The Nazi Terror Mounts

CHAPTER 6

Dark times followed in Berlin. Rumors were rife that Rausch might be executed. "The more a man is a National Socialist, the more he talks against the Jews and Bolsheviks," Marx explained. "The more likely he is to be in the pay of the police." Hugo Stoltenhoff, a former Communist, was murdered. The police raided the Communist arsenals in Berlin. A bomb factory, also in a Berlin suburb, was thrown into confusion by the Tschekists, who retreated to Berlin after they had blasted a few government buildings. Hundreds were arrested at the station. These arrests and raids were traced to Rausch by one Skobelewski, a female counter-spy, and Felix Neumann received instructions to put Rausch out of the way.

Three attempts were made, one with the help of a girl from Marie Schlepers's group, the second in the apartment of a brother where Neumann had posted Tchekists armed with revolvers, and the third in Rausch's own home. Felix Neumann himself, with the snarl, "Take that, you ——!" emptied his pistol into Rausch's groin.

Felix Neumann was too excited to follow the advice he had given us a few weeks earlier. He did not even a razor to slash his victim's throat. Still alive, Rausch was rushed to the St. Lazarus hospital in Berlin.

The police records in Leipzig have it that Skobiewski, hearing that Rausch was not dead, had blurted out, "That's not the way. The man must die!"

Rausch died. Felix Neumann fell into the hands of the police. At once the G.P.U. got busy trying to bribe a prison physician to order Neumann's transfer to an insane asylum, but to no avail. Felix Neumann was broken by the police. Skobiewski and fourteen other Tchekists were arrested and charged with treason and murder.

Most of the captured terrorists were war under a year of police pressure. But Skobiewski himself admitted nothing. He maintained stubbornly that he was a Russian student stranded in Germany, that his arrest was a mistake, that he had never set eyes on any of the other men in his custody. The trial before the Supreme Court of Leipzig lasted nine weeks. Felix Neumann, Skobiewski and a third G.P.U. agent were condemned to death. The others received long terms in prison. Between two court hearings an attempt was made in prison to assassinate Felix Neumann, the author. He was struck on the head, but escaped.

In October, 1933, the day's wage of a docker in the harbor of Hamburg was 17,000,000,000 marks.

On the night of Oct. 22 all dockhands followed in Hamburg were summoned to a house on Valentinskamp. There were about 60 men present, denoting that our central Communist organization in Hamburg numbered roughly 1,200. Hans Marquardt and his secretary, the stephanitche Circle, were present. So were two young Russian officers. But none of them spoke; listening, they hovered in a corner while the fight was dinkmest. The chief instructor was Hans Neumann and Ernst Thaelmann's aides. There was no enthusiasm. A spirit of silent resignation permeated our meeting. The air was stifling and full of smoke. The faces of the comrades at the door were taut and pale. But we were determined to triumph or to die for the revolution. The meeting broke up with a muffled shout, "Forward! Long live Soviet Germany!"

In a tenement around the corner the detachment couriers, their bicycles parked in a rear courtyard, were waiting. I found my courier, the riveter's apprentice, in a kitchen, eating a large meal of boiled potatoes and margarine. I ordered him to mobilize my group of Detachment Two of the Red Marines—and to tell the men to assemble outside of the suburban train station at Harburg at a certain point on the Hamburg - Bremen Railway line at 12:30 sharp. The riflemen were to be left with a Party member in Kirchenstiel, to be called for later. The boy clattered downstairs, still munching.

Then I took the local train to Harburg, a journey of twenty minutes. The night was dark, windy, and not cold. I felt so hot that I loosened the woolen scarf I wore around my neck and unbuttoned my windbreaker. The Harburg comrades assembled a lot of stolen bicycles in a vacant store a couple of blocks from the station. Here the front door was locked, there were no lights, but a side-door, opening on an alley, was open. Comrades were stationed at the corners to warn against occasional policemen. I received a bicycle and crossed the waterways. Once out on the highway, I extinguished the light, and followed the railway line until a cluster of long low sheds popped out of the night. On a siding stood a few empty freight cars. This was our point of assembly. A dark figure leaped suddenly on the highway and raised an arm.

"Halt!"

In the shadows of the empty freight cars huddled a group of Ideal Communists. None of them had firearms. By midnight sixty men from my detachment had arrived. Half an hour later two stragglers from another detachment appeared. They had lost their way or misunderstood their directions. Both of them had Belgian pistols. At 12:45 I said:

"Let's go."

The signal for assault sounded. I and a few others pushed out into the dark street. Instantly, the screech of whining lead drove us back into the house. The sidewalk was littered with dead and wounded. Gray, fire-spitting things moved forward. Armored cars.

We had been taught how to stop armored cars. Here and there hand-grenades were thrown out of windows and low windows. Only one of them exploded. The others [illegible] the street. Instantly, the screech of whining lead drove us back into the house. The sidewalk was littered with dead and wounded. Gray, fire-spitting things moved forward. Armored cars.

We had been taught how to stop armored cars. Here and there hand-grenades were thrown out of windows and low windows. Only one of them exploded. The others [illegible] the street. The armored cars continued to advance, raking the [illegible] youth carrying a bottle of gasoline darted out of a doorway and ran up to the first [illegible] smashed both bottles against the armor and then was [illegible] machine-gun bullets. In the moments of his death he threw a [illegible] rags on the back of the gray thing. This man I can never forget him. He was the most perfect thing I saw in Hamburg rising. The armored car was enveloped in flame and smoke, and the faster it moved, the brighter the flames became. At the end of the block it stopped. But two others continued, machine-guns spitting.

By now I was, with many others, in the street. Police counter-attacked in the shelter of armored cars. A few barricades of cobblestones at the end of the street stopped them. From a window, a solitary figure took a potshot at civilians and policemen. No one attempted to clear away the obstacle. Before waves of attacking police we scattered into side streets. We retreated, scuttling from doorway to doorway, shooting before we ran. Of my detachment, the Red Marines, I saw nothing more. Around me, men I had never seen before, were shooting and yelling. And then we all ran, each man for himself, each man abruptly aware, it seemed, of the paramount task of saving his own skin.

Retreat is the death of any insurrection. What had begun as a concerted assault ended in a desperate defense, in equally desperate but short-lived attacks, and a guerrilla warfare which knew no leaders except those who took charge of haphazardly assembled groups before they were smashed and dispersed a few minutes later.

In the chill morning we attacked. The trenches crossing the highways were well - manned to prevent the penetration of police or troops from Hamburg. We advanced in four columns, each with its own important objective. I was assigned to the force which was to raid the dynamite factory; instructed at 1 a.m. I did my duty as a good soldier of the revolution.

Small assault groups went ahead to disrupt the communication lines of the defenders, and to test the strongest points in the defense of the main buildings. We had planned a surprise coup, but it was we who were surprised. The resistance was fierce. Soon rifles cracked from the windows of workers' dwellings and from the roof on the rambling factory. We gained ground slowly through backyards and gardens, and worked ourselves through many of the small one - family houses that skirted the factory area. An armored lorry was stopped with two hand-grenades. By the time our squad faced the factory gates, half of our number had fallen in the fire.

The day turned into a nightmare. I saw a girl from the Communist first-aid columns who had followed us in Berlin tend the wounded. Her mouth and chin were half-torn away by a slug, and she was still whimpering. We did not take the dynamite factory. We were pressed back into the trenches which followed the crest of a low hill, and there we held out until the afternoon.

Airplanes droned overhead, dropping leaflets first, and then blazing away with machine-guns. "Surrender," the leaflets said. "Resistance is useless." That I knew, and so did every other man in the trench. But we had no thought of surrender. We would fight until we were dead. Mortars thundered and threw sheets of rock and mud on our heads. And then came a new, dreaded noise: the juicy hammering of heavy machine guns. Terrified shrieking followed.

"The navy! The navy!"

We had believed in the revolutionary tradition of the navy. We had hoped that our propagandists would cause a naval revolt when the order was given to shoot on workers. We were mistaken. We saw the blue uniformed men, throw themselves to the ground, rise and run again. They were sailors from a destroyer flotilla that had slipped quietly early in the morning.

Here and there a Communist threw away his gun and ran. More followed, and then we all abandoned our weapons and fled. We ran like hunted hares in all directions. The "hurrahs" of the sailors sounded menacing and hollow as they charged with bayonets fixed.

Fleeing Communists asked one another: "Where do we concentrate? Where is the Communist?"

"Don't know," was the invariable answer. "Get a breathing spell, and keep on fighting till we know what's happened in Berlin."

Berlin? Berlin was calm. A message from Zinoviev had postponed the revolution. Every third member of the Hamburg Party machine was either dead or wounded or in jail.

But the Party is like an animal with seven lives. After our rout in Geesthacht, I was hidden with three others in the home of a partisan who was a Party courier, tombing through the houses of sympathizers, brought orders from Otto Marquardt's staff to assemble a few miles south of Ahrensburg. We headed toward Hamburg, each man alone. Some went by boat, some followed by rails, and others trudged along the roads. Many were arrested by police patrols on the way.

On Thursday, the third day of the rising, shooting continued all through the night, single shots, and now and then, a strong fusillade or a burst of machine-gun fire.

Off a street called Wandbecker Chausee I found a worker who had been shot through the stomach. He groaned at regular intervals, and after each groan, he bit into the barrel of his Russian carbine. Passers-by made a cautious circle around the fallen man and hurried on. I picked him up and carried him around a corner, in the hope of finding a friendly house. I had never been in this section of the city before. I dragged the wounded man into a gap between two houses and tried to speak to him to find out who he was. He could not answer. Like all of us, he had left his identification papers at home. I fell asleep behind three garbage cans, and when I awoke toward the morning, the worker was dead. I dragged the corpse back to the street, and propped him against a wall so that a cruising ambulance could find him. Then I took his rifle; only two cartridges were left.

Ahrensburg, just outside Hamburg on the railroad to Luebeck, was manned by the hands of Red Hondrédis. Headquarters was the railway station. Men slept on the stone floor, and others trampled over them without heed. A stocky man was in charge, and a mad plan was afoot.

The plan was to seize the central station of Hamburg, which had a commanding position. Eight important thoroughfares ended at the station. Spies had been sent to find out the strength of police and troops guarding the terminal. The stocky man wanted to fill a local train with armed men, run it into Hamburg, and overwhelm the station. A new consignment of Russian rifles had arrived from Luebeck.

"Once you're inside, massacre every uniform you see," the stocky man said.

A thin Communist with a meek face and a drooping mouth protested. "Do you want to murder us all?" he cried. "Do tell Thaelmann and Brandler and Lenin to storm the damned station themselves."

The stocky man pushed the defeatist against a door.

"Hold still, my boy," he murmured.

In a flash he drew his pistol and shot the thin man through the head.

A murmur went up and a few "Bravos." Many of us crashed our rifles to the floor. I was sick of it, and so were others. For a minute it seemed that our comrade would murder comrade.

"We're through," someone said.

The argument stopped when a scout arrived from the Hamburg station. He reported 200 policemen hidden in the waiting rooms. Posters in the city squares had the caption: "Persons bearing arms against the Government are subject to the death penalty."

Resistance had become a farce. We had no leaders. Demoralization took its course. Isolated rebel units, still fighting out of sheer stubbornness and, perhaps, a craving for revenge, retreated along the Luebeck Road. The vast majority, broken, bedraggled, disgusted, sauntered away, each man leaving the next to shift for himself.

"What did we get out of it?" one of my companions asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"I wish I knew," the other mumbled forlornly.

A skirmish line of policemen bore down the street.

"We'd better separate," I proposed.

"All right."

We parted. I felt as if I should never be happy again or enthusiastic about anything as long as I lived. So much bloodshed and suffering! It made a man want to turn his face to the clouds and roar, so great was the pain. For what? When I entered the Cafe Bunte Kuh in St. Pauli above which I had rented a shabby little room, someone pointed out to me a police patrol. There was no chance to flee. The people were hostile. A policeman held me in a grip that threatened to break my arm. So I was led to the police post on the Davidstrasse.

The small jail was overcrowded. The cells were packed with arrested men, and new arrivals were herded into the guard rooms which were so crowded that men stood on each other's feet. The usual organized rowdyism of a band of Communists in jail found no response in this gathering. A dismal stench filled the place, faces were surly or stole, and except for the ribaldry of a few intoxicated sailors, men spoke in whispers. After a wretched hour I was called out and pushed aboard an open truck together with many other prisoners. On the rear end of the truck, his carbine across his knees, sat a policeman. We sat on the floor boards, hands raised above our heads, while the truck sped toward the headquarters of the Security Police.

The policeman on the rear end of the lorry was young, and his face was gaunt and sunken from lack of sleep. On the way, the prisoner next to him, a gorilla of a man, lashed out at the guard with both feet. Both pitched to the pavement. The truck stopped, his siren twittering for aid. A policeman jumped down from the front seat, his pistol drawn.

"Nobody move," he commanded.

The next instant he began to shoot. We tumbled off the lorry in a welter of arms and legs, and sprinted away in all directions. The street in which the lorry had stopped was long and straight and narrow, but to the left lay the ancient section of Hamburg, a labyrinth of alleys, crooked passages and crumbling houses. The denizens of the Gaengeviertel—the alley quarter—are prostitutes, pimps, criminals and down-and-outers of every description, hated the police and helped the hunted.

I emerged after dark. That night I spent in the apartment of Erika Zeyngansk. Other fugitives were there, two wounded, and all utterly exhausted. We slept on the floor like dead men. Erika, after an sleepless night, was as good-looking and practical as ever. She had summoned a Communist physician to treat the wounded. The touch of her firm, cool hand as it stroked over a face hot with fever and crusted with dirt, was like a fairy tale come true. Blood and filth could not affect her. Those who could, departed after a bath and a breakfast of coffee, butter and rolls. The morning papers reported that 400 dead and wounded had been counted in hospitals and morgues; one-third of the known casualties were policemen. An unknown number of Communist casualties were still hidden away in the homes of partisans.

"The police will be after me," I told Erika. "I must go away."

"Where will you go?"

"I'm going back to sea."

"Never forget the cause you fought for," she said. "You can keep up contact with the Party through me."

(Continued Monday.)

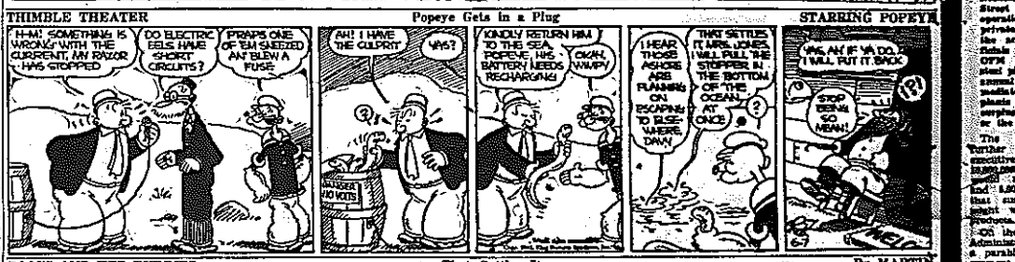
Say, "I saw it in The News." Thank you.

BLONDIE — The Odds Are Against Him! — By CHIC YOUNG

GASOLINE ALLEY — Problem in Addition — By FRANK KING

RED RYDER — On Red's Trail — By FRED HARMAN

THIMBLE THEATER — Popeye Gets in a Plug — STARRING POPEYE



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES — That Settles It — By MARTIN

LI'L ABNER — It Hain't Hoomin — By AL CAPP

WASH TUBBS — Calling All Dogs — By ROY CRANE

SUPERMAN — Interested Onlooker — By JERRY SIEGEL and Joe SHUSTER