

had apparently witnessed a minor argument and, assuming the worst, had pushed the panic button. We stayed until the game was over anyway, and I got to meet my first Russians. They didn't seem very friendly, but they were certainly not antagonistic either.

XIV. MP ROUTINE

Eventually the rest of the 78th Division moved in, the 82nd moved out, and we settled in to a routine that was to last for most of us until our service-point level was enough to get us home. The MP Company lived in a small garden apartment complex of row houses on a quiet, tree-lined street in a pleasant, mostly undamaged section of the city. Across the street was a parking lot that had become our motor pool. I was designated a Jeep driver and was assigned my own Jeep, for which I became responsible. We patrolled in these, in two-man teams, every other day from about 4:00 p.m. to 12:45 a.m. Thus we had 40 idle hours for every eight that we worked, or so it seemed much of the time. We had to service and maintain our vehicles, keep our living quarters clean, and perform other small military chores, but our off-patrol duties were not onerous. On patrol, we rode the streets looking for traffic violations, made the rounds of drinking spots to put in our appearance, and did what sometimes seemed to be our most important duty, enforcing the midnight curfew imposed on all 78th Division troops. This we did mostly by being a presence, though often we'd give an errant potential violator a ride to his billet. We surely were not strained by over-work, and we began to make varied use of our off hours. Because of our Jeeps (which we could use as we wanted, not just on duty) and the nature of our work, we had total mobility and got to know our part of the city very well. This gave us full access to the three most popular

activities: womanizing, drinking, and the black market—and whatever else might take our fancy.

Some of us drank very heavily, so heavily in fact that it is still somewhat of a wonder to me that I didn't do any permanent damage to myself—which apparently is so. We came upon a Berliner who claimed to have two barrels of good cognac in his possession, which some of us bought from him at the rate of two bottles each every other day, delivered like milk. Fortunately for us it was good cognac and not denatured alcohol or something worse, for there was never any left over when the next delivery came.

Our own enlisted men's club was in a little bar in a shopping area around the corner from where we lived. There we spent many of our off evenings drinking peppermint schnapps, which I never worked up much real enthusiasm for. Occasionally we would be entertained in the club by a small orchestra that had purportedly accompanied Max Schmelling on vaudeville tours after his retirement from the boxing ring. There was a movie theater in the neighborhood too, where we often saw American films with German sub-titles.

Women we found to be plentiful and very accommodating. There weren't very many young German men left around in any case, but, to offer besides ourselves, we had food—especially chocolate—soap, cigarettes, and other luxuries in ample supply which were totally unavailable elsewhere in Berlin. We found the girls oddly loyal and compliant. Picked by a soldier as a companion, and there never seemed to be any compunction about which individual selected her, the girl would make herself completely and exclusively available to him until he either was transferred out or told her he was no longer interested in her, whereupon she would take up with the next man who asked her to. I never heard of any permanent liaisons, but there were far too many of these girls around for them all to have been prostitutes. However, venereal disease was almost epidemic, and a real problem, although I escaped contamination that way myself. In the small, rather private quarters that we inhabited those who wished to were able to entertain women overnight in their own beds for most of the duration of my stay in Berlin. I recall being amused by a notice on the bulletin board when we first moved in with the 82nd Division, to the effect that all women had to be out of the buildings by 0800 hours. The notice was not removed for some time after we moved in, if ever.

The black market was another aspect of our excessive leisure time. Most of us were heavy smokers and constrained by our addictions to consume all of our weekly ration of cigarettes. However, sometimes a few could be saved out, it might be possible to purchase rations from non-smokers who didn't have our black market contacts, or cigarettes could be mailed from home. It is hard for me to realize now, when cigarettes and smoking mean nothing more to me than an occasional minor annoyance, that they were then not only a medium of exchange, but also the most important and precious medium there was. Black market dealing was, of course, illegal. However, at our level of military police work we were never called upon to attempt any sort of control. In fact, just the opposite; since our work afforded us so much mobility we were able to engage in sub-legal trade with more ease and success than most of our compatriots. Most of us were not committed criminals, however, and our operations were limited to turning the odd two or three cartons of cigarettes into a Leica or perhaps some family jewelry of questionable value.