

(Flight Over Berlin
Before It Fell to
the allies)

LOWELL THOMAS' BROADCAST FROM PARIS

April 24, 1945

GOOD EVENING, EVERYBODY:-

I am not going to attempt to cover the European war news tonight, even in brief; for the reason that I don't know what the latest is. Since early this morning I have been flying most of the time, and have just returned to Paris. Since arriving I have heard the story that Marshal Petain is coming to France, coming from Germany by way of Switzerland, to stand trial. But I hear this has not been confirmed. I also have just heard that the storming of Hitler's mountain redoubt has begun, in fact has been underway for several days. But where I was, farther north at the Front, we heard not one word about that. At the Front you seldom know anything about anything that is going on anywhere else, and frequently you don't even know what is going on right where you are. Oh yes, and in the few minutes I have been in Paris tonight I ran into a dozen distinguished American editors, who arrived here by airplane, this evening. Just in from the other side of the Atlantic, in response to General Eisenhower

and General Marshall's suggestion that they see some of the German murder camps with their own eyes. So much for what I don't know about the day's news -- because I have just flown to Paris from Berlin.

Several days ago a group of us heard that the Russians had taken Berlin. We started to fly there, then decided to check, and found the Russians were not within miles of Berlin. Since then my colleagues went on to the Italian Front, while I decided to stay and have another try at Hitler's capital. The Russians are there now. I witnessed some of the fighting at Berlin today, and with my own eyes saw the city in flames, saw the bombardment going on between the Russians and the Nazis, and then raced back across half Europe to go on the air here in Paris tonight.

With a crack Army Air Force pilot of the 67th Reconnaissance Group of the 9th Air Force, I flew to Berlin in a P-51 Mustang. It came about this way:-

For two days I had been with the ground troops nearest the advancing Russians, with General Terry Allen and his 104th Division, the Timberwolves, on the Mulde River, with the Russians about eighteen miles away, and the Germans in between. All along the Front the one question has been: When do we join up with the Russians? An artillery spotter for the Timberwolves brought word that the Russians, some miles

to the north of us were driving west at top speed. From where he was in his little plane, it looked as though the Second Armored Division of the Ninth Army might be the first to make the junction.

When I heard this I decided to try and find a fighter pilot who would like to take a look all up and down the Front. Back at the 67th Reconnaissance Group they had invited me to do this some days before. So there I flew in a light artillery observation plane. And in no time at all two fast Mustangs were out on the line and we were off.

In one, alone, was the officer in command of the 67th, Lieutenant Colonel Dick Leghorn of Winchester, Massachusetts. His job, to "fly cover," as they call it. Protect us from enemy aircraft. He to scan the sky for enemy planes. We to do the looking for the Russians; also for German troops and airfields -- and, maybe, Berlin. My pilot was Lieutenant Colonel Karl Kraft of Clarks, Louisiana, No. 2 in command of the 67th. Both were single-seater fighter planes. With me, squeezed in behind Kraft. Piggyback they call it. The most cramped position so far devised by man. But that's unimportant; here are some of the things we saw: -

Berlin in flames. Although not entirely. Potsdam, and the southern side of the city seemed comparatively undamaged. The rest of it -- in flames from one end to the other. We swung in over Berlin

at about four thousand feet. Much too low. But we had to because of the heavy cloud layer above us. Below us an artillery duel was going on. Apparently the heavy guns on both sides going all out. Dense clouds of smoke were rolling over Berlin, concealing much of it. We spotted a couple of planes several thousand feet lower. Leghorn and Kraft thought they were ME 109's.

All this time, off to the south of us we could hear other American pilots -- none coming as far north as Berlin -- we could hear them talking back and forth, from plane to plane, arguing as to whether or not the Russians, near Dessau, had actually met the 2nd Armored Division of the Ninth Army. So maybe the junction was effected today. I can't be sure.

Before flying north to Berlin, and again after we turned south from Hitler's smoking funeral pyre, the bombardment and burning of the world's fourth largest city which we had been watching in awe from the sky, we also looked for the Russian armies. Our first landmark as we headed for Berlin was Leipzig -- or rather, the ruins of Leipzig; then east over the American First Army Front, and on still farther east towards the Russians. As we crossed the Mulde, with Nazi-held territory under us, we were on the lookout for a vast multitude of people reported to be heading for the American lines. They may have met our troops by now. If so, it will be the largest single mass

surrender so far in the European war. An American artillery observation plane spotted them yesterday. The pilot, Captain Ken Morris, told me there were between twenty thousand and thirty thousand German soldiers, without weapons and without helmets, fleeing from the Russians; evidently hoping to surrender to the Americans. As we crossed the Mulde, at Wurzen, on the south side of that town, I saw a huge encampment. So, they apparently had gotten that far.

As we flew on towards the Elbe, we passed over several Nazi airfields with dozens of planes dispersed about them. But none took off to chase us; and as we flew on to where the Russians must have been right below us, we encountered neither German nor Russian planes. We did see long lines of Russian motor vehicles however, with their telltale markings. But no special flares were fired. So we fired none of another color -- the way by which we are supposed to recognize and salute each other.

Re-crossing over Nazi territory, and following the Elbe and then the Mulde north to where the two rivers join at Dessau, we saw fires every mile or so, which to us indicated that the Russians had advanced to the middle of the German-held corridor between the rivers, or that the fires had been started by Russian artillery. And then from Dessau, we headed right up the Autobahn for Berlin.

Before setting out from the headquarters of the 67th Reconnaissance Group we were fully briefed. All planes coming in report on weather, flak pockets, enemy planes -- everything they see. So if you are starting out you have the benefit of all this. As we flew over flak areas Colonel Kraft swung our Mustang from side to side. Which meant that we did a sort of aerial jazz dance through the sky, as we flew to Berlin -- dancing like that so we would make the poorest possible target for the Nazi anti-aircraft batteries, which have been famous for their accuracy.

The trip was a routine mission, the main purpose to check on the advancing Russians, locate German planes on airfields, and so on. The only part that wasn't routine was our going to Berlin. That was beyond the 67th's zone of operation. But the two flying Colonels wanted to go as much as I did. They had never made it all the way to Berlin. And they wanted to verify with their own eyes the reports coming in that the Russians, at last, were in Hitler's capital, blasting it to bits. They verified this. And so did I.

I had another reason, an unimportant reason, for wanting to get to Berlin in these closing hours of the European end of World War Two. Twenty-seven years ago, at the end of World War One, Webb Waldron - then with Collier's, now an editor of the Readers

buildings. Twenty-one of Berlin's metropolitan districts are in Russian hands. ^{one hundred and twenty - ~~thirty~~ ^{five} square miles} ~~One unit, composed of veterans of Stalingrad and Budapest, is marching on the heart of the city. Ahead of them is a group which carries the biggest red banner ever made, which they intend to hoist over the ruins of Hitler's Chancelory on the Wilhelmstrasse.~~

~~But that is not the complete story of the Soviet advance. Zhukov's columns have also captured Frankfurt on the Oder, captured it a week ago.~~

Further south, Konev's armor is only eleven miles away from Dresden. According to the Paris radio, the advance guards have already broken into the suburbs. They have seized Mühlberg on the Elbe River, and the probability is that the Russians have already joined up with the United States First Army by this time.

Dispatches from Stockholm bring tales of rioting

in Berlin, with foreign workers revolting, even some Berlin civilians. One story told of their having stormed an arsenal, taken all the weapons they could find, and seizing an industrial district in the south of Berlin, with the police making no attempt to keep order. The firemen have long since given up any effort to check the flames. Three passengers who escaped on the last plane to Stockholm reported they left behind a ~~xxx~~ ^{state} of complete chaos, with mobs hunting down members of the Gestapo.

The Hamburg Radio, the only big one still under Nazi control, claims that Adolf Hitler is in personal command of the one hundred thousand S S Elite troops left in Berlin, ~~at the moment~~

WESTERN FRONT

So much for the Battle of Berlin, but far more important for the future is the feat accomplished by George Patton's armor in the south. *Patton has* (Once again ~~he~~) completely fooled the Germans. He was apparently aiming for Chemnitz. But that was a feint. He suddenly sent his tanks wheeling southeast toward the Bavarian redoubt, *dashing through bewildered German towns and villages.* ~~The~~ *he* is within a short distance of effecting a junction with the Russians and ~~shutting~~ *shutting* off ~~all~~ the entire German garrison in Czechoslovakia. *Noab* The Eleventh armored division of Patton's army forced the ~~N~~ River at two places and drove on southeast, by-passing Regensburg and approaching the Russians.

The Seventh Army of General Patch is also driving toward the Bavarian redoubt. It advanced ten miles on a hundred mile front. The Seventh is only seventeen miles away from the French First Army, which has a number of Germans sewed up in a pocket east of Lake Constance.

The great fact about all these operations in Bavaria, is that they are destroying the German hopes of making a prolonged stand in their much vaunted redoubt.

Meanwhile, in the north a junction between the U.S. Ninth and the Russians is also expected at any moment, may have happened already.

News is being made so fast that the ~~correspondents~~ correspondents are hardly able to keep up with it.

On the North Sea front, British forces are slamming hard at both Hamburg and Bremen. Montgomery's artillery ~~and~~ and Allied bombers have turned Bremen into a furnace. Evidently the Germans are prepared to see their second largest port completely demolished rather than surrender it. The bombing is literally non-stop, night and day. Huge fires light up the horizon. British artillery is shelling the German ships in the Elbe River, while Montgomery's tanks are coming closer and closer to Hamburg.

The Battle of Holland has come to life again.
British forces crossed the Maas River south of Amsterdam,
the first activity we've heard about that region since
November.

And here is an item which indicates that what
is left of the Nazi government begins to realize its doom.
It has offered to leave all Allied prisoners of war in
prison camps as the Allies advance, and not drag them
along in the retreat of the German armies. The War
Department in Washington announces that the Government of
the United States has accepted the offer. Allied planes
tonight dropped leaflets all over Germany, warning
German officers in charge of prisoners that they will be
held individually responsible for anything that happens
to the prisoners. The warning was signed by President
Truman, Prime Minister Churchill, and Marshal Stalin.

And now a word from Hugh James for
Standard Oil of California.

KOEPENICK

In the minor news from the Western Front today appears the name of a suburb of Berlin which would be unknown to most Americans but for an amusing adventure that happened there in Nineteen Twelve and 'Thirteen, the town of Koepenick. The story of "The Captain of Koepenick" became a classic illustration of one aspect of the German character.

The hero of the story was a criminal who in some manner obtained possession of the uniform of a captain of infantry. Arrayed in this uniform, he strutted down the streets of Koepenick, and a platoon of soldiers led by a non-commissioned officer, gave the customary salute: "Eyes right with goose step heels rapping loudly on the pavement."

The phoney captain halted the platoon, gave them the order, about turn, and marched them down to the city ^{hall} There he ordered them to fix bayonets, marched them inside

into the office of the city treasurer, and in the name of His Imperial Majesty, the Kaiser, grabbed every cent that was in the city treasury. Neither the non-commissioned officer nor the privates ever thought of questions ^{ing} the orders of the man in the captain's uniform. Having acquired possession of the money, he sent the ~~officers~~ ~~and~~ soldiers back to barracks, and then walked off himself.

I've always had a sneaking feeling that the Captain of Koepenick deserved to escape. But unfortunately he did not. The pol~~it~~zei caught up with him, recovered most of the Koepenick city treasure, and deposited the adventurous lad in what we call over here the Big House.

ITALY

The news from the Italian front tonight gives the impression that the Allied Fifth and Eighth Armies have broken the German dam. After the capture of Bologna, the Fifth advanced from twenty to thirty-five miles north and northwest. They are now pushing fast toward the Po River, while the Germans are falling back upon the big industrial cities in northern Italy

In the east, the British Eighth Army is advancing on Ferrara, and early this afternoon was not much more than a mile away.

LABOR

There is a story current in Washington today that the next Secretary of Labor may be Edward F. McGrady, who held the job of Assistant Secretary under Madam Perkins for four years. A prominent veteran in the American Federation of Labor, McGrady at present is in charge of labor relations for the Radio Corporation of America, and on the side gives his services as special Labor Consultant to the Secretary of War. He was once President of the Pressmen's Union.

President Truman is believed to be considering him as a successor to Madam Perkins. Whether that is true or not, stories accumulate in the capital that the Madam will be the first of the Roosevelt Cabinet members to be replaced.

PACIFIC

Admiral Nimitz tells us tonight that warships and carrier based planes of the Pacific fleet have been battering Japanese positions on Okinawa for five days running.. The Tokyo radio claimed that Japanese suicide planes had inflicted heavy losses on the Pacific Fleet. Nimitz admits they did some damage and sank one small vessel. On the other hand, the Nipponese lost one hundred and twenty six more of their planes.

Our three United States Army divisions on Okinawa are up against the strongest defenses they have yet faced in the Pacific war. The American drive has definitely been slowed up, but the Yanks recaptured the village which they lost over the weekend when Japanese troops slipped through our lines in the darkness of Saturday night. The Seventh, Twenty-Seventh, and Ninety-Sixth Divisions are still facing some sixty thousand Japanese troops.

PHILIPPINES

General MacArthur reports ~~ix~~ tonight that his infantry on Mindanao have cut the Japanese forces in two, captured an important road junction and are well on the way to Davao, the principal city of the island.

BUTLER

In the West as in the East, the resignation of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler as President of Columbia University is an event in the history of American education. He quits at the age of eighty three after forty four years of service as President of Columbia, the most famous living person in the field of education. He is also an outstanding figure in politics, having ~~xxxxxxx~~ been candidate for Vice President of the United States in Nineteen Thirteen and a candidate for the Presidential Nomination in Nineteen Twenty. In the evil days of prohibition Nicholas Murray Butler was the only college President who ^{openly} ~~had the courage to~~ oppose ~~it~~ and denounce ~~it~~.

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PEACE

San Francisco is ~~already~~ all ready for the great conference. Most of the delegates of the United Nations are already there working for the big event to begin Wednesday. But up to a late hour this evening the Foreign Ministers of the big three, United States Great Britain and Russia were still in Washington. They are still trying to reach an agreement about Poland. Both Washington and San Francisco are rife with questions and guesses about the discussions among the Big Three. Stettinius Anthony Eden and Molotov are expected to arrive in San Francisco tomorrow night.

A bulletin came in from Washington less than an hour ago that the Foreign Ministers of the Big Three had been unable to agree. They broke off their discussions for the time being and called in T. V. Soong, the Foreign Minister of China. ~~Then~~ By taking in Soong the Big Three became the Big Four and set about *d*rafting plans for the machinery and

procedure of the San Francisco Conference.

The White House announces that the discussion of the Polish question will be resumed at the Golden Gate. That will give Molotov time to get fresh instructions from ~~himself~~ in the Kremlin.

LEISURE

Here is the story of a scientist who believes that one of the approaching menaces to civilization is too much leisure. Dr. Lucas Kyrides of the staff of a large chemical company says that many people who need the attention of psychiatrists get that way because they use their leisure time unwisely. Too many people talk of retiring at an early age, little realizing that only a healthy mind and a sound body can preserve us from boredom. Idleness, he points out, is good for chickens and many other animals, because it improves the flavor of their meat. The same process applied to man brings about fatty degeneration of both mind and body. In other words, a good dose of hard work is a human necessity.

Now we'll hear from a man who does plenty of hard work, Hugh James ~~speaking~~ ^{speaking} with a message from ~~Sunoco~~.

Standard of California -

Taken from early bc.

COAL

Tonight it looks as though our worries over coal might be over for the time being at any rate. The War Labor Board has approved the contract, which will increase the pay of the workers about a dollar and thirty cents a day.

Before Economic Stabilizer William H. Davis can make a ^{final} decision, he will have to have a report ~~xx~~ from O.P.A., estimating how much the increase in wages will boost the price of coal.

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The Congressional Medal of Honor is shortly to be conferred upon a newspaperman for the first time in history, that newspaperman being, of course, the late Ernie Pyle. The medal will be awarded ~~posthumously~~ posthumously. Bills have been introduced in both the House and the Senate to this end. Republican ~~Representative~~ Representative Raymond Springer of Indiana is one of the sponsors for the bill in the lower House. He said today that Pyle left an indelible impression on the hearts of the American people, and that is one statement by a Congressman which nobody will dispute.