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John Raikos

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B-18

OPERATION RHINELAND

"This place will do for my quarters," the young Infantry Company Commander told his First Sergeant. "Tell the men it's off limits and notify Sergeant Correia to tell the occupants to 'blow'. I think an hour's time is enough. If we give these Heinies more time than that, they take the sheets off the beds."

"Who do you want to stay with you, sir?" the 1st Sgt. asked. Sergeant Brice was a typical army 1st sergeant--except--he had a pleasant disposition when things went well.

"Just Correia and my driver," the captain replied; "and be sure to let them know that if they loot my bedroom before I get there, I'll try both of 'em. I'm tired of their finding Leica cameras in my boudoir."

"Yes sir," retorted Sergeant Brice in a curt military manner. Sergeant Brice knew his C.O. enjoyed a military air. Captain Barnes wasn't G.I. from a strictly West Point school of thought, and even though he was always threatening someone with court-martial, it was known in the outfit that he was a "regular guy." The captain merely enjoyed exercising his authority, and he always liked a good performance on the part of his subordinates. For this reason, the men were always willing to give him an extra salute, or an extra "yes sir."

The men were all in good humor because they knew this operation was going to be a stalemate for a while. They had orders to push behind the Rhine river and secure a bridgehead--if--they could capture one of the two bridges spanning the Rhine. The German engineers were on the job

however, and the bridges were blown according to schedule. Because of this, the troops were being shuffled around, taking up defensive positions to repel any possible counter-attacks; however counter-attacks were not anticipated.

The essence of a good defense has always been determined by good living quarters. In Neuss, on the Rhine, the homes of wealthy German industrialists were to provide excellent quarters for the soldiers; moreover the captain was a firm believer that "it didn't cost anymore to travel first class."

The tired Infantrymen, who had conquered Neuss earlier that morning, were plodding up Graflingstrasse, the captain in the lead. As they would pass each mansion in the suburban residential section, the captain assigned a platoon or a squad to billet themselves. This procedure was repeated until the entire company was quartered.

Then the captain wearily retraced his steps to his home to be. As he walked, he thought of the American Bill of Rights and that part that said "no soldier in time of peace shall be quartered in any house without consent of the owner, nor in time of war but in a manner prescribed by law." "No such thing here," he thought to himself, "but," he paused to light a cigarette, "if the shoe were on the other foot, I guess we'd be in for the same treatment--probably worse."

A large white brick mansion came into view, and he recognized it as his new home. He hastened toward it and after ascending the small flight of steps, gave the large

brass knocker a couple of jolts. He noticed that the entire landing atop the stairs was made of pure red marble. A pretty German fraülein wearing an apron answered the door.

"Ist der Amerikanische Unteroffizier hier?" he asked.

"Ja, gewiss! Treten Sie näher," answered the fraülein.

The captain entered into the vestibule and then into a spacious living room. He noticed the walls were covered with antique European tapestries.

Sergeant Correia came out of the library holding a glass of Champagne. "Well Jake, this time it looks like we hit the jackpot," he said. "The basement is full of liquor, Champagne and all. And wait till you get a load of this guy's secretary--she looks just like one of the pinups I had back in the states. I'll even flip you for the best....." The captain cut him off.

"Sergeant Correia, I'll have to remind you to quit calling me Jake--you're apt to do it in front of the colonel, and furthermore just what the hell is this all about? Don't you know there's a law against fraternizing with the enemy?"

Joe Correia took advantage of every opportunity to call his company commander by his personal name. The two had "buddied" around for a couple of years when the captain was an enlisted man. They were in the same class at the Officers Candidate School, but Sgt. Correia could not meet the requirements needed to graduate.

"Yes sir, Captain sir," he said sarcastically as he walked over to the desk and picked up a letter. "Here,

this ought to answer things better than I can explain them." The captain picked up the letter and began reading it. It was in typewritten English. "Notice to anyone entering these premises: I, Harry Arns, am the owner here, and since the temporary Military Government has requested that I work with them on important civilian matters, I will require my house as a place of business. I will be only too glad to allow the Americans the use of it, provided I keep three bedrooms, my maid, and my secretary. I am sure Military Government will allow this. Signed Harry Arns."

Captain Barnes looked up in astonishment. "Why the brazen fool! I'll have him hung from the highest rafter. Why I'll....." Sgt. Correia interrupted.

"Jesus Christ, captain, you're not going to pass up the best set-up we've ever had, are you?"

"Orders are orders." Tell the maid to start packing her things, she's moving--and while she's at it, tell her to start packing her master's things because he's moving too when he gets here."

Sgt. Correia grumbled as he went to the kitchen, "You're always lousing up my love life," and as an after-thought added, "and without even seeing the secretary."

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Later that same evening, Harry Arns walked into the library to see the American captain using his desk.

"I'm Harry Arns," the German said extending his hand.

Captain Barnes hesitated and then said, "I'm sorry but we're not allowed to shake hands. Nothing personal--just

orders."

The German's eyes twinkled. "I fully understand all right. I know how things are when one's in the army." Herr Arns spoke perfect English with an Oxford accent. He was a middle aged man, immaculately dressed, and very distinguished looking. "I trust you are comfortable and making yourselves at home." Herr Arns gazed at the stack of records piled on the chair and added, "it's too bad we can't provide you chaps with electricity--it's the bombings you know--they've obliterated almost everything."

Captain Barnes noticed that the man wore a black arm band. "Did you lose someone?" he asked.

The German winced at the irony of the question and nervously blurted, "My mother was killed during the blitz over London."

"Well, aren't you German?" the Infantryman questioned.

"I'm a German subject," Herr Arns answered. "My father was German, and my mother English. When the war broke out, she chose to remain in London. I lived in England many years myself, and as a matter of fact, I graduated from Oxford--nice old place, England."

A sudden knock terminated the conversation as Captain Barnes hurried to answer the door. Pvt. Tabor, a Company messenger, greeted the captain. "Sir," he reported, "the colonel wants to see you right away."

"O.K., thanks Tabor," the captain answered.

After he closed the door, Captain Barnes picked up his helmet lying on the piano and with a short "I'll see

you later," left.

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The captain returned home in an hour. He pushed the door open and as he entered the dimly lit villa, he heard a metallic hammering emanating from the second floor. He hurried up the stairs and into one of the many bedrooms. The room was illuminated by a kerosene lamp. Sgt. Correia was kneeling in front of a small strong box and was trying to open it with a chisel.

"What the hell are you doing?" the captain queried.

Sgt. Correia looked up in surprise. "Say captain," he said, "this guy Arns is a big time Nazi. You ought to see some of the stuff I found. Look at that pile of letters on the dresser, all of them signed with a 'Heil Hitler.' And I found a whole stack of Nazi magazines in the library. I wouldn't doubt but what Arns isn't one of those 'left behind spys'. He's probably got some valuable papers in this strong box if I can ever open it."

"Yeh," Captain Barnes mused, "and he might keep his jewelry in there too."

"No he doesn't," Correia answered promptly. "The maid told me he put his valuables in a downtown vault several days ago."

"And I suppose he would be stupid enough to leave valuable papers behind, eh, Sgt?"

"Well, I never thought of that," Sgt. Correia stammered. "I-----thought....."

"Who told you to think?" the captain chimed in. "Don't

you know it's against my orders for sergeants to think? Just do what you're told to and leave the thinking to people who get paid for it."

Sgt. Correia uttered a meek "yes sir" and started to put the strong box back in its place.

The captain grinned and said, "Go ahead and open her up Joe, we'll take a look anyway." The two sat down and while the Captain held the box, Sgt. Correia hammered away at the metal clasp that kept the lid closed. In a matter of minutes the lid fell open.

"Huh," the captain exclaimed. Inside the metal box was a smaller hand carved wooden box. The two quickly pulled it out and noticed there was no lock on it. They raised the lid of the wooden box and looked at each other in amazement.

"Well I'll be damned," uttered Correia. "Who the hell would have thought the old boy kept a miniature battleship in his bedroom. And flying the British flag at that."

"Not too hard to explain," ejaculated the captain, "the 'old boy' is and has been with the British Naval Intelligence. I just left headquarters and the colonel told me to see to it that he isn't bothered. Judging from his collection of boats in the parlor, I would say he is probably a collector."

"Well, if he's a navy man, what's he doing so far inland? And what about the letters and magazines?" asked Correia bewildered.

"The letters, Joe, are ordinary business letters and

the 'Heil Hitler' is the standard way of saying 'sincerely yours,' and as for being this far inland, I haven't asked Herr Arns, but the S-2 says he's working on a special steel alloy used on submarines that is ten times stronger than anything we have. Oh yes, and the magazines, you can buy those down at the Drogerei for 2M. Ho-hum," the captain continued, "let's hit the sack Joe, I'm dead tired."