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DB - 34
The Little Sausages

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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The other day, my friend Erwin Lich (DB - 2) came around for a chat. We were talking about the local activities of the "Fight Atomic Death" committee, which recently staged a protest meeting on the Marktplatz. Lich said that one of the men who was busy gathering names for a petition was a colleague of his in the Schillerschule. "He rushed around demanding that we all sign up," said Lich, "a fervent SPD man."

"Uh huh," I murmured. Then Lich leaned forward and fixed me with his eyes. "Another teacher told me that 15 years ago this same guy was an enthusiastic "Pg." (short for Parteigenosse, or member of the Nazi Party). One day the other teacher made a 'defeatist' remark, and this guy said, 'be careful or I will be forced to denounce you to the Gestapo.'

"What I can't figure out," Lich continued, "is how a man can change his colors like that. Why does the German always have to choose up sides and then try and make everyone conform to his line?"

I thought a minute and then I remembered what a retired policeman told me not long ago: "There are some Germans who just have to be in a party." Lich's eyes sparkled. "That's it!" he said. "They're not fellow-travelers. They have to be on the inside looking out. Otherwise they feel helpless and insecure. But then they have to bolster up their own confidence that they did the right thing by trying to make everyone else hew to the line..."

It occurred to me that I had encountered a number of conformists of this type last month when I was interviewing some of Giessen's ex-Gestapo officers. They were a sorry lot of mumblers, these men who once terrorized the city. As might be expected, they spoke at first only with great reluctance. Then all at once, as if one had touched a secret button, the dam would burst open, and their turgid stories gushed out in a muddy flood.

You ask them how they happened to get into the Gestapo, or what they thought about their hideous tasks. And they answer: "What could I do, I was just a little Beante (civil servant)." Or, "I was just a little sausage." Or, "I just followed orders. I couldn't disobey..." They answer in whispers, those who shouted once like Herr Lutz (DB - 33).

Heinrich Lutz is 62 now, a short, round-headed man whose hazel eyes have the injured look of a punished lap dog. He told me he is suffering from a heart ailment.

A Giessener, Lutz fought with the 116th for three years in World War I. In 1920 he joined the police force, where he worked contentedly for the next 17 years. Then, in 1937, the local Gestapo picked him up and put him to work in the counter-intelligence section.

Today, Lutz thinks about his Gestapo period frequently - the synagogue fires, "I was sent to investigate the Sudanlage, the Party men said 'That's none of your business.' 'Please,' I said, 'I'm a Kripo officer.' Then I was sent to Herz's Bank to chase out the S.S. and S.A. people who were robbing the place. They cursed us, that rabble." He remembers the denunciations - "It was awful. There was a dentist who sang 'It'll all go away, it'll go with a bang, Adolf Hitler and his gang.' He got three years in Dachau." and the unpleasant tasks he had - "I felt my honor was injured. It pained me greatly." And the Jews - "I was worried that something would happen to them..."

Asked about his treatment of people like Frau Scheurer, Lutz grinned nervously. "You see how humane I was!" Then he pulled out a great bundle of "Exonerating testimonials" which he had laid before the denazification authorities after the war. "I'm still collecting them," he said after he had read from some of the well-thumbed papers.

Heinrich Lutz sat in Allied prisons for three and a half years after 1945 ("They chased us around like a herd of cattle.") After his release he began working as a gardener. Today he receives a small pension for his work as a policeman. This means he is not one of the so-called "13ler", those men whose Nazi activities tainted them to the extent that the Government still denies them certain privileges. The name comes from the number of a paragraph in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of the Federal Republic.

How did a little man like Lutz come to join the Gestapo? "They commanded us to do it. I tried to resist hand and foot. I didn't want anything to do with politics. What I did I had to do as my duty." Herr Lutz knows now that he could have avoided the Secret Police assignment, and perhaps that is what pains him so much today.

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The next Gestapo man, Heinrich Becker, was more reticent about his past. From what one hears, he has reason to be. He is a thick-bellied bald man with a stubby beard and shifty eyes. A World War I veteran, he landed in Giessen in 1918 and joined the Schutzpolizei soon after. Becker now earns spare cash training police dogs. When I visited him, he was clipping a squirming terrier.

Becker lives on the musty top floor of the Burghof Restaurant building. Before the war it was the home of Herz's bank. After the synagogues burned down in 1938, the Gestapo moved its headquarters here from across the street. Formerly, they had held forth in the old Ernst Ludwig Cafe, named after the last Hessian Archduke. It is now the Lido Bar. For a dozen years, Giesseners gave this area a wide berth, if they could.



**Former Gestapo Headquarters
Left and Right**

Becker got to know a lot of concentration camps after that. He accompanied deportation trains to Mauthausen, to Buchenwald, to Lublin, to Lwów, to Ravensbruck. "I escorted hundreds of trains," he said with a certain pride. "It wasn't hard work. I was always glad to get away from Giessen." Sometimes we escorts sang with the prisoners, or drank with them... I got 6 marks per diem on the trips. Among my prisoners were a former Bürgermeister, a County Councillor, and the elder of the city council," he boasted.

From other former Gestapo officers I heard that Becker was greedy for his escort money. One said: "He would come in and whine, 'Haven't you arrested any more that I can take away?' He always wanted to earn more money." Still another said that Becker had beaten one of his prisoners to death in 1944. Gestapo men don't speak well of each other in general.

In 1945, Heinrich Becker, former Gestapo employee and former Party member, was put to work immediately by the American Military Government as a part of the local constabulary. Seven years ago he retired at the age of 60. One of his sons is a Giessen policeman today.

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The Gestapo section in which Ernst Schneider worked covered Marxism, sabotage, defeatism, and national opposition. "I won't tell you about it," he said when asked for an interview. "We suffered spiritually. We want our peace. We weren't really Nazis."

One of the reasons Schneider didn't want to talk was the fact that he spent three and a half years in jail as a war criminal. After the war, he was found guilty of being accessory to the murder of three Communist prisoners at Giessen's Gestapo Prison. The prisoners had been shot down in the courtyard while awaiting deportation.

Actually, Becker might be living in a pleasant house on the edge of town if he had held the right cards in 1945. A Gestapo colleague of his, Ernst Schneider was arrested on murder charges then. Becker tried to influence the housing authorities to push Frau Schneider out of her house, and nearly succeeded.

"I had nothing to do with the Jews," said Heinrich Becker, wringing his hands, "that wasn't my section." A little while later, he admitted that he was one of the Gestapo men who escorted the first 150 Giessen Jews to Dachau in 1938.

As Schneider describes it, "An S.S. aide came to pick up half a dozen Commies. He lined them up, pulled his machine pistol and blasted a round into them. Three fell. I was a little Beamte. What could I do, we had taken an oath. To disobey meant the concentration camp."

Schneider was a little Beamte; one of 12 in Giessen Gestapo Headquarters. According to some who remember, he was not at all as feared and despised as his boss, Bernhard Winzer, who later changed himself in an Allied prison, or Kommisar Reichert, who had a habit of kicking Jews until they passed out.

Because of his conviction, Schneider is today one of the so-called "13ler". He gets no pension for his 24 years service in the police, nor for his service in World War I. Now he lives with his son-in-law and tends the family garden. He is 66 years old, a pipesmoker with a thin face, a large nose, long ears, and brown eyes seemingly veiled behind his spectacles. He has the thick calloused fingers of someone who works the soil.

Despite his original reluctance, Ernst Schneider did "tell about it." He spoke for about an hour, while his wife sat next to him with her head in her hands, and sighed. He said that he joined the police here in 1921 and was enrolled in the Gestapo in 1935. "I had been a Social Democrat," he said. "Then I joined the N.S.D.A.P. to keep my job. We went in dumb and they kept us dumb."

I asked him what the worst thing was that he remembered from the Nazi period. Schneider said: "The vilest thing of all was when families denounced each other. That galled me. I had to work on dozens of such cases. That was in my department."

Then he recited a couple of examples - the woman who denounced her husband for defeatist remarks after she found out he had a girlfriend, (The man hanged himself); the man who denounced his wife for listening to Radio Moscow; the man who denounced the neighbor to whom he had lost a court case. Says Schneider, "They would come to me and say, 'I'm a good National Socialist...'"

"There was a psychosis about the Gestapo," said Ernst Schneider, "mostly because of the denunciations and informing. It was a bitterly bad time."

This seems to me to explain a lot about why so many of my Giessen acquaintances are suspicious of one another even today. The time is not so long past when a person could send a neighbor to concentration camp and possible death with an effective denunciation. Not a few took advantage of this.

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Another Giessen "13ler" is Theo Lössch, the 65-year-old former deputy of Gestapo Chief Winzer. Like Schneider, he spent a few years in a prison for war criminals.

Lösch is a short skinny man with slicked back hair and a toothbrush moustache. He talks rapidly with a tingé of Hessian accent:

"I was ordered to the Stapo; I couldn't do anything about it (except quit the police force). I didn't do anything, I helped people. I was punished just because I belonged to the Stapo.

"I get upset even now when I think about it. I don't want to talk about it. I had two nervous breakdowns during the war. Our orders came from Darmstadt. We couldn't disobey; We couldn't leave the Gestapo or we'd be sent to concentration camps...when you're with the wolves, you have to howl with the wolves.

"Sometimes I came back home at noon so upset from the office that I lay down on the couch and had to listen to music to calm down. Oh the beatings... Winzer was a big fat man. He grabbed stuff from the peasants like a robber baron. In the end he had to walk to Lauterbach (to escape the American troops). He grew a beard and hid with a peasant. Then he got nabbed and hanged himself in prison. A swine. I'd rather rub shit under my nose than work for such a man again. A sadist. He mistreated us even... threatened to shoot us if we didn't obey."

Theo Lösch has paid for his Gestapo service. After he got out of jail the only job this former police inspector could get was one shoving cars in Giessen's freightyard. He receives half his pension.

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A third "131er" is Ludwig Keiner (DB - 33). However, Keiner is also the only member of the Giessen Gestapo detachment who is now employed by the local police force. Since September, 1956 he has been head of the prostitute detail - a not inconsiderable job when one considers that there are 400 registered prostitutes in Giessen.

He is a deep-voiced little man, thin, gray-haired, and the owner of an enormous nose and a large jaw. Keiner is 57. A native Giessener, he joined the police in 1919. Already in 1931 he was a member of the political section, which formed the substance of the later Gestapo.

Keiner can look back on the early days of the Nazi Movement, when he had to attend the riotous political rallies of the rightist and leftist parties, the torch parades, and the street fights. He also recalls the times in the Twenties when two of the local nobility, the Solms counts, Georg and Bernhard, engaged in Nazi plotting.

Once in the Gestapo, Keiner was put to work in section 6a, the Card Index and Personal Dossier department. It is not surprising to find that he has a photographic memory. I asked him about Gestapo Chief Winzer and he said: "Born in 1892 in Mrotschem, East Prussia...I looked at his card once." He also named the exact dates of the various stages of his career. One of the last was March 17, a few days before the Americans arrived. It was then that this perfect little civil servant piled all his records into a truck and drove to nearby Lauterbach, where the incriminating material was ground up at the paper factory.

Keiner describes his Gestapo career thus: "I did my duty. I committed no crimes. I lost much." After his release from jail in 1948 he lived in the Vogelsberg area, supporting his wife and eight children with odd jobs.

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Technically speaking, all policemen were Nazified during the Third Reich. The so-called Schutzpolizei or public safety division was renamed the Ordnungspolizei (Orpo) and placed under S.S. command. In reality it soon became subject to the Gestapo. Today, members of the Orpo hotly deny that they were Nazis, but in fact some were guilty of many crimes which were later attributed to the secret police.

I have met several members of Giessen's Orpo, and I must say, it was difficult to distinguish most of them from their Gestapo colleagues. One has the feeling that if they got orders to torture and torment, they too would obey.

Heinrich Raab, for instance, was transferred from the "Schupo" to the Orpo after the invasion of Poland. He took part in four or five of the Gestapo Grossaktionen, collecting Jews in this district for deportation. Usually, he and other Orpo officers would be called to the Burghof Gestapo Headquarters about 6 a.m. and then sent out on the hunt.

"Generally, we picked up 50 to 100 at a time," Raab said. "When we came they were afraid. Some prayed. But they were silent."

Raab is 67, a native Hessian. He is big man with a butch haircut, heavy eyebrows and drooping lids - like an old bloodhound. He has big hands, a rough voice, and no teeth. Raab joined the police in 1919 after fighting with Giessen's 116th Regiment.

The times he "remembers" best were the months before Hitler seized power at the end of 1932. "There was a bad four months," he said. "We had to picket every Party meeting. When the Nazis met, the Socialists invaded. When the Communists met, then the Nazis rioted. There would be maybe 500 in a single meeting. As soon as the speaker began the intruders would start yelling. Then came the slugging. Then out onto the street. It happened almost every night then. They got plenty of bloody noses from us. We slugged 'em all."

Was anyone ever arrested. "No. But we had to have peace and order. Sometimes we had to escort the Nazis back home from their tavern - the Trinkaus (see DB - 1) or the leftists from theirs."

Raab talked about other Giessen police too: about Crime Inspector Rienhardt (DB - 32) who kept a diary of Gestapo crimes but was killed in a bombing attack in 1944; about the Gestapo officer Oskar Wald, who was one of the most vicious men in the Giessen department - he vanished after the war; about the torturing that went on in the Burghof, and about the murder of two American fliers who had been shot down nearby.

I asked Raab how he felt about collecting Jews for deportation. "We had our orders...I knew many of the Jews; decent Jews they were.

I wasn't in agreement with that at all. No. No." He looked away. "Before the deportations when they came by on the street I would wink at them or nod to show how I felt."

Somehow, the story of the wink made me shudder. What a horrible thing that seemed to be - a wink from the hangman. Later, I asked Frau Scheurer (DB - 33) about it. "No, you are wrong," she said. "that wink helped a lot."

Two days after the Americans captured Giessen, Heinrich Raab was back on duty again. He was assigned to the criminal police. The Counter Intelligence Corps gave Raab the job of hunting down Nazis - "Pg.s". Gestapo men, S.A. and S.S. leaders, and Party officials.

"I hauled in hundreds of them from as far away as Fulda, 50 miles," Raab said, with a faint smile. "I knew most of them personally. They had hidden themselves under false names. But lots of them betrayed each other. They were pretty sore about me arresting them. They took it hard. Some of them blame me even today."

What was the difference, I asked, between arresting the Jews and arresting the Nazis? Raab replied: "The Jews didn't complain about it..."

Raab was also assigned to make the investigation which preceded the trial for the Giessen synagogue fires. "I know the guys who did it - the ones who are still living here. But I couldn't get any proof on them."

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Another Orpo officer was Heinrich Liebermann. Like many of his colleagues, he also served in the 116th during the first war. And like Raab and Keiner, he had to "attend" the street fights of 1932 and '33. "I only made one arrest," said Liebermann. "It was during a torch parade of the Reichsbanner (left wing) down Seltersweg. The Nazis stormed out of Trinkaus Tavern and there was a lot of slugging. Flower pots rained down from above. One girl broke her foot. We were helpless onlookers..."

Liebermann is 66. He joined the police in 1921 and registered in the SPD during the late Twenties. After the Nazis took over, he "quit politics." He is a toothless man with a squarish head, snow-white hair, and a white postage stamp moustache. His son is on the local force now.

Like Raab, he also took part in Gestapo Grossaktionen - at least the big one here in Giessen.

But one of the most interesting things Liebermann recalled was the night in early 1933 when the windows of Jewish store in the Schulstrasse were smashed. "I investigated," he said. "and found that three S.S. boys had been in the tavern across the street. The barkeep said he heard a crash after they left. Three weeks later I had them. They had glass in their bootheels. Students they were. I filed a declaration for the State's Attorney, but there was never a hearing... Three years later, one of the boys came to me and admitted he had done it."

Liebermann said the window-smashers are living in Giessen today. I asked him whether he had denounced them at the denazification proceedings in 1948. He shrugged and said, "No, that was all so long before. What good would it have done?"

Maybe he is right. A smashed window isn't much compared to a smashed body. But one asks what sort of concept of justice such a man has. Herr Liebermann and his fellow policemen never hesitated to carry out Nazi justice. What is justice? Something you do on orders? Or does time erase a crime?

Herr Liebermann probably isn't very sure about the answers to such questions. When our talk was finished he asked: "I won't get in any trouble for this, will I. It's all the truth. The constitution says we can speak the truth. Doesn't it?"

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"Most of them were just little sausages," said Karl Seng (DB - 23), who retired this spring from his post as commissar of the criminal police after 43 years on the Giessen force. "After the war, everyone over the rank of Obersekretär was fired. They had all been 'reliable' under the Nazis."

Karl Seng was in the Orpo too during the Hitler period. But he avoided all the Nazi actions. "I got tipped off before the Grossaktionen," he said, "and reported myself sick every time."

Sitting in his garden, I asked Seng what he thought of today's police force. "It's an efficient troop," he replied. "A new order. Much more comradely. We don't address each other with titles anymore." Would today's police serve a totalitarian state? "Never again. They got burned too badly last time."

Theo Lösch echoed this sentiment: "I don't believe today's police would serve a police state again. They'd run away first. They learned; the police shouldn't be political." Lösch had some criticism for the modern policemen, however. "They were sharper before. If someone walked on the grass in a park or let his dog run loose then he was arrested. Today they ride around in cars and say please."

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One thing that many of the men had in common was the denial of all knowledge about Konzentrationslager annihilations. "I knew nothing," said Lösch. "We didn't know what happened there," said Keiner. "We didn't know," said Liebermann. Only Heinrich Raab admitted that he had heard of the gassings.

It was hardly possible for me to determine their attitude towards Jews. Keiner, for instance, said his wife's aunt was deported to Theresienstadt as a Jewess. "If my boss had only known," he said. And Ernst Schenider has a son-in-law of Jewish descent. All of them attributed local anti-Semitism to "newspaper propaganda".

Something else that came up again and again in the interviews was the bitter way in which the Stapo and Orpo men abused each other.

Schneider said: "Raab is not all there mentally...Becker was a pig... I never speak to them." Raab said: "Schneider was a criminal Hitler type." Liebermann said: "Schneider changed colors overnight." And so on.

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It is comforting to note that Giessen's police are now in the hands of a democrat, Wilhelm Düsing, who was fired from the force in 1933. Düsing has also been in the United States, where he studied police techniques in Los Angeles and Chicago. He has a youthful and efficient team working in his barracks on the Landgrafphilipp Platz. It must be due in part to Düsing's leadership that Giessen's police make an impression of friendliness and effectiveness.

However, it seems to me that the Liebermanns and the Löschs and the Beckers raise a question that cannot be answered easily. Could today's policemen be changed from protectors of the people in the name of the state into weapons of the state against the people?

The answer is the number of Little Sausages there are around. Giessen had them, and probably still has some, despite what Seng and Lösch say. One might also ask, do we have little Beamte in Boston and Detroit?

David Binder

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