Free translation from the German. An article appearing in the " Main-Echo" newspaper of Saturday and Sunday May 4 & 5, 1968

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Captain Varda: The man between war and peace

The adventure of the first year after the war at a distance of 23 years : A Visit

Aschaffenburg, May 3rd, 1968

Eghd. He came to Aschaffenburg on April 7, 1945. He stayed until Juli 1946. It was the decisive transitional time between war and peace. It was the highly critical year of enemity and conciliation. It was the decisive year to bring order into public life and the begin of reconstruction.

Since April 3, 1945,3 american officers - a major, a captain and a first lieutenant - stood ready for action in Grossostheim. On April 7, they established a military government for Aschaffenburg. Major Emerick was in charge, his deputy John P. Varda, at that time a first leutenant, 26 years old and captain Hurst.

John P. Varda, the youngest of the three and lowest in rank, became the most important American, who influenced within the walls of Aschaffenburg the fate of that city and surrounding areas.. We are glad, to see him again.

As it is everywhere (and according to Parkinson's Law of the inevitable growth of beaurocracy) grew the American military Government in Aschaffenburg gradually to 28 men. It started with the three. Of all three men, Varda alone was a professional. He was a young attorney and at age 23 was already an assemblyman of his homestate. He represented the Progressive Party (It was at that time the third largest party after the Republicans and Democrats). As a 24 year old he was with the U.S. airforce and than antiaircraft. Already a half year before the end of the war he was trained to become an officer for the military (occupation) government. Three months before the end of hostilities (so systhematically worked the American army too) he acquainted himself with the circumstances in the city of Aschaffenburg. He already knew than the all about the county, even if only in theory. The commanding officer EMERICK was already in government service, but, like so many Americans,had varied professions. Among others, he was a teacher and a radio announcer. As far as we know,he is again a government employee. Captain HURST started to study chemistry, but did not graduated. Those were the three.

Varda is today General Manager of the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association in Madison, the capital of the State of Wisconsin. That is in german: er ist Syndikus des Arbeitgeberverbandes der Spediteure und Transportunternehmer des Staates Wisconsin. He negotiates for instance with the truckdrivers and mechanics union. So, even today Varda needs to be firm. His counterparts in negotiations do not have the reputation of being softies.

DIFFICULT TRANSITION

If friend and foe - as at that time - suddenly meet at a conference table a strained athmosphere will exist. They are ill at ease and as officials especially unable to be without suspicion or friendly.

Varda, a dark and ~~stocky~~ powerful man (see picture as a young captain, which he became soon afterwards) did - to outsiders - not make the impression of being lenient. It was not easy to get close to him. But this changed soon with people close to him and whom he trusted. He scrutinized everybody. He was seldom disappointed in his judgement of people. He was still the man "between war and peace".

He was tough when he was disappointed. He rejected (and mostly justly so) when he had grounds for suspicion. People, who, for reasons of self-interest, cringed before him, were mostly out of luck. Varda, was, and still is, intelligent above average, sober, clear-minded and systematical, but also (within human possibilities) impartial (even with his own people) and just. He was serious about his duties, he wasn't an amateur. He was little influenced by the power and prominence which were inherent with the occupation forces. At that time the axiom that " the women belong to the victor" was true. Temptation for a " soft live" were existant.

Varda's knowledge, correctness, willpower and intelligence gave him power. And, even though he was only FORMALLY second in rank, he was first in wielding the power, despite his youth. His decisions were clear cut and stood.

Here is the case of the attorney Dr. SPAETH. Spaeth was a pro forma Nazi but of reputable character and excellent legal knowledge. He had difficulties to get a license to practice - everybody had to apply for a new license after the war - Because of chicanery and not objective reason this license was refused. Varda checked into the matter. Varda said:" Have the man come to see me". Späth did get his license.

COPS AND ROBBERS

There was the scandal of the American military police officer LINN: Marauding and killing Displaced Persons (mostly of polish nationality) made the countryside unsafe. It was a small band of freebooters which raided solitary farms and homes. LINN organized a special german contingent. These were mostly rough and tough characters, outcasts of the war and were lead by a man of uncertain past by the name of ZEY. The " police troop Zey" for which the American Linn was responsible, gunned around the countrside. Zey was reputed - but never proven - to be a "double agent". That means that he divided the loot with the foreign bandits after given mock battle ~~and ... was~~ followed by orgies. Zey with his girlfriend became certainly one of the wholesale procurers for the black market in Frankfurt.

When Varda heard of these going-ons, he said " Lt. Linn has to go within three days". Zey and his girl friend were arrested. Subsequently "Removed" to avoid a public scandal. Varda's American comarade disappeard within 3 days from Aschaffenburg.

EMERICK, who was in charge, was easier going than Varda. His judgement could not compare with Varda's. As an American with long heritage - his mother was of Irish extraction - he could never understand, or never sufficiently understand the fundamental difference in the american and european-german thinking processes. But Varda to the contrary has a european heritage. Of italian extraction, he is an American in the second generation. The family Varda comes from Aosta which is south of the Mont-Blanc mountainrange. This is section where France, Switzerland and Italy come together. The people there speak italian and french. His heritage made is easier for Varda to understand the way Europeans think.

THE HERITAGE OF FATHER ANTONIO

Varda is an "American Catholic". When asked, if he still celebrates his Saint's Day he answered with a frank "No". But his father Antonio did it with gusto, and so diligently that he, the father, wasn't quite sober for three days. Varda's great understanding for european thinking processes, his clear decisions and his habit to give a clear "yes" or "no" without hedging, the willpower with which he followed up his decisions and the trust which he gave all those who earned it lead to the situation where the german representatives came ever more often and preferrably to Varda with their questions and affairs. Their expectation for an objective decision was never disappointed. Since the transition from war to peace, from enmity to reconciliation and from ruins to reconstruction happned within the 15 months of the regime Varda and since Varda was the outstanding man among the Americans, we see in Varda the most important American who ever worked in Aschaffenburg. (Next sentence does not make sense in translation and is repeating: transl.)

Policies were made at Varda's desk. If one speaks of Varda as the "Number One", we must also mention "Number Two", first lieutenant CUSHING. As we see it, he must be regarded as the second most important man. Cushing was an American jew. That means, that he was not an emigree of jewish religion as so many of the other officers of the occupation forces. Cushing heroically overcame the negative attitude, which he as a jew would have to have and with justification towards the Germans. He was fanatic and fascinated with the task to make habitable again a completely destroyed city. He even- as we shall see- went to "steal" for Aschaffenburg. His methods were not those of the correct attorney Varda. He did what was pertinent... any old way. Cushing came 2 or 3 months later than Varda to Aschaffenburg. The ice was already broken, the cooperation had already started.

THE "SWIPED" GLATTBACHER CROSSING.

"Where to get it..and not to steal"... This principle went out of fashion with Cushing. He exchanged his uniform as an occupation officer with his old engineers uniform. He took eight special railroad cars and went with the deserving railroad official Treutlein and the necessary personell to the (german) marshalling yards in Grossauheim to steal a bridge. To be exact, they swiped two bridges: so called ROTH'WAGNER'BRÜCKEN. These two bridges with one spur each were than welded into an two-spur bridge by the Seibert factory. From this was than fashioned the "Glattbacher Crossing" (over the river Main: interpr.) thanks to the incursion of Cushing and for the benefit of the Aschaffenburger citizens.

With the little allocation of diesel fuel for the city, it was impossible to take all the debri of the bombed buildings and dump it into the Main river. The little narrow gauge wagons stood still in the streets. Railroad official Treutlein went with a locomotive again to Grossauheim. There was stored American (!) diesel fuel. Six railroad cars were unhitched, emptied and than returned. Cushing was the "look-out". During this " requisition trip" he traveled in a jeep alongside to give protection in case a military police patrol would get the idea to protest against unhitching the railrod cars. Cushing was at that time a busy (or industrious: interp.) man. So too apparently after the war. He is a successful building contractor and owns in Green Bay on an penninsular a lovely home, overlooking the Atlantic on both sides.

The Aschaffenburger military district included the city and county of Aschaffenburg and the county of Alzenau. The county Obernburg belonged to the military district of Marktheidenfeld. But Obernberg, especially the Glanzstoff (tectile fiber (interp.) factory were a long way from Marktheidenfeld. It therefor happened that the Aschaffenburg district sometimes acted in behalf of the ~~Offenburg~~ Obernberg district. This circumstance brought Varda ~~together~~ a connection with the Glanzstoff factory and which should become important for his later civilian life.

The Achaffenburg military government was organized in 7 departments:

> Police, care for the population, reconstruction, culture (incl. schools), justice (including public safety and military justice which was especially concerned with affairs of foreigners), german justice, finance, ~~and~~ banks and taxes.

As deputy commander Varda, who in the mean time was promoted to captain, had a voice in all the departments. It was not long until good cooperation began und than the german and american departments stood together thru hell and high water (literally "pitch and sulphur; interp.). There developed a sort of regional german-american patriotism for which there are many touching human episodes.

At the final colaps Aschaffenburg was a city (if it still could be called that) without water, without light, without electricity, without a functioning canalization. Fortunatly the district had also a few assets, certainly not in proportion. The german army at the end of the war had still reserves of merchandise and army equipment. A great portion was stored on board of riverboats (~~laying in the Main river: interp.~~) which travelled and retreated with the troops. Many of these were stuck with us on the Main river. There were the famous " 5o rice ships", there were great stores of spices and a huge quantity of textiles. Pillage occured often at the time of the colapse. The one with horse and wagon had an advantage.

Women in UNVARIED CHECKED PATTERN

In one of the army depots was a huge quantity of uniformly checkered cloth ~~which~~ with the result that suddenly the womenhood of the communities near the Main river appeared in the same checkered (PATTERNED) dresses. This was not a result of a fashion fad. But soon the plundering was stopped. Great quantities of useable army godds, also from the harbor of Leider, were used by the city of Aschaffenburg. With that great amounts of money went into the city ~~treasury~~ treasury. This money by right belonged to the State of Bavaria which was declared the rightful owner. Again and again the State of Bavaria requested transfer of the moneys from the sale of these merchandise. The treasury of the city of Aschaffenburg replied that the military government refused to grant such transfer. The military government and the city were ~~in~~ conspiring.

There was the case of a tavern keeper in Daemmer. To rebuild there also was a permission (license: interp.) necessary. It was the time when the bakers, butchers and tavernkeeper were riding high ("BMW Zeit" will not make sense in tanslation: interpr.). Anyone who could offer something to eat, as these businessmen, could hire bricklayers and other tradesmen. Now this tavernkeeper from Daemmer started

to build without ~~a~~ permission. The military government wanted to arrest the man. He cried for help. ~~Vinzenz Schwind~~ Vinzenz Schwind became his guardian angel who - with a twinkel, stated that he gave the permission. Since the Americans couldn't very well arrest the Lord Mayor (Schwind was the Lord Mayor: interp.), the deed remained unpunished.

After leaving Aschaffenburg in July 1946 Varda stayed another year as a judge in Frankfurt. After that he exchanged his uniform for civvies. He settled in Wiesbaden as an attorney and represented his clients interests in questions of restitutions. He handled especially cases for the Glanzstoff combine (a large group of textile mills:interpr.) which had large holdings in the USA and which were confiscated there. On the other side he represented, among others, the interests of the emmigrated family of ~~Kahn~~ industrialists by the name of Kahn (ABA-factories) for return of their properties (from the german State, which confiscated their holdings in Germany:interp.) The visit of John P. Varda gives us now the occassion to review the events of 23 years ago. It is fortunate that the conciliatory and humane episodes remain stronger in our memory than the dark and hard times ~~which~~ and which is as it should be (verb. " a lucky circumstance") interp.).

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caption for top photo: John P. varda twice: As a 26 year old captain and today, after 23 years on the occasion of his visit.

caption for lower photo: The bridge ~~of~~ over the river Main in Aschaffenburg was blown up and with it the ~~water~~ mains from the waterworks on the left bank of the river Main. With hoses from the fire dept. drinking water was pumped in a makeshift way over the river. A group picture at that time, taken at the bridgehead across from the "Wilden Mann" shows from left to right the head of the city utilities Mr. Braun, Major Emerick, architect Jung sen., First Lt. Cushing and Dr. Vinzenz Schwind, the front-desk man of the military government (who got rid of undesired visitors in the reception room of the military government) and Mr. Mendel, clerk in the judicial dept (as small as he was noisy). The fat-one at the extreme right is unknown. How lean were the three german civilians against the others!

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May 18, 1968

Dear Margret, dear John:

Here 'tis. Its no masterpiece and I didnt try to correct anything but the most flagrant typing errors. It would be fun to the the article after a journalist worked it over. If any questions ...let me know.

I hope that your return flight was smooth and uneventful. Lets hear from you soon.

as always and with a kiss for Margret

Dear Friends:
Hope you have better weather in Wisconsin than we have here! - Did you still recognize the Baby after your return? Hope everyone in your Family is fine and you are "back to regular procedures"! - We were so happy to have had you here and would like you to return soon again.
Herzliche Grüsse und Küsse Gudrun and Gisela