Of the Night

JAN VALTIN

One hundred and one days the condition continued. All these long months I fought like a wounded beast in a trap. They were one hundred and one days of blood-stained blackness teeming with merciless fiends. Except for one week I was alone all this time; not in the company of my torturers. For two months I lay in chains, in solitary confinement. For three months I did not see a piece of soap, nor was I given a chance to bathe and shave. I wrote no letters and received none. The outside world had ceased to exist. And all around me was despair and death and madness, and manifestations of a mute and futile courage, ghostly faces and others full of harsh insolence, and the enemy will to break me or to kill me.

I was in Concentration Camp Fuhlsbuettel, on the northern outskirts of Hamburg. Near was the airport, and the droning of airplanes could be heard day and night behind the rust-brown walls. Camp Fuhlsbuettel was no "camp," but a cluster of old prisons which the Ministry of Justice had ordered demolished but a few days before the Nazi triumph. For years these prisons had been out of use. But the sudden overcrowding of more modern jails with political prisoners had caused the Gestapo to halt the process of demolishing the condemned buildings. Almost overnight the once deserted dungeons became populated with thousands of men and women. There were four huge cell blocks, built of brick, thick-walled, and four stories high. They were surrounded by a number of naked yards, and the yards in turn were surrounded by guard posts and high brick walls. Along the inside of the walls ran a tall fence of barbed wire. The wire was charged. In the space between the barbed-wire fence and the outer walls black-uniformed Elite Guards, in steel helmets and armed to the teeth, were on duty. Two of the main buildings contained only solitary cells, while the remaining two were fitted with common halls for those who had "confessed."

A day in Camp Fuhlsbuettel began at six in the morning with the loud clanging of a bell. A minute later I would hear the rattling of keys in ponderous locks, the crashing of doors, the banging of the troopers' boots, and angry shouts. The instant the door of my cell swung open, I rose from the cot as far as my chains allowed me to rise, to report my presence to the guard on duty. At the top of my voice I would shout my name, and add: ". . . red pig in chains for high treason!"

While I shouted, the trooper stood over me, his rubber truncheon poised, and slamming it down on my chest if I paused too long to catch my breath. Then he unlocked my chains. I leaped from the cot and reached for my pants and an undershirt. I was not permitted to wear other articles of clothing. While I slipped into my rags, the trooper rummaged through my cell and shouted:

"Faster! You move like a sack of flour! Faster, du Lumpenhund!"

Then he threw the "night chains" out on the tier, shackled my wrists together with "day irons," and clattered off to repeat the procedure in the adjoining cage. For an hour I was alone. At seven o'clock a hunk of black bread was thrown into my cell, my breakfast. Ten minutes later began the assembling of prisoners who were scheduled for questioning at Gestapo headquarters. With curses and kicks I was summoned from my cell and herded into the yard. There I stood, face to the wall, until my name was called. I jumped toward the prison truck. At the door of the truck stood two young Elite Guards with chains in their hands. Each prisoner, before he was pushed into the truck, was struck across the back with the chains.

In the court-yard of Gestapo headquarters the prisoners formed a column. Then came a barked command: "Forwards, march!" Surrounded by Death Head guards, we broke into a run. Those among us who could not keep the pace were beaten mercilessly. We ran through the court-yard, through corridors and up three flights of stairs until we came to a halt in front of a door which bore the sign, Wartezimmer. The door was unlocked and we were herded into a long room.

My name was called and an Elite Guard put a chain around my wrist and led me to the offices of the Foreign Division. Inspector Paul Kraus conducted the questioning, assisted by Hertha Jens and a group of assistants. The method was always the same: Questions—threats—beatings; questions and beatings; promises of peace and luxury if I would give them the desired answers; threats and questions, questions and beatings. Maledictions and yells and whimpers floating through the walls from other rooms showed me that I was not alone in the grinding mill. At times Inspector Kraus would repeat the same question thirty times, and after each evasive answer was followed by a spell of slashing pain. Often the inquisition lasted until I was too battered to understand the meaning of words.

After each turn of questioning, the Elite Guards dragged me to a room on the fifth floor, which was known as the "Repair Shop." A young Nazi doctor was in attendance, and two male nurses in the Brownshirt uniform. Their one and only treatment was the smearing of vaseline over the backs and legs of tortured men. The Brownshirt nurses worked silently. The doctor would walk around me, rubbing his hands and beaming, "Remarkable, remarkable."

Toward four in the afternoon we were assembled for the return transport to the concentration camp. By five, we were again locked in the cells. Those who had not had their mildey meal were now given a liter of thick soup—of potatoes or peas or cabbage or beans; the rest received again a hunk of dry black bread. Even the manner in which the food was distributed was designed to break the nerves of prisoners who met the Gestapo assaults with stubborn passive resistance. The soup given me was boiling hot. The time allowed me to consume it was one minute, when the minute had passed, I was beaten bludgeoned. The first few times I miserably burned my mouth and throat. But as time passed I developed the technique of gobbling a liter of soup in a minute. As soon as it arrived and my hands were unshackled, I dumped half of the soup into the toilet of my cell. Then I filled the bowl with cold water. The remainder of the soup, thus diluted and cooled, I drank down in fast gulps.

The "lights out" signal came at seven, and then the night. In this winter of 1933-1934, each night in Camp Fuhlsbuettel was a night of horrors. Each night men died. Most died by suicide, some were deliberately murdered, on Gestapo orders, and other died "accidentally" under the hands of marauding night guards.

Toward one o'clock in the morning the screaming of men for special purposes arrived in Camp Fuhlsbuettel. They were young Elite Guards, a hand-picked lot of Gestapo apprentices. Invariably they arrived on a sputtering motor lorry. When the lorry arrived in the yard, the driver blew the horn to announce the commencement of the nocturnal horrors. It began with the ringing of bells on the concrete tiers, and the banging of doors. A loud voice read off a list of names. Troopers entered the cells. Hoarse whispers: "Hello, hello, you'll be shot at sunrise." The door closed. Sometime later it was opened again. The outline of a Death Head guard stood against the corridor lights. "Hey!" he yelled. Then he emptied his revolver into the walls and ceiling of the cell. A period of silence followed, until the banging of doors began anew. Chained men were beaten in the night. I could hear the banging doors, the tramping boots, the wild howls of the beaten. They came nearer, nearer. Then the turning of a key in the lock of my cell door. Three troopers barged in. They stripped away the faded blanket and their rubber truncheons hailed on me indiscriminately. A prisoner who did not yell was beaten until he yelled, to satisfy the guards, and to terrify the comrades in adjoining cells, whose turn would be next. I awaited them, shivering as if under an attack of malaria, and after they had done their work, I lay still, too stupefied to listen to the howling of the others.

Sometime in the middle of February I was transferred to the infirmary. I prayed and begged for death, but death would not come. The bed was clean, and the food plentiful—white bread, milk, eggs. Elite Guards sat silently between the beds to see to it that no prisoner could speak to another. The retired doctor, whose face was disfigured by saber scars, did not permit the Gestapo to enter his wards. On the same corridor, already for weeks in a water bed, lay Edgar Andree. The Elite Guards made bets from day to day as to whether Comrade Andree would live or die. They showed an undisguised admiration for his fortitude. The prisoners in the infirmary were men whom the Gestapo considered too valuable to let them die without the propagandistic show of a high treason trial. On the ninth day I was discharged from the infirmary. I still felt a dull pain in the right side of my head. My ear had been smashed; I was half deaf. My kidneys were damaged. I had received an abdominal injury that was beyond repair. Before I left the infirmary, the doctor shook my hand. "Well, my boy, times have changed," he said.

A Gestapo agent escorted me to the railway station. We rode in an open car. The sights and sounds of traffic, the shop-windows, the people in the streets—they all seemed to belong to a far-away world.

"Where are we going to?" I asked the Gestapo man.

"To Berlin."

For two days I was questioned by the Berlin Gestapo. They were less brutal than their colleagues of the Foreign Division in Hamburg. The officials seemed better trained and more experienced in police work. Here I was subjected to a special form of torture: kneeling for hours at a stretch on a police carbine, and at another time on a shallow box filled with nails. The general atmosphere, however, was the same as in Hamburg—grimy corridors, offices furnished with Spartan simplicity, threats, kicks, troopers chasing chained men up and down the reaches of the building, shouting, rows of girls and women standing with their noses and toes against the walls, overflowing ashtrays, portraits of Hitler and his aides, the smell of coffee, smartly dressed girls working at high speed behind typewriters—girls seemingly indifferent to all the squalor and agony about them, stacks of confiscated publications, printing machines, books, and pictures, and Gestapo agents asleep on tables. The questioning of me got nowhere. Afterward I had become so experienced that I could formulate an answer to a question before it was asked. My answers were either evasive, or misleading. Not to answer at all is—in Gestapo headquarters—always a fatal course.

"We give you three days to think it over," I was told.

A police truck whisked me past the Stettiner Bahnhof, across the Havel River and out on a road which leads toward Stralsund. There were perhaps thirty prisoners in the truck, a sullen and defected-looking crew. Elite Guards stood between the rows of prisoners to keep us from communicating with one another. After a couple of hours we arrived at Concentration Camp Oranienburg. I saw factory buildings, long barbed-wire fences, low barracks and a large paved court-yard. Again I was singled out for solitary confinement.

(Continued Tomorrow)

Benson Ford Is Bridegroom

Married to Former Edith McNaughton

DETROIT — (AP) — Honeymoon bound, Benson Ford and his pretty bride, the former Edith McNaughton, were en route to California today after their marriage linking two of the best known families of the automobile industry.

Benson, 21, second son of Edsel Ford and grandson of Henry Ford, and Miss McNaughton, also 21, were married yesterday afternoon in Christ Church of Grosse Pointe in an intimate family setting. Benson's brother, Henry II, a navy ensign, was best man.

Police kept the church walk clear of a crowd of spectators and private detectives guarded the wedding gifts at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Evan McNaughton. McNaughton, retired, is a former vice-president of the Cadillac Motor Car Co.

Only recently Benson Ford was rejected for military service because of an eye defect.

Work Begun on Flying Center

ORANGEBURG, S. C. — (AP) — Preliminary work has started four miles south of here on a preliminary training center for flying cadets, who are expected to report Oct. 1.

Included will be four barracks, an administration building, operation hut, canteen and recreation center, mess hall, class room buildings, two steel hangars, swimming pool, baseball diamond and two tennis courts.

Lieutenant Jack Wallace of Maxwell Field, assigned here as senior instructor, and other officers will arrange Aug. 15.

FOOD GRASS

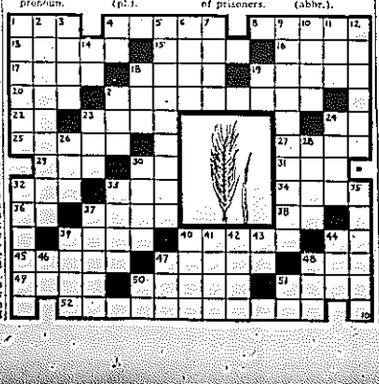
Answer to Previous Puzzle

HORIZONTAL

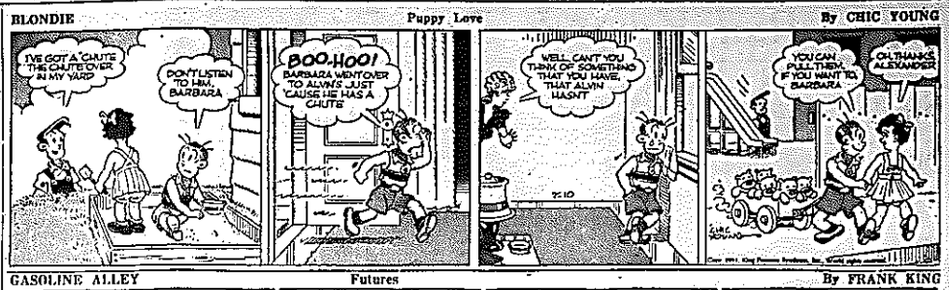
1 Cereal grain.
4 It is an annual ——— grass.
8 It is a food ——— bread.
13 Eagle's nest.
15 Region.
16 Kind of tree.
17 To gasp.
18 Egg-shaped.
19 Continued attempt to gain possession.
20 Fury.
21 Most frizzly.
23 Ell.
25 Enemies.
26 Masculine pronoun.
28 Ceremonies.
27 Boisterous outcry.
29 Convent dweller.
30 Musical note.
31 Every.
32 Ovum.
33 Ventilating machine.
34 Harness parts.
35 Plural pronoun.
37 Three.
38 Behold.
39 Lakes.
40 Text.
41 Before Christ (abbr.).
45 Liquid part of fat.
47 Spacious.
48 The deep.
49 Bucket.
50 To analyze.
51 Christmas carol.
52 It is used as a coffee ——— (pl.).
14 Neuter pronoun.
18 Native metal.
19 Southeast (abbr.).
21 Kind of lettuce.
23 Marsh.
24 To stop.
26 Tow boat.
28 Hodgepodge.
30 Without.
32 It is widely grown in ———.
33 To cringe.
35 Its genus.
37 French soldier
39 Portuguese coins.
40 Moldings.
41 Throng.
42 Mealey apple.
43 Form of "I."
44 Honey gatherer.
46 Musical syllable.
47 Animal pest.
48 Sea call for help.
50 Postscript (abbr.).
51 Compass point (abbr.).

VERTICAL

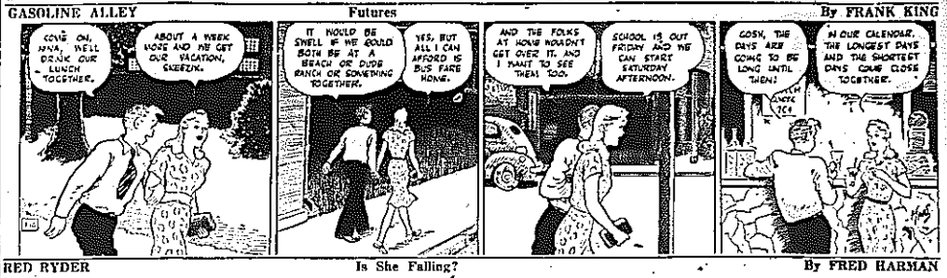
1 Two-edged sword.
2 Year-old beasts.
3 Eagle.
4 Pronoun.
5 Exciting ecstasy.
6 Small drink.
7 To bark.
8 Not occupied.
10 To foment.
11 Tenon.
12 One in charge of prisoners.



BLONDIE — Puppy Love — By CHIC YOUNG



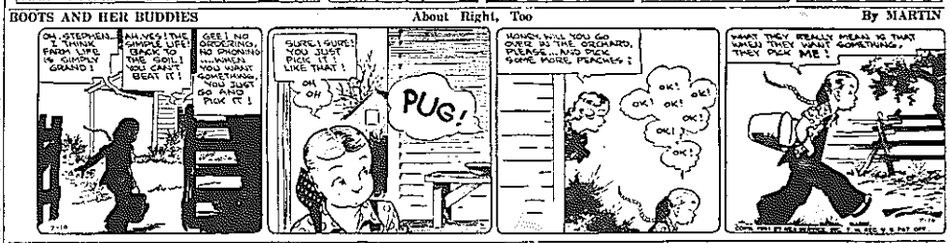
GASOLINE ALLEY — Futures — By FRANK KING



RED RYDER — Is She Falling? — By FRED HARMAN

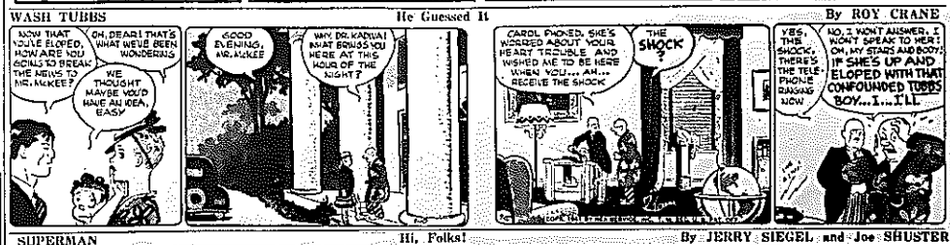
THIMBLE THEATER — Get Off the Line, Operator! — STARRING POPEYE

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES — About Right, Too — By MARTIN



LI'L ABNER — No Honor Among Thieves — By AL CAPP

WASH TUBBS — He Guessed It — By ROY CRANE



SUPERMAN — Hi, Folks! — By JERRY SIEGEL and Joe SHUSTER