnam's Sons. New York 1944

In the center of the line yesterday divisions of the Nineteenth French Corps made slow but steady progress toward Zaghouan, threading through extensive mine fields in stiff fighting. The Eighth Army advanced somewhat in an area nine miles northeast of Djebibina. It also went through bloody fighting and some of the worst mine fields yet encountered in Tunisia.

* * *

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, NORTH AFRICA, May 10, 1943 (International News Service): Three mighty Allied columns hammered ceaselessly tonight at the cracking door to Cape Bon peninsula, where Axis troops now officially estimated at 80,000 were caught in a giant death pocket from which all escape was blocked.

* * *

TWO WORLDS

by Erika Mann

THE Arab town of X is one of the oldest and finest in Morocco. Separated from the new French settlement by several miles, its thirteenth century walls, its narrow shopping streets, its magnificent palace, its sacred mosques and its bewitching smells—sweet, heavy, and indefinable—used to attract tourists from all over the world. Yet, in contrast to other renowned “curiosities,” it has retained in full its genuineness and integrity, and its dark inhabitants keep living their exotic lives, undisturbed by the ever changing “white” influences about them.

Near the old city, the swanky hotel Y opens its wide halls and stylish apartments to the sightseer. It was strangely fascinating to come back to the gorgeous old place now that it was run by the American military. Gone was the lazy international crowd I'd known there. Instead, British and American soldiers, Red Cross personnel, girls in the uniforms of the Wrens or Waafs, and some few determined looking civilians, lacking utterly in the flawless elegance displayed by their predecessors, went about their business. And it had to be a vital one, at that, if it was to secure them a room at the Y.

Like most commodities, matches proved to be scarce in X. So I gratefully accepted the light offered me in the Y's lobby by a fair-haired lad in the uniform of the U. S. Transport Command. Twenty-year-old Lieutenant G. comes from Spokane, Washington. He isn't actually stationed in X; but then, he told me, it doesn't really matter much just where he is stationed. He is on the run most of the time, and the distances he covered during this past year are prodigious. Once he'd made 5600 miles in thirty-six hours: flying from somewhere in India to somewhere in Africa. And dozens of times he had crossed the Sahara, and throughout the whole Middle Eastern Theater of Operations he felt quite at home.

"Not at home, really!" he informed me, "I just know it all pretty well by now. But you wouldn't believe what a difference it makes to get back to one's own station once in a while, to sleep in one's own barracks with one's own photos on the walls, and to see one's own friends, makes all the difference in the world—even though it's still Africa one is coming 'home' to!"

He didn't care much for Africa, it appeared. What he cared for—and deeply so—was Spokane and the State of Washington. And it was indeed fortunate that his companion and superior, twenty-two-year-old Captain C., also originated from there.

"No matter where we are," said Lieutenant G., "we keep talking of home; and nobody dare stick his head into our cockpit who won't admit that our State happens to be the best and finest on earth."

I wondered how long he had been over here.

• About a year and a half. But he'd seen and learned more in that period of time than in the whole decade preceding it. "To begin with," he said, shaking his head as if in bewilderment, "I'd never known, even faintly, just how fortunate we are over there. Gee, I wouldn't want to live anywhere but in the U. S.! And once back, I'll sure stay for good and for keeps. Why, I don't even want my family ever to go and visit any of these odd places around here! Funny isn't it? Usually, I'm pretty eager to have them share all my experiences. But not this time. I don't think they'd like it, either. It's all much too strange!"

And strange it was indeed, listening to this kid from Spokane, as he talked about Cairo and Jerusalem, Tripoli and Dakar, Irak and Syria, as if those far-away places were nothing but bus-stations on his daily way to school.

"Bethlehem!" he said, again shaking his head. "We've been circling over that one, recently, for fifteen minutes solid; yet, there wasn't a thing to explain just why on earth Our Lord chose that particular spot. Was there anything extraordinary about it at the time? Was it pretty or anything?"

Clearly, Our Lord couldn't well have chosen nonexistent Spokane; but in his, Lieutenant G.'s opinion, there must have been some places somewhere in the world, even then, which would at least have somehow resembled the real thing and would thus have been infinitely more suitable than dusty old Bethlehem.

"It's the dust that gets me!" he declared. "Even where it's green around here, it's still dusty and olive colored. The desert, of course, is the worst of all. If I'd ever be forced down in the desert, first thing I'd do would be to bury my gun and walk away from it just as fast as I could. I don't want to shoot myself, and I'm afraid that's exactly what might happen if I didn't get rid of the thing in time. I'm quite ready to die for my country, but if at all possible I want to live, see? I want to get home to my girl. I've been going with her ever since I entered high school, and we never even needed to get formally engaged. We always knew that we belonged to each other. You don't happen to have any small Portuguese banknotes, do you?"

Slightly startled, I produced a ten escudo note. Would I, please sign it

for him? I did; whereupon I was shown the little treasure to which my modest contribution was to be added; a long flag composed of all sorts of paper money, from dollars and shillings to francs, liras, pesetas, dinars, and piasters, neatly fastened to each other with paste and covered with the signatures of all who had been the lieutenant's passengers at one time or another. Many a proud name could be found among the autographs.

"It's supposed to be my good luck charm," he announced, "but actually, it's for her. Think she's going to like it?"

Of this I was firmly convinced; all the more so, since no less a person than a captured Italian General figured among the signatories.

"He was a funny old dog, too!" giggled Lieutenant G. "Didn't seem to mind captivity a bit. And did he like those green life savers I offered him! Enjoyed them like a baby. So, I had him sign my lira note. But I wouldn't have that Nazi lieutenant scribble his name for me for anything. He was a real bad egg, just as sneering and arrogant and repulsive as they show them in the movies. We've sure got to get rid of that type once and for all!"

"When shall we?" I asked. "Come on now, let's have some careless talk, *as well as* some idle speculation: when do you think the European show will be over?"

On this my friend had very definite ideas. "I've set up a little time-table of my own," he reported, "and so far, it's proved quite correct. Around Christmas last, I decided that we'd have Africa cleaned up by the end of May. Now, that wasn't so bad, was it? I also predicted that Italy would collapse sometime in October, and that Germany would follow suit early next year."

He had it all worked out and explained to me, eagerly, why, to his mind, things would develop thus and not otherwise. Again I felt how strange it was, that I should be sitting here in this transfigured Moroccan town with this American youngster, who had never cared for world affairs, who had wanted nothing but to work in peace and in Spokane, Washington, and to set up house with the girl he'd been fond of since childhood. He looked exceedingly young, very neat, and very honest. His mother, I thought, must be rather proud of him. Then I wondered if his life had ever been acutely endangered.

He smiled. "Sure!" he said, "and not just once! Toughest time we had, though, was when one of our ships had been forced down by engine trouble on hostile territory. Since there didn't seem to be much hostile life anywhere near the spot, we decided to land, rescue the crew, and destroy their machine. The place wasn't really fit for a landing and we had to set her down on a mountain top which was flat all right, but didn't give us much of a runway. You can look far and wide for a bird that could have made it. Yet ours did, and everything seemed to go smoothly until those natives appeared in our rear, suddenly, and as if from nowhere. There they were, standing quite close to our plane, while we were burning the damaged one. Silly fools they were! Instead of getting busy on our ship, they opened fire on us. Even so, matters didn't look too rosy, for we couldn't afford a great deal

of shooting for fear of hurting our plane. My captain managed to get behind them and shoot two of them before they knew what was what. The other three were so good as to turn around to see what the trouble was, and the battle was all over. Still, I don't think I'd like to go through that one again. It was a bit too narrow for comfort."

* * *

At ten o'clock sharp the Lieutenant bade me good night. We were to depart at seven A.M. which meant that he'd have to be out there at six.

I walked out into the warm night and toward the old city. No sooner had I passed the market place and entered the Soukes district, than I saw myself accompanied by an Arab boy who disclosed that he was a guide, that his name was Mohammed Number Two, and that he would be delighted to show me around.

In his own way he was quite handsome, Mohammed, slender, graceful, and melancholy—his fine eyes several shades darker than his fawn colored skin, and his childlike face marked by the pensive fatigue of his ancient race. Despite the vague sadness of his gestures and looks, however, Mohammed was extremely talkative. He spoke French fluently and knew quite a bit of English. He'd been to Chicago, he informed me casually, as well as to Brussels, Paris, and Amsterdam,—oh, not so long ago, perhaps two years, or four. I didn't believe a word of it all. Mohammed, I decided, must be smoking hashish, that intoxicating herb to which Arabs are sometimes addicted, and which makes them happy, unreliable, peaceable, and also makes them inventive.

Would I care for some mint tea? Mohammed wanted to know. If so, we could go to a small terrace near here, from where one overlooked the town, and where we wouldn't be disturbed by either peddlers, beggars, or dragomen.

Presently I found myself up there, sipping the sweet and sharp liquid Mohammed had ordered, and listening to his pleasantly veiled voice. He was twenty, he told me; and I thought of Lieutenant G. who was just as old, just as exceedingly young. But how unlike they were, those two, how utterly incomparable! Fair, neat, and honest Flight Lieutenant G. knew this world to be small. Yet its children still differed from each other in a way both bewildering and enchanting!

Mohammed—fragile, deerlike, and iridescent—spoke of his wife to be, and I inquired when he expected to get married.

In three years from now, he said, adding that I might have known, since he'd told me his age. "We all marry when we are twenty-three."

My question as to whether he had already found himself a girl he answered firmly in the negative. Nor would he ever do anything of the kind. It was his parents who would present to him the bride and he wouldn't lay eyes on her until the day of their marriage.

"Do you think the war will be over by then?" I asked him, remembering

the Lieutenant's time-table and schedule. Did Mohammend indulge in similar speculations? But Mohammed merely shrugged.

"Patience!" he demanded gently. "We'll have to be very patient, and one day it will be over. For a long time there was three of us—three peoples in our town—Arabs, Frenchmen, and Jews. Now there are four of us, for now there are also Americans. We don't mind. They give us soap, and to those who work for them they give money. They are friendly, I believe—quite friendly and homesick. They, too, will have to be patient."

There was something very sweet and very wise in his words and in the way he said them.

Beneath us, a pair of American M.P.'s raced across the square on their motorcycles. The air was hazy and heavy with smells. As Mohammed paused for a moment to sip his tea, the murmuring of voices could be heard in some distance. Arabs—hundreds of them—had gathered in three wide circles around three men who were standing, while their listeners sat crouched on the ground.

"Our story-tellers!" said Mohammed. "They are very good. But one of them—the old one with the biggest crowd at his feet—is truly excellent. He's been telling the same story for sixteen years now, spinning it on and on, and inventing a new chapter every evening. And there won't be an end to it before he dies. Then, one of his pupils will take over and the story will never die. It's a religious story—they all are—based on some tiny anecdote out of the Koran. But to make such a small incident into a story that lasts for generations takes great talent and knowledge. Also, it takes great patience."

He saw me "home," Mohammed. Walking noiselessly in the shadow of the trees that fringed the street, he seemed to avoid the moonlight. Did he mean to spare me the "embarrassment" of being seen with him? When I prepared to remunerate him for his services he silently shook his head. And when I insisted, he grew very earnest.

"Please," he said, "*please* do not now offend me! I've so much enjoyed this evening. And I shall never forget it!"

I yielded, and Mohammed, having bowed deeply, but with great dignity and grace, disappeared in the darkness.

His brother in age, Flight Lieutenant G. from Spokane, Washington, awaited us at the airdrome at seven A.M. Even then, the day was glaringly hot. The desert sent out its dry and sulky winds. Cloaked in a cloud of dust, we ascended.