

BLITZKRIEG REPORTING

Correspondents In Berlin Must Move Adroitly

Extracts from an article in "Current History." The writer, ERNEST R. POPE, has for the past six years been press and radio correspondent in Munich and Berlin

THIRTY American journalists in Berlin, working under handicaps of air raids, blackouts, food cards, tapped telephones, and diluted beer, have the ticklish task of trying to tell the United States through a wall of censorship what is going on in Germany.

Nine-tenths of the war news emanates from Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry or from Ribbentrop's Foreign Ministry which face each other across the Wilhelmstrasse. The correspondents gather daily at Goebbels' huge and monotonous white building for a conference. Early comes pitch pennings in the corridor with blond young Professor Boemer, foreign press chief. Neither his snug army uniform nor his dignity prevents him from being adept at scooping up the coins.

Soon we all troop into Goebbels' private theatre, luxurious with red carpets, white and gold walls and polished mahogany furniture, where Goebbels and his friends relax by viewing command performances on stage or screen. We may not smoke. Professor Boemer presides, flanked by advisers on law, transportation, agriculture, and so on, ready to answer questions in their fields.

"Special Attractions"

Boemer reads the latest bulletin from the army high command. Then we have a special feature. One day it is Lieut. Prien, straight from his U-boat, who parades this bearded crew into the auditorium to tell how he "foiled the British" and torpedoed the Royal Oak. Another day Goebbels is the attraction, staging a dramatic entrance from his adjoining office. Grimly the club-footed little Doctor faces the reporters.

"My colleagues," he shouts, "I have a very serious matter to call to your attention as fellow journalists. That yellow, lying American writer, Knickerbocker, has accused me and other Nazi ministers of hoarding money in foreign banks. Not one word is true. I call upon you to blot out Knickerbocker's name from your journalistic fraternity."

Or the Reich Minister of Agriculture praises Germany's "strong food reserves" and supplies official figures. Or there is a lecture by a Red Cross officer, a prison camp warden, a labour leader, or some military authority.

During conferences we may ask Boemer any questions we please. He may answer them, or he may merely smile. The smile is a form of censorship. It means, "I shan't tell you, and I shan't say I won't tell you, and if you find out elsewhere send the story at your own risk."

Facilities and Privileges

The conference is about to break up. But not until Boemer announces changes

in cable and telegraph facilities, and changes in gasoline rations. We share with diplomats, physicians, the army, the Gestapo, and a few high officials, the privilege of having cars. A special red check mark on our licence plates identifies us. At the start of the war we were granted 30 to 50 gallons of gas per month, at 75 cents a gallon. But the cylinder capacity of automobiles permitted grew smaller as the war progressed, until we who owned American cars had to lay them up and buy little European models. Almost every day we are entreated to drive only when necessary—not to drive from home to office, or from office to the Ministry, for example.

As we leave the theatre Boemer calls out, "Don't forget to pick up your food cards, Meine Herren." The Promi gives us extra butter and meat—several ounces more each week than the average German gets. We are classed as "hard workers" and get the same food allowance as ditch-diggers, constructions workers and stevedores. Only one class gets more food, the labourers doing hard work in unpleasant environment—in front of a blast furnace, for example. Dr. Goebbels apparently couldn't quite bring himself to call his theatre "unpleasant surroundings."

At the Foreign Office

At the less pretentious conference hall in the German Foreign Office we are permitted to smoke.

What is Germany's attitude toward the nomination of Willkie? Has the Foreign Office replied to Cordell Hull's Note? What is the object of Count Ciano's visit to Berlin? We fire the questions at beefy Dr. Schmidt, Ribbentrop's press chief and, like Boemer, blond and young. His replies, statements and evasions, when carefully examined, worked into a Berlin despatch or radio script with the censor in mind, and with Schmidt's warning not to quote him, appear in the American news as "It was officially stated at Berlin to-day that Germany does not intend to..." etc.

On special occasions Ribbentrop puts in a ceremonious appearance, in full diplomatic uniform, to "explain and justify" the invasion of Holland, Denmark, or whichever country was latest on the list.

"News" of Hitler

Hitler never sees foreign correspondents. The Reich press chief, Dr. Otto Dietrich, who follows the Fuhrer round the Reich, occasionally receives reporters. He informs us that "Der Fuhrer eats from the same field kitchen as his soldiers. He is wearing a simple field-grey uniform. He sleeps on an ordinary army cot. Herr Hitler arose at 4 a.m. to-day,

He was in a cheerful mood and his eyes sparkled."

Himmler, Goering, Schacht and Hess are hardly more approachable than the Chancellor himself. Gala banquets for the press are a thing of the past, and the studied informality attempted by the German leaders in dealing with us gave way to grim aloofness and invisibility at the outbreak of war.

Oiling the Machinery

When the day's lessons and sermons by official spokesmen are finished we talk over the gist of them on the sidewalk, then scatter through the blackout to our offices, most of them five minutes' walk distant. Or maybe some of us take our Nazi schoolmasters around the corner to the Adlon bar. This, if it does not yield news, at least reduces friction.

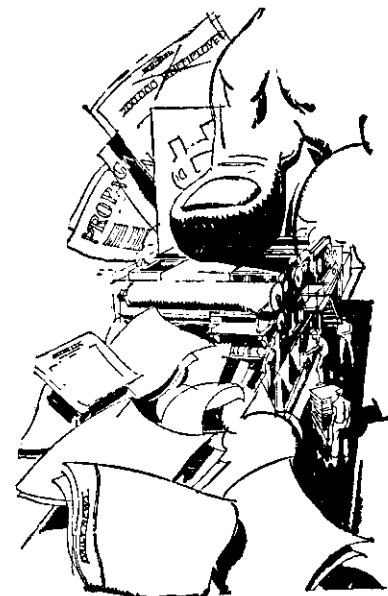
The oiling process is completed later on at the *Taverne*, the only night club in Berlin open after curfew—by special government decree—and only diplomats, journalists, theatrical people, and Nazi big shots may frequent it.

How the Censors Work

The censors work in various ways. Despatches sent by cable or wireless are taken by the correspondent or his assistant in person to the Haupt Telegrafien Amt; and a long trip it is, in a blackout, when all cats, buildings and streets look alike. The despatch is not accepted until the bearer has shown his credentials from Promi. An army of experienced censors handles despatches at the HTA. Another army at the main post office handles articles that are mailed. And if we telephone despatches—to Holland, Denmark or Italy, to be relayed to the United States—a censor listens in and a machine records what we say. If messages thus telephoned do not meet with official approval the correspondent is immediately reprimanded, he is barred from press conferences, his communications are entirely cut off, he may even be expelled.

Radio reporters who broadcast five-minute talks to the United States daily, for NBC, CBS and Mutual, get a thorough going-over by three sets of censors who blue-pencil their script; and a fourth censor listens in, ready to cut them off the air if they deviate from the approved written version.

Neither radio men nor press correspondents tell all they know—or hear. Discretion is the better part of valour. They know—or hear—that the Czechs have tried to revolt but are being crushed by rough Gestapo methods. They know that the railway system has broken down, that many German families are eating dog-meat, that hospitals have run



out of ether, that Goebbels is running around with a new film star, that Goering yesterday had a terrific quarrel with Ribbentrop, that Doctor Sauerbruch has had a rush call to Hitler's bedside, that the Rumanian ambassador became furious during a visit to the Foreign Office. In short, they know or hear many things which are kept secret even from the Fuehrer, so they have no notion that they will be allowed to tell them to millions of Americans.

There are other "don'ts." *Don't tell Germans what you know* is one of the first rules. Germans are eager to know what the foreign radio stations are saying, but it is a crime for them to listen, and it is against the law for you to tell them. *Don't air your own opinions* is good common sense if you want to stay in Berlin. *Don't ask embarrassing questions* is another precept. You won't get an answer anyway, and you won't be invited on the next press trip. Finally, *don't discuss news on the telephone*, even with your colleagues. Telephones have extra ears in totalitarian countries.

A Good Deal Gets Past

Despite all this much unfavourable or critical news is permitted to get through the censorship. The explanation is simple. The Nazis learned a lesson from Stalin and the Soviets. The bombastic self-praise and 100 per cent. Communist propaganda from Moscow made the world lose all faith in Russian reports. The Nazis feel that America will be more inclined to believe Berlin despatches when they contain adverse facts and criticism.

It is the ticklish job of the blitzkrieg reporter to know just how much of this unpleasant material he can salt into his reports, and still not be thrown out as so many of his colleagues have been. His skill accounts for the surprising amount of accurate reporting that has reached America from the most policed, most authoritarian and most belligerent country in the world—the Third Reich.