Surveying the Occupation

Broadcast

By CHARLES M. EMERICK
Resident Officer, Fuerth, District III, OLC Bavaria

In the winter of 1945-46 and 1946-47 hunger stalked the land. Many of us can recall the saddening sight of empty store windows at Christmas in 1945 and 1946. You remember the German people who were working for the Americans living on one meal a day which was furnished by the occupation. You remember the amazing and ridiculous blackmarket in cigarettes, the value of a pound of coffee or a pound of butter. Most people felt that in retribution all these agonies were justly coming and deserved to be heaped upon the German nation. Into this came the millions of refugees fleeing from the places that had been their homes for centuries, forced to move because they insisted they were Germans and would remain Germans.

These things were what we as an American occupation inherited. Added to this we as conquerors were determined to crush out of Germany anything which we believed had been causes of the terrible conflict. Despite the lack of food in the early days of our occupation, there were few, if any, people that died of starvation. Few people died for lack of medical assistance, if that assistance were in the possession of the Occupation Forces.

Let’s look at the picture now. December 1950 found the store windows full of goods, people again fairly well dressed, women with clothes of their own choice and an opportunity to earn a decent living. The trains are running on time. Telephone communications have been re-instituted all over Germany with international hookups; there is a post office department that is extremely good. Windows now have glass in them, not dark and dismal cardboard, wood, rags and other unsightly materials. Government has returned to the people and with it free elections, free press, free speech. There is a police force that is gradually beginning to understand what is meant by giving service rather than demanding service from the citizens. The people are unafraid. They meet and discuss their problems. They criticize the occupation, and aggravating though it may be, sometimes even tell us where we have made mistakes. They do this without fear of arrest. Now we find ourselves in a normal society. When we look

Charles M. Emerick

(Photo by Harren, Fuerth)
back at our record, we can be proud. Mistakes we have made, but the over-all planning and the execution of the plans have been good.

Our main objective here has been to assure the world that Germany never again would use its resources to the disadvantage, harm and personal degradation of other people. We believe in America that this can not occur when the avenues of free will are safeguarded and when the institutions and the government of Germany are controlled by the will of a free people. Then Germany will become a cooperative member of the Western society. To this great objective we have set our course.

Our government in cooperation with the Allies has assisted the German people to build a house of freedom in western Germany. Compare it to a man who has been given sufficient money to build a new home. How the man lives in this house is another matter. The home may assist a man to be a better citizen in his community, but a fine house alone will not guarantee good citizenship. He must have had experiences which make him believe good citizenship is worthwhile. Examples of good citizenship we as Americans must display to the Germans.

WE HAVE SET OUR TASK to assist the German to put their house in order and guide the occupants to a more democratic way of life. We know well the Western nations have had a long and continued struggle towards a more democratic society. Democracy was not given to the United States, it was inherited, earned, developed.

The advantages of a democratic state have not been prevalent in Germany. The German individual must be given faith if he is to accept democracy. His experiences have not been too satisfactory. He has been puffed up by false philosophy, he has been organized and militarized and ruled in an empire which led him after false gods and to a major defeat. He has seen a democracy established in word and misused in fact. He has seen that democracy flow into a dictatorship which brought tragedy, shame and complete destruction to his home and his nation. Naturally he is inclined to be skeptical.

He is inclined to be skeptical of the type of government offered by the Allies. Our weapons and superior strength he understood, respected and feared. The organizations and mechanisms of a more democratic society he can understand, but this is not enough. Somehow and from somewhere Germany must feel the profound spirituality of democracy. Perhaps the spirit can be caught from the individual members of the American occupation forces. This means all of us — soldiers, officers, civilians, every man, woman and child of the occupation.

THE GERMAN PEOPLE MUST BE MADE to believe in this article we are trying to sell. We are the models, wearing a garment designed by the hands of a free people. There are only two exhibitors, the East and the West. When we indicate our apparent feelings of superiority at every opportunity, we are not displaying our garment to its best advantage. A victorious people can well afford to be generous and tolerant. Yet I have seen many manifestations of our own boastfulness and intolerance. Sometimes we like to remind the Germans who won the war. We must remember that the Germans do not like the occupation, the humiliations of which consciously or unconsciously make them aware of our victory and our generosity even though they don’t admit it. These people are traditionally proud, maybe arrogant and likewise critical. Nevertheless, they are capable of catching the spirit of a democratic society. By our actions we can assist them.

An example of what I mean: In June of this year I was making a long distance telephone call at the Excelsior Hotel in Munich. I had booked my call and was waiting. I was chatting with the hotel clerk and the telephone operator. Both understand English very well. An American woman came and booked a call. She announced quite energetically that she wanted that call put through to Augsburg immediately. She then began to condemn the German telephone system in the presence of these people. She said: “And have you seen this city?” I replied that I had. She said: “What an awful mess it is.” She thought that the German people were the laziest people on earth, just waiting around for the Americans to come and help them. I asked her how long she had been in Germany and she replied, “Six months.” The hotel clerk walked away, the operator went back to her board and I went and got a drink. I ask you, just what good did that remark do?

I have had a few Americans express to me over the telephone in my office their resentment and dislike of Germans, forgetting entirely their obligations to our mission, and their responsibilities as members of the occupation. Such little things do us much harm. Unpaid debts, unnecessary quarrels with Germans — in the month of October alone in the county of Fuert there were 24 minor disturbances in cafes, broken windows and so forth. I add to that the incident of the bomb explosions in the city of Fuert. These things I have seen ad infinitum. These thoughtless acts and words have a staggering and destructive impact upon our well thought out plans and policies.

OUR GOVERNMENT HAS KEPT its word to the German people, much to their surprise. Many of them have admitted to me that when they were told five years ago how this occupation was to develop they considered it so much propaganda. But to the average German, the rank and file, the worker, our employees, the man on the street, the people in the cafe, to these people, we are the occupation. How we conduct ourselves, in the final analysis, will determine whether or not the German people buy our garment.

These responsibilities we cannot escape. I believe all of us in the past have regarded the effect of our actions with too little consideration. Many times I have seen our good high level contributions lost track of because one of us has forgotten, momentarily, the dignity that a free people inherit and possess. The chips are down. This is not a struggle for peanuts and peppercorn. If you don’t know what the struggle is about and why we are here, you’d better find out, and quickly. + END