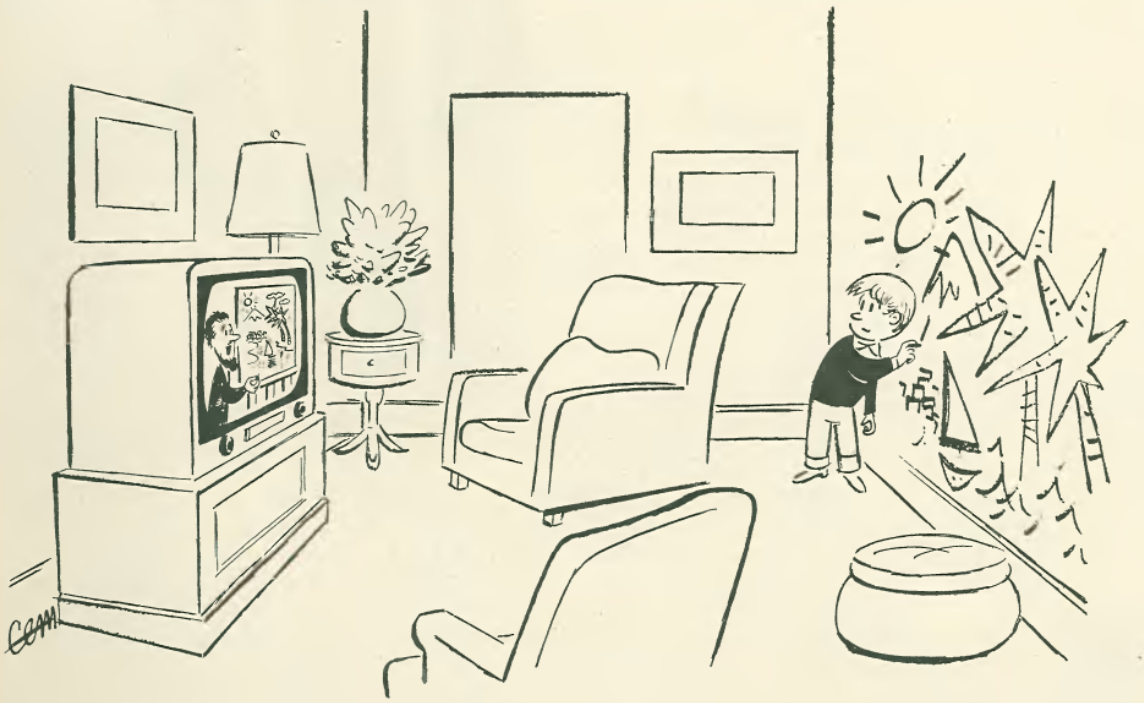
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE WOODEN BEAM

I HAVE never broken the laws of Czechoslovakia, my native land, where I lived for over thirty years before I moved to the United States, but if I were to return now, I would be treated worse than a common criminal. It is bad enough for a native American to be apprehended in any of the forbidden parts of the world that lie behind the Iron Curtain (American passports have been invalid in Czechoslovakia since last June), but it would be much worse for a former citizen of one of the Soviet satellites who, like me, left his homeland and became a citizen of another country. According to the peculiar notions currently widespread in the Soviet orbit, such a change of status automatically makes a man a "traitor" to the land of his birth. Ever since the door was slammed shut, I have been troubled now and then by this realization that under no circumstances could I safely go back to visit my native land. Not that I particularly want to go back; what disturbs me is the knowledge that I couldn't go back if I did want to. Never, perhaps, have I felt this more strongly than one day not long ago when I found myself six inches over the border—on Czechoslovakian soil. It was an accident, of course; in fact, the whole day had an accidental quality about it. I was driving through the eastern part of Bavaria, in the American Zone of Germany, at the time, and had stopped for a cup of coffee at a small inn in the town of Waidhaus. I knew that the Czechoslovak border was not far away—only a couple of miles to the east—but it didn't occur to me to visit it until I struck up a conversation with Herr Hájek, the local *Grenzpolizei-Kommissar* (Commissioner of Border Police), who was sitting in the inn drinking tea with rum. We talked about the last war, politics, and the border, three subjects that for the people in this part of the world have taken the place of the weather, crops, and inflation.

I had passed through Waidhaus at the end of the war, when I was a sergeant in the American Army. Shortly before reaching the town, I'd heard that the Czechoslovakian fight for liberation had just started in Prague, and I was impatient to get back to the country in which I had been brought up and which I had last seen in 1938. I was elated to find myself so close to it, and as I approached the border and saw the yellow signs with black inscriptions that indicated the road to Pilsen, I felt a real thrill. Now, sitting there in the inn and chatting with Herr Hájek, I found it difficult to realize that all this had occurred only seven years before.

Herr Hájek, a tall man with the ruddy complexion that comes from being out-of-doors most of the time, finished his tea and said he had to get back to his post, near the border. I offered him a lift, and he accepted. After I drove to the edge of the town and came out on the highway, I saw the yellow road signs with black inscriptions that I remembered so well—"NACH PILSEN 71 KILOMETER," one of them read. That meant forty-four miles. It was then half past ten in the morning. I was thinking that if distance were the only consideration, I could easily be in Prague in time for lunch when Herr Hájek interrupted my musings with a request that I let him off in front of the customhouse. As I stopped the car, I instinctively looked in the rear-view mirror to make sure there was no car immediately behind me. It was an unnecessary precaution; the highway, the main automotive link between Western Europe and Czechoslovakia, was deserted. Herr Hájek said there was rarely any traffic on it nowadays. As recently as two years ago, he said, big trucks had pounded over it, one after another, bringing food into Czechoslovakia from Belgium and the Scandinavian countries, and private cars would be lined up, bumper to bumper, on both sides of the border, waiting for clearance by the customs authorities. At present, the only cars going through were those belonging to members of the diplomatic corps in Prague; sometimes there would be one of these a day, or possibly two—hardly ever more than three. Even accredited diplomats now had to get a special visa each time they crossed the Czechoslovak border; all permanent visas were cancelled last January. Czechoslovak citizens, except those travelling on government business—both diplomatic and mercantile—were no longer permitted to leave the country. There was no local border traffic. People living close to one side of the boundary were not allowed by the Czech authorities to visit friends and relatives on the other side.



Ahead of us, so near that I could see the individual trees, was a growth of pine on the slope of a hill, and that hill, Herr Hájek said, was part of Czechoslovakia. The countryside in that direction looked calm and peaceful, as calm and peaceful as the countryside through which we had just driven, but as I sat there,

I found myself wondering how many millions of Czechs would give all they owned for the privilege of looking at those pines from where I sat. Again Herr Hájek interrupted my thoughts, this time by inviting me into the customhouse. The sky was clouded over, and as we got out of the car, we encountered a raw wind. "That damn wind!" Herr Hájek said. "Always from the east. We call it the Bohemian wind." As an afterthought, he said, "We called it that long before we ever had trouble on the border."

Herr Hájek ushered me into his small office. He appeared glad to have someone to talk to. It was lonely on his border post now, he told me. In the old days, before the Communist *Putsch* in Czechoslovakia, a pleasant camaraderie had existed between the Czech and Bavarian border guards. Sometimes they would meet at a border inn for a glass of beer and a smoke. There had been lots of activity then, too, because of all the smuggling, or attempted smuggling, that went on—cigarettes, coffee, and saccharin moving from Germany to Czechoslovakia; textiles, sometimes concealed in secret compartments built into trucks, moving in the opposite direction. Then, as time went on, frightened Czechs in increasing numbers had tried to smuggle out their gold and jewelry. The Czech and Bavarian guards had worked together at the job of catching the smugglers. But all that had come to an end. Nowadays, a Czech border guard wouldn't even pass the time of day with a Bavarian guard unless he was alone and could be certain no one was likely to appear who might report him for being friendly with Westerners.

"The Czech guards I used to know have been replaced by carefully selected Czech soldiers and S.N.B. men," Herr Hájek said. ("S.N.B." stands for Sbor Národní Bezpečnosti, or National Security Corps.) "Twice in the past couple of weeks, I have had to see them on official business. I have a Czech name and I speak Czech, like many people living in this border region, and both times the Czech guards tried to sound me out about politics and prices and working conditions and what people on our side think of it all. The last time I saw them was a few days ago, when a Czech soldier came across the border, pretending to be drunk. He mumbled something about wanting to claim asylum as a political refugee, but we knew better. So I got in touch with the head officer at the Czech post over there, and he asked me to bring the man down. I must have sound-

ed sort of jittery, because he said I shouldn't worry, I would be all right." Herr Hájek laughed dryly at the very idea of a Czech officer's promise of safe-conduct. "Well, I walked down to the post with the Czech soldier. I was armed with my service revolver. The Czech officer was waiting in front of his headquarters. He was flanked by six men with tommy guns. He assured me that everything was all right, and he was quite friendly, but I had— well, I had a sort of funny feeling, just the same."

Herr Hájek shrugged self-consciously, as though he were embarrassed at having to admit that a member of the Bavarian border police was ever afraid of anybody, and then continued, "The Czech officer took me aside and told me an involved story about how he wanted us to send back two Czechs who had come over to our side a few weeks before, claiming to be political refugees. He told me they were anything but that. One, he said, was a common criminal, and the other had run away because he was having trouble with his wife over an illegitimate child he had by another woman. He insisted that they should be refused political asylum and turned back to him. I said nothing. Fortunately, it's not up to me to decide in such complicated cases." He explained that formerly fugitives who managed to cross the border had been allowed to remain, in the status of political refugees, if they were able to prove that their escape was prompted by "definite, immediate danger to life or limb," but that now the bars had been lowered to such an extent that asylum was granted to anyone who could establish himself as a bona-fide fugitive from Communist oppression. The decision was made by the American occupation authorities. "It's not an easy decision to make," Herr Hájek said. "There's always the risk that people posing as refugees are really Communist agents. You never know."

Herr Hájek shook his head thoughtfully. "The border looks deserted, but there's a lot of illegal activity going on along it," he said. "I suppose you've heard of the Eslarn affair?" I said I hadn't. "Well," he said, "there was this German woman in Regensburg who was going around with American soldiers. Trying to get information about American Army units—their location, size, weapons, even the names of their top sergeants and what they'd had for dinner the night before. She was the brains of a Communist gang. She had assistants

who would see to it that her messages got across the border and into the hands of the Czechs. It was easy for her to recruit them among the Communists who live in Eslarn—that's a Bavarian border town a few kilometres south of here. People from Eslarn often walk along the border looking for mushrooms or firewood. Some of them, in fact, have fields that go right up to the border. We Bavarian border guards began to notice that certain people from Eslarn kept strolling up to the border without getting a rise out of the Czech guards, who are ordinarily on their toes against even the most minor border violations. After a few days of watching these people, we discovered that all of them, at some point in their stroll, circled a hollow tree that was right on the border. We investigated and found that inside the tree, on the Czech side, was a small metal box, in which the messengers from Eslarn were placing their messages and picking up instructions. We let them go on doing it for ten days, until we were sure we had the whole gang, and then we grabbed them." Herr Hájek looked pleased, and held out his hands, wrists together, like a man being handcuffed. "The woman got two and a half years, and the others were given shorter sentences," he said. "You ought to have a look at Eslarn," he added. "That's the main trouble spot. I'd like to show you the place myself, but I'd better stick by my post. We've got a good man in Eslarn, though—Georg Sommer. He'll take you to the border. I warn you, though, don't, under any circumstances, approach the border on your own. You may be sorry if you do."

THANKING Herr Hájek, I took my leave, and drove down to the guards' office at Eslarn. Herr Sommer turned out to be a hard-faced, alert-looking fellow who was running his post with the help of two other men and a police dog. He said he'd be glad to accompany me to the border. "There always used to be a lot of good-natured kidding back and forth across the line," he told me as he got in my car. "There wasn't any hostility until the Communists took over on the other side, and the patrol used to consist of one man. In the daytime, I still patrol alone, but at night I always take one of my men with me, and the dog. We've been shot at twice recently. I don't know whether they intended to shoot us, but the trouble is they now shoot at anything that moves. Some nights, they hide behind trees as we

walk by. We wouldn't know they were there if the dog didn't get restless. The moment he does, we start talking in loud voices, hoping they'll know it's us and not shoot. Makes you almost feel ashamed of yourself." There was the same embarrassed attitude that I had detected in Herr Hájek. "At night, you can't help getting jumpy when you hear steps and see a dark form glide by," Herr Sommer went on. "Sometimes they trail us. It's a regular war of nerves. And yet we're not supposed to be fighting anybody. We're just supposed to be guarding the border."

Eslarn, as we drove through it, looked sleepy and quiet, but Herr Sommer warned me not to be fooled by appearances; Eslarn was dynamite. "It's crowded with refugees from the Czech side who know the country around here much too well for my liking," he said. "You can never trust those refugees, especially the ones who have relatives in Czechoslovakia, who might be held as hostages. We've had all kinds of people going through here in the past few years—whole waves of them. At the end of the war, there were the Sudeten Germans and the Nazis who ran away during the Czech Liberation. They were followed by Russian and Polish deserters from the Red Army. Later came the Czechs, running away from the Czech Communists. Last year, we had as many as two thousand a month in this region alone. Six months ago, there were over a hundred. And today? Hardly any. You'll find out why when we get to the border."

We rode up a gentle rise. Just before we reached the top, I caught sight of a parked American armored car, half hidden under a clump of trees. Two American soldiers were sitting on its top, reading the *Stars & Stripes*. They waved to us, and we waved back. Herr Sommer said that the Americans also patrol the border day and night and that he was glad to have them around.

The top of the hill commanded a sweeping view of sloping fields on the Czech side of the border and, in the foreground, the small town of Eisendorf—part Bavarian and part Czechoslovakian. "See that tower beyond the town?" Herr Sommer said. "It's the Czechs' new observation post. In clear weather, you can spot its telephone wires. They've seen us coming over the hill, and by now they've alerted their border detachment. When we get there, they'll be ready for us."

The road ran down through some woods, past the Eslarn customhouse, and into the main street of Eisendorf. At

first glance, the place looked like most of the towns and villages I had been seeing on my trip through the region—a school, a small inn, the town hall, and many gable-roofed one-story dwellings with fields stretching out behind them. Such towns are rarely very lively, but as we entered the main street of Eisendorf, I became aware of a singularly oppressive silence. Nothing seemed to be stirring. The windows of the inn—a run-down establishment named Gasthof zur Tillyschanze, after General Johann Tserklaes Tilly, who led an army in the Thirty Years' War—were broken and stuffed with newspaper, and the inn garden was full of weeds.

Rounding a bend, we were almost on top of a massive wooden beam that lay across the street as a barrier. I slammed on the brakes so hard that Herr Sommer was thrown against the windshield. The car stopped with its bumper almost touching the beam. Herr Sommer rubbed his forehead and laughed. He said he hadn't told me about the barrier because he thought I would be more impressed if it came as a surprise.

AFTER I'd parked, we got out and walked over to the barrier. About ten inches from the beam on our side were two square stones, each inscribed "D.B.," for "*Deutschland, Bayern*," or "Germany, Bavaria." Herr Sommer said that the strip of land between the stones and the beam was the border itself—a ten-inch no man's land. One could reach the Iron Curtain simply by stretching out a hand. Beyond the barrier, the street had all but disappeared, along with part of the town. Fifty or so of the houses nearest the barrier had been torn down; their cellars, filled with rubble and refuse, were visible. Herr Sommer said that about a year before, every Czech building in Eisendorf within three hundred yards of the frontier had been razed, to give the Czech guards an unobstructed view of the boundary. The houses left standing immediately to the rear had been turned into fortresses.

"Except during the war, the border has always gone right through Eisendorf," Herr Sommer said. "Before 1918, it was the Austrian-Bavarian border. Afterward, it became the Czechoslovak-Bavarian border. Either way, it didn't bother anyone. The townspeople were permitted to cross without formalities of any kind. The border guards knew them all by their first names. Then, late in 1950, some

very frightening rumors began going around. It was said that the Czechs were going to turn their side of the town into a fortified zone. It seemed incredible, because, after all, the people who would be affected were members of families that had lived here for generations. But early last year, after arresting some sixty people—the ones who were raising the biggest fuss, I suppose—the Czechs evacuated all the rest of the population in their part of the town to the interior of Bohemia. That meant over a thousand people. The only occupants of those buildings that are left over there are soldiers and border guards. I guess I shouldn't have said everybody was evacuated. A few people managed to get away in the midst of the confusion, and they came over here. Stayed here, too. They don't want to go any farther away from home than absolutely necessary. They're incorrigible optimists, living in hope the day will soon come when they can go back." He turned and pointed to the inn. "You know how many people are living in that shabby little building? Seventy-two. Only six of them are earning any money, and they earn very little. The rest of them— How they get along, I don't know."

Behind the barrier, a ditch some three yards wide and two deep had been dug across what was once the street, and behind the ditch, paralleling it, was an earthen parapet three yards high. Twenty yards behind these fortifications was another barrier, of reinforced concrete. Herr Sommer said all these obstacles had been built in great haste in the spring of 1951, at about the time a Czech truck loaded with fugitives had got across the border at Eisendorf. "They were going so fast they didn't even know they'd crossed the boundary until they were overtaken by an Ameri-

can jeep and forced to stop," he said. "Today, no ordinary vehicle could possibly break through. Except for a few control points, the roads all along the border have been closed in this way. Now they're beginning to put up barbed-wire fences rigged with trip wires that set off flares and bullets."

Herr Sommer pointed to what looked like a small, freshly plowed field behind the concrete barrier. "Last May, some Czech peasants with plows and oxen dug that patch up, and ever since, it has been plowed twice a week," he said. "It's easier to spot a man against a dark background like that than against a varied background like rubble. Anybody who ventures onto the plowed strip is shot at instantly."

A gust of wind almost blew my hat off. I caught it just in time. "Better pull your hat down snug," said Herr Sommer. "And if it *should* blow off, don't chase it across the barrier, for God's sake."

"What would happen?" I asked.

"I can tell you exactly what would happen," Herr Sommer said. "They would open fire on you. They would shoot this very second if you were to take one step forward. In fact, I wouldn't even stretch out my hand. Those fellows over there have a perverted sense of humor. In the past month or so, they've shot twice at boys who were playing catch and ran across the border chasing the ball. Maybe the Czechs didn't want to kill the children—it's true they didn't hit them—but they certainly gave everybody a bad scare. Right this minute, they have their guns and telescopes trained on us. Don't turn your head too sharply, but do you see that small two-story house with the gray roof, where there's an open window on the second floor? That's where they're watching us from. When the sun is shining, you can sometimes see them moving about in the room. If you were standing alone here, I wouldn't guarantee anything, but let's hope they recognize me. Sometimes a new man comes on duty over there—one of those trigger-happy fellows—and he starts shooting. 'So what?' he thinks. 'Just another minor border incident. No one will start a war because some people got too close to the boundary. They should have known better.'"

I didn't speak for a few moments. Beyond the barrier was the country I had grown up in, a lovely country. Its people hadn't inherited their liberty; they had fought for it, and won it, and had been deeply conscious of

their good fortune. And now this country was as inaccessible to me as a distant planet, although I could, if I dared, reach out and touch it; perhaps this was as close as I would ever come to it again. The men guarding the other side of the border were soldiers in the Czechoslovak Army, in which I had served twenty years earlier. For all I knew, some of those who I had been told were staring at me now had once been my comrades in arms.

From somewhere out among those silent, menacing buildings came the eerie sound of a window being raised or lowered. Then all was quiet again, and there was no further indication of life over there. Then a couple of Bavarian chickens stalked across the border to scratch in Czech soil. "They're the only ones still permitted to go over," Herr Sommer said. "I suppose they'll start shooting at the chickens one of these days. By the way, did you hear about that Czech actress who tried to escape with her little boy?"

I replied that I had heard of the incident—she'd been a beautiful, gifted woman, very popular in Prague—but knew no details.

"She almost made it," Herr Sommer said. "She tried to come across over there beyond that patch of woods. She had her son with her and a professional guide. There are lots of guides around, and they get paid plenty for helping people across. Well, these three were hiding behind some bushes only a few yards from the border when the Czechs saw them and opened fire. I happened to be standing here at the barrier. When I heard the shots, I ran along the border toward the woods. The guide made a dash for the border and crossed the line just as I got there. He took cover behind a tree and shouted to the woman to follow him. She was lying on the ground, half covering her child, and she seemed paralyzed with fear, unable to move. She was only five or six yards from the boundary line but she apparently couldn't bring herself to get up and come over. It was horrible. I had to just stand there and look on. The Czechs stumbled over her, and then they dragged her and the child back by their feet. It was awful. If only she could have made those few extra yards. Of course, the Czechs will occasionally shoot people even after they cross the border, but only when they think they are unobserved and can get away with it. They wouldn't have dared shoot at her while I was standing there."

An old man with a torn cap on his head and a soiled apron over his suit ap-

proached us along a narrow footpath that ran parallel to the border. He was carrying a large bundle of firewood, but he managed to free one hand to tip his cap to Herr Sommer, who returned the greeting and introduced him to me as one of the refugees from the Czechoslovak side of the town who were now living at the inn. The old man said yes, his house had been the third over there, and he pointed to the cellar of what must formerly have been a rather large building. I asked him whether he had been around when they were wrecking the place.

"Oh, yes," he said.

"What did you do?" I asked.

The old man smiled wearily. "What could I do?" he said. "I just stood here behind the barrier looking on while they pulled it down, first one wall, then another." Turning to Herr Sommer, he said, "I hear they've started to build barbed-wire fences up near Selb, and that before they're done, they plan to close the entire border with barbed wire." The old man sounded as if nothing could ever surprise him again. He tipped his cap once more, and went on toward the inn.

"Over the past weeks there's been a lot of mysterious activity on the other side," Herr Sommer said. "During the day, everything is quiet, but after it gets dark, flares are lighted, and we hear the noise of concrete mixers and the engines of trucks and tractors. There's talk that they are building underground munitions magazines. As if they didn't have enough stuff there now! There are more than four hundred men stationed in this sector, and they have thirty dogs and lots of horses and vehicles. To cover the same area, we have fifteen men and two dogs. Speaking of the manpower on their side, you should have been here two weeks ago, when one of our overhead power-transmission wires broke—right above the boundary. Believe it or not, the power plant is in Czechoslovakia, and some of the houses here on this side still get electric current from the other side. Well, as I say, the wire broke. I went to the barrier and tried to get them to come and let me explain the situation to them. I waved and shouted, but it was half an hour before I got any response. Then three men appeared and came over to me. I asked for permission to have an electrician step over the boundary long enough to fix the wire. They pretended not to understand German, although it is well known that they talk German fluently when they question people from this side. They went back to deliberate, and finally two other

men came and said we should meet them again at the barrier at three o'clock that afternoon. It was then ten in the morning. When we returned at three—the electrician, one of my men, and I—they were waiting." Herr Sommer grimaced. "By 'they' I mean eleven men with tommy guns, posted all over the place, and an officer standing behind the concrete wall. And here were the three of us, and not a gun among us. So the electrician got up on his ladder, with most of the eleven tommy guns pointed at him. Even if I knew how to fix a wire, I don't think I'd have been able to under those conditions."

HERR SOMMER suggested that we take a little walk along the footpath. It looked perilously close to the border line, but he assured me that there would be no trouble as long as he was with me and I kept on our side of the series of marker stones that indicated the boundary. "Don't be surprised if you see a few Czech soldiers lying in a ditch up by those bushes," Herr Sommer said matter-of-factly as we set off. "They're always out hoping to catch somebody. If they get hold of a really interesting prisoner, they are rewarded with four weeks' vacation, a bonus, and a promotion. Careful, there!" He grabbed me by the sleeve and yanked me toward him so abruptly that I fell to my knees. "For a couple of seconds just then, you were in Czechoslovakia."

I scrambled away from the line with more haste than dignity, conscious of the fact that the United States passport in my breast pocket contained the entry "Birthplace: Ostrava, Czechoslovakia." I had no desire to provide some border guard with so much as one week's vacation.

"Last May, the Czechs put up big

pictures of Stalin and Gottwald all along the border," Herr Sommer said as we continued our walk. "Then they brought loudspeakers right up to the boundary and gave our people a lot of big pep talks. Why didn't we Germans throw the Americans out and become united under the banner of peace, they shouted. After all, the Czechs said, *they* had no *Soviet* armored cars and troops near the border." Herr Sommer laughed. "They needn't have bothered. After all, our people aren't idiots. When you live as close to the border as we do, you learn a lot. Why, everybody knows that if this barrier were lifted for as little as twenty-four hours, half the population of Czechoslovakia would vanish into the West. These days not many people make it across, but those who do have stories to tell. Of course, most of them are too tired to talk when they first get here. Scared, too, because they've been warned by the Czechs that we treat refugees brutally. But when they realize that we do nothing of the sort, they relax and begin to talk."

We walked some distance in silence, both of us very much on the alert, and then Herr Sommer said, "As a matter of fact, it has become just about impossible to cross over in this area any more. You see, from here it is over thirty kilometres to the nearest Czech city. It's much easier near Eger, to the north, where at one point the boundary is only six kilometres from the city limits. That's not far from where the Freedom Train crashed through. To be sure, they've tightened up on controls since then. They've set up a sixty-kilometre zone just inside the border, and anybody getting off a train or travelling on a highway there is certain to be stopped by S.N.B. patrols. To travel anywhere in the zone, a Czech must have a special permit from his local branch of the National Committee explaining the reason for his trip. The first twenty kilometres inside the border is even more restricted. No one is allowed in there without a special pass from the military."

We were approaching a stand of trees on the Czech side. I peered into them, but I saw no one. Nevertheless, I was just as glad when my companion remarked that we might as well head back to the barrier.

"Escaping these days sometimes takes months of preparation," Herr Sommer said after we had turned around. "Like the four men with their wives and kids who crossed the border near Selb last fall. About two years before, the men had applied for jobs felling trees for the Czech Army. After months of being

investigated, they were hired and put to work near Pilsen. Ten months later, they and their families were transferred to this border area. Still they took their time. For eight more months, they worked docilely almost within sight of the border. Then, when they were confident no one would suspect them, they applied one day for the use of an Army truck, which, they said, they needed to move their woodcutting equipment. They lined the body with sheet iron, hoping to make it bulletproof and so no one could see who or what was inside, and then put their families and all their belongings aboard. One of the men had once been a member of the S.N.B., and he still had his uniform. He put it on and pretended to be a guard, covering the insignia on his shoulders with pieces of red cloth, as all S.N.B. men do when they're on special missions. When everything was set, he seated himself next to the driver, and off they went, heading for the border. Several S.N.B. patrols saw them, but made no effort to stop them, because of the man in uniform on the front seat. About thirty yards from the boundary, the truck slid into a ditch. The men simply unloaded their stuff and, with the help of their wives and children, carried it across the boundary. They made several trips back to the truck. One of the men insisted on going back for his violin, and the children brought along all their toys. Just as they were finishing up, two jeeps loaded with Czech soldiers and S.N.B. guards came racing toward the truck. The men told the women and children to get over the line, and then lay down behind the truck and opened fire. You should have seen the confusion! By the time the guards and soldiers had pulled themselves together, the four men had joined their families in Bavaria."

Shortly before we reached the barrier, the sun came out, and Herr Sommer turned to me. "Now you can see them," he said. "In that open window on the second floor."

I looked at the house he had previously pointed out, and saw them—two men in khaki uniforms. One was watching us through a pair of field glasses and the other was standing next to a machine gun that was pointed in our direction. As we continued to stare at them, both men moved back into the shadows.

About twenty yards lay between us and the barrier. It seemed an interminable distance, but at last we made it. Herr Sommer was unconcerned. "I've been offered a better post, on the Saxon

border between West and East Germany," he said as we climbed into my car. "More money and a promotion. But I'm going to turn it down. It's bad enough here, but up around Saxony it's Germans against Germans, and that makes things even worse."

I felt more at ease once I was settled behind the wheel. I pushed the starter button, and the smooth whir of the engine was a sweet sound. As we drove off, Herr Sommer turned around and looked out the back window. They were now out in front of their house, watching us, he said. I was tempted to look back, but I was more interested in getting out of there, and I drove quickly through the town with a mounting sense of exhilaration.

—Joseph Wechsberg

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FRATERNAL NOTES FROM ALL OVER

[*From the Sierra Madre (Calif.) News*]

Hugh Warden, to put it quite conservatively, is a good sport. If there was any doubt in anyone's mind about this up to now, it was completely dispelled Tuesday. As president of the local Kiwanis Club, it is Hugh's job to levy fines against members on virtually any pretext.

Tuesday he went too far. He fined every member of the club because he hadn't seen them at the previous week's meeting. Why hadn't he seen them? Because Hugh was in Las Vegas that day. Club reaction to his decree was swift, and violent.

Police Chief Gordon McMillan, speaker of the day, obligingly snapped his handcuffs on Mr. Warden, and then the fun started. His suit of clothes and even his shirt were literally ripped from his back. And as a coup de grace, Hugh's necktie was neatly snipped by a ready pair of scissors.

Would you laugh good naturedly if that happened to you? Hugh did. And that goes to show you that service club men will go to practically any lengths for a gag.

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Dr. Jansen's plan calls for having principals or other heads of schools certify on the payroll each month to the loyalty of teachers and other staff members under their supervision. Assistant superintendents will certify to the loyalty of the principals; Dr. Jansen will certify for the assistant superintendents, associate superintendents, directors and other supervisory personnel, and the Board of Education will certify to Dr. Jansen's loyalty. Such certification will be based on the knowledge or belief of the supervisor.—*The World-Telegram & Sun.*

Now if we can just get Feinberg to O.K. the Supervisor, and get the Attorney General to O.K. Feinberg, we're all set. That is, we're all set provided we can get somebody to O.K. the Attorney General.