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A Modern Tale of Two Cities

(Editor's Note: The protection of American citizens in dictatorship countries, when there is no recourse to a formal consular convention, raises difficult and frustrating problems. This is all the more true when Americans are arrested and held for long periods, without formal charges or the opportunity to get into touch with their own officials or their families. The following narrative is not presented as a treatise on international law, but simply as fascinating reading of the inside story of two significant instances of the interplay of chance and design in the field of international affairs.)

If there ever was a convenient time as Central European Manager of the United Press to have a member of your staff arrested and held incommunicado for three months without further action, it was *not* in Berlin in the Spring of 1941. Arrest was no novelty among United Press or other American correspondents then covering Hitler. But when the Gestapo picked up Richard C. Hottelet of the Berlin United Press staff for "serious suspicion of espionage," after a crude raid on the office, it was surprising, annoying and offensive.

It was surprising because the Nazis, say what you like about their big bloopers (such as losing the war), did not do egregiously stupid things in the usual course of business with foreigners. It was annoying because Hottelet was a valued and greatly-needed member of a staff already much too small to cover a war already much too large. And finally it was offensive because it simply was not the way the game was played under the curious ground rules which the Nazis imposed and which, in general, they also respected. These were that each side had its job to do; there was no censorship; correspondents were entitled and expected to report fully on developments in the war, with an honorable observance of the requirement to be accurate and objective insofar as possible. Given our private feelings, these were difficult restraints enough, but up to that point the Hitler government had recognized and respected our integrity and also recognized

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the difficulty of working without triggering the sword of Damocles which they held over us. For real cause, as they saw it, they could always, of course, expel an offending correspondent. It was easy to construe reporting as espionage, if they wanted to.

But Dick Hottelet was an experienced, skillful, responsible member of an exceptional staff of "young veterans," in the United Press' happy phrase, who had built up a tradition of cool efficiency as journalists in covering Berlin during the Hitler years. Give a thought to these names: Hottelet himself, now CBS United Nations correspondent; Howard K. Smith, analyst and commentator for ABC, whose book "Last Train from Berlin" gives one of the most lucid accounts of Hottelet's arrest and the preceding raid; Richard M. Helms, now Director of Central Intelligence Agency; Joseph W. Grigg, now Chief European Correspondent for United Press International; Paul Kecskemeti, now a distinguished social scientist with the RAND Corporation; Dana Adams Schmidt, Chief Middle-East Correspondent for the New York Times; George Kidd, officer in the U.S. Naval Intelligence Command since early World War II; Clinton B. Conger, a mainstay in CIA's executive staff in Washington; Alex Dreier, analyst and commentator for Mutual Broadcasting in Chicago; Edward W. Beattie, now retired after a full career as reporter, author and Voice of America executive; Harold Peters, a stalwart for years with Radio Free Europe; Jack M. Fleischer, Foreign Service Officer, now with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome; and Glen M. Stadler, now a university professor and member of the Oregon State Legislature.

Were these men of a stripe to commit stupid indiscretions under the cloak of journalism? The United Press hardly thought so. It would have been poor judgment, however, to allow indignation of Hottelet's arrest to damage the chances for his release. The Nazis might have had no case against him, but they had *him*; and he was in real jeopardy.

The very fact that Hitler's people had gone to the lengths they had in the Hottelet arrest meant that they were after something of importance to themselves. The more obvious things were to give a fresh warning to correspondents and all other Americans in Germany that they were walking a razor's edge; or simply to flex Nazi muscles and deliver a slap at American prestige in the propaganda war. Most probably, however, we thought the arrest had been pure retaliation for the arrest somewhat earlier in the U. S. of two Nazi newsmen, Manfred Zapp and Günther Tonn. One of these was the son of a close friend of Von Ribbentrop, the Nazi Foreign Minister. It stood to reason that Von Ribbentrop would like to get him back.

Whatever the motivation might have been, Dick's jailers were telling him that neither the United Press nor anyone else was making any attempt to get him out, and he was telling himself that the prospect of spending the rest of the war behind bars was not exactly what he would choose if he had a choice. It certainly was not true that no one was trying to spring the prisoner, but it was true that we were rapidly not getting very far.

In our effort to secure an early release, the first thing to do was plainly to find out what the Nazis thought they really had against Dick, if anything, that would justify a formal trial. A call upon Herr Schambacher, who was handling the case for the Political Section of the Criminal Police, yielded no information, but did yield the opportunity, as far as the United Press was concerned, vehemently to reject the empty charge of espionage, and to substitute a charge of our own: that the arrest was a crude reprisal for our arrest of Zapp and Tonn. Schambacher did not seem impressed by this.

Next, to the American Embassy to assure them most earnestly that the charges against Hottelet were ridiculous, and to consult on the chances for an early release. The Embassy ("our poor, overworked Embassy" in George Kennan's phrase) already had its hands desperately full with the United States and Germany all but at war; with British interests (including their prisoners-of-war) to protect; and preparing for the departure of the American Consuls in Germany with the denunciation of the Consular Treaty.

The Embassy felt, in any event, that we should retain a lawyer for Dick, and we agreed that the higher-up he was, the better it would be for our chances of finding out what evidence, if any at all, the Nazis were going to muster to support the arrest. We selected the name of a Obersturmbannführer in the SS Hauptamt (General Staff), who was still practicing law, outside his official duties and who would be able to rush in where angels feared to tread, although not for the usual reasons. I visited this Jekyll-and-Hyde character and told him, as I had told Schambacher, that there could not be a shred of real evidence against Hottelet and that, using a flimsy interpretation of journalistic activity as espionage, it was retaliation for what happened to Zapp and Tonn. The lawyer, being not only a lawyer but a Nazi and an SS man, could hardly agree with me, but he did agree to look into the case immediately; to apply, under German law for access to the prosecution's evidence as soon as the case was prepared; and to keep the United Press informed.

There was nothing more to be achieved in Berlin. Leaving Joe Grigg in charge, and to cover what was to be the Nazi attack on Yugoslavia, I proceeded to New York. There Hugh Baillie, United Press' President, and Earl J. Johnson, Executive Vice-President, confirmed that the United

Press had wisely done nothing in its domestic handling of the Hotteliet arrest to raise the issue of Nazi prestige (always the best way to slam the door to negotiation) or to excite American resentment; and they agreed that inquiries in Washington were a good next step.

In the capital, Ray Atherton, Chief of the Division of European Affairs at the Department of State, could offer no light in the darkness, or, of course, any assurance of a deal that would give us Hotteliet for Zapp and Tonn.

A visit to the German Embassy where Hans Thomsen, a suave, able and practiced regular in the German Diplomatic Service was in charge, brought not much more than renewing an acquaintanceship with Thomsen that went back for more than a decade. We spoke very freely, I moreso than he, for I was not an official of my Government and he was. In no position to do more than suggest that an exchange of Hotteliet for Zapp and Tonn would be a sensible way to settle things, I was, of course, not at all able to say that the State Department or President Roosevelt would agree to this, but the idea was nurtured. Thomsen was careful not to express any interest in it. I told him that I was going down to New Orleans for a visit with my family, and that I would be available for any further discussions which events might indicate (I wonder whether, in retrospect, this had any prophetic meaning for him).

Lyle Wilson, Washington Manager of the United Press, thought that I should see the Attorney-General, Robert H. Jackson, before I left town, and he set up an appointment. This sage individual listened to my presentation of events, my insistence that the Nazis had nothing valid against Hotteliet, my earnest fear that the swift uncoiling of events might trap Dick in Germany for years of his young life, and the plea that the Attorney-General consider what might be done. Mr. Jackson listened, quietly "hm-m-m-med," rubbed his chin, tilted back in his chair, looked out the window and, like a good Attorney-General, said no more than had Atherton, Thomsen, Schambacher or our SS lawyer, to commit him to any course of action. But he loved a scrap and (I may be wrong) it seemed to me that his eyes twinkled.

New Orleans in April and May is, of course, a pleasant place in which just to sit and read the papers and eat the good food. The only thing to make it better was to read what I did one day with quickened interest: the whole crew of a Nazi cargo ship had been detained in Baltimore for some offense so grievous that I cannot remember it today. Others read it too. The German Embassy, for example.

The Nazis had Hotteliet, and we now had not only Zapp and Tonn, but the crew of a ship presumably loaded with goodies for the German war

machine. (This was resting for the moment after a brilliant victory in the West, and soon to be used against Stalin in the mightiest thrust in history.)

The next time I saw Mr. Jackson was five years later when, as Justice Jackson, he prosecuted at Nuremberg after the German surrender; but the next time I saw Hans Thomsen was when he telephoned me in New Orleans suggesting vaguely that there had been developments in the Hottelet case, and that we might continue our talks.

The *last* time I saw him was a year later when, in Lisbon, he was being repatriated to Germany and I to the United States, each of us having been interned in the other's country. Enemies by then, we did not talk. If we had done so, he would never have admitted any more than he ever did that there was any connection between the events in Berlin and in Washington.

No matter. In late July, Dick Hottelet, having had a pet cockroach as his only companion for three months, was released to George Kennan who took him to his home, gave him a good meal and a ticket to return with the American consuls. Zapp and Tonn made it back in time to witness the remainder of Hitler's triumphant years. We paid the SS lawyer, whose efforts manifestly had brought things to a successful conclusion, and I lived to tell herewith, for the first time ever, some of the minor sidelights in this interesting case of coincidence, and a practical application of international comity.

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The second of my illustrations involving coincidence in the protection of American citizens abroad, is just now turning the twentieth anniversary of its commencement and the fifteenth of its ending. The five years in the middle might be called the "longest wait between planes on record," for reasons that will emerge; and also one of the most harrowing experiences of an American in the whole period of Stalin's tyranny over Eastern Europe.

In August of 1949, Hermann Haviland Field, Harvard-educated American architect, son of a distinguished scientist father, having visited architect friends in Warsaw, went out to the Okecie airport to take a plane for Prague, enroute to join his English wife and their two sons in London for the trip back to the United States. He simply disappeared from sight at the airport and for five years remained, to both the American and British Governments, and to an anguished family, a lost soul without trace on earth. Representations to both Warsaw and Moscow secured only deadpan denials of any knowledge of Field's whereabouts, or even of confirmation whether he was alive or dead.

Hermann Field was the brother of Noel Field. Not only was Hermann more relaxed, less wound-up about causes, less gangly, more worldly, than

his famous brother, but he was no fuzzy-minded idealist up to his neck (and over his head) in the operations of international Communism. Hermann was, indeed, no brand of Communist whatever; even if he had been, that was no ground for the Polish Secret Police to have whisked him off from the airport in a small black staff car; or, having very soon found that he was innocent of any offense, to have cast him into prison for the next five years of his life.

But, as Flora Lewis makes clear in "Red Pawn," her scrupulously-detailed study of the Noel Field case, 1949 in Warsaw was not a time when anything mattered except what Stalin wanted to matter; and what Stalin wanted was fuel for the propaganda trials, which in six Eastern European countries doomed hundreds of persons in purges for conspiracy and espionage. It was only with Stalin's death in March of 1953 that the jails and graveyards of Eastern Europe regurgitated these victims as mostly innocent men.

In Hungary, the axe fell on Rajk; in Bulgaria on Petkov; in Czechoslovakia on Slansky; and in Poland it was poised above the head of Wladislaw Gomulka, until Stalin's death cleared the way instead, for Gomulka to become the big wheel in the Polish state that he is today.

At the American Embassy in Warsaw in 1954, where I was serving as Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission, we knew a lot about Gomulka, but most of us knew relatively little about Hermann Field. Just as being identified as Noel's brother was officially enough to cost him his freedom and almost his life, so was he identified to many people simply as the younger brother of the tall, brilliant, awkward Bostonian who had worked for the League of Nations in Geneva in its early years, and for the Department of State before that.

In the chaotic years which spawned World War II after Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, Hermann Field had served at Cracow, Poland, with the Layton Trust; the British Government had given it \$16,000,000 to help refugees from Hitler's wrath flee, among other places, to England. At Cracow, Hermann had thus assisted many who later became prominent in the Communist régimes of Eastern Europe. This, as Flora Lewis points out, was not unnatural, since Communists were among the prime targets of the Nazi invaders. But the very association with persons who later fell into Stalin's bad graces served to make Hermann Field, like his brother, a pawn in Stalin's deadly game.

In Warsaw in 1954, we were aware at the Embassy that the UBEA, or Polish Secret Police, was infiltrated down to the lowest desk level by its big brothers, the Soviet Secret Police. Being diplomatic personnel we had nothing to fear—the placement of microphones in our homes and such

things as the delivery of the contents of our wastebaskets to the Secret Police by our servants—these, and incessant trailing by the UBEA on our every emergence from home, were more nuisances than anything else, but to the Poles and very much to Hermann Field, the UBEA was something to be feared.

Especially a Col. Josef Swiatlo, Deputy Director of the Tenth Department handling important political matters. Tough, hulking, nicknamed “The Butcher,” it was he who had arrested Field at the airport, who had put him through the first brutal, fruitless interrogations; and it was he whom Field hated with a passion forever after. Yet, curiously, it was he also whom Field had to thank for ever getting out of prison and out of Poland. Swiatlo’s behavior and Stalin’s death, two merciful coincidences in the case.

This is what happened, and again I am indebted to Flora Lewis’ extraordinary account for the facts which did not come directly within my own experience:

On December 5, 1953, Swiatlo, who had also interrogated Noel Field in Budapest, visited East Berlin with his chief, a Col. Anatol Feygin. Purposely losing his companion in a department store, Swiatlo ducked to West Berlin and presented himself to the Allied authorities as a defector. He had doubtless seen the denouement of the whole hideous tragicomedy after Stalin’s death, and thought it wise, as men will, to save his skin. In West Berlin, the United States agreed to give him asylum. For many months he was interrogated. Among other things, he revealed that Hermann Field, far from being dead or in Russia, had been imprisoned not a hundred yards from the small club where the Western diplomats played tennis. On September 28, 1954, Swiatlo was surfaced in Washington. A few hours after announcing his defection, the U.S. Government presented him at a press conference, where he explained his disillusionment with Communism and his desire to join its opponents. He stated unequivocally that the case against Hermann Field was groundless—falsified from beginning to end.

The State Department sent off immediate notes to Warsaw and (concerning Noel Field) to Budapest, setting forth that “the U.S. Government requests immediate access to these American citizens, and the conclusion of arrangements for their repatriation at the earliest possible date.”

At the Embassy, we received a copy of the note to the Polish Government, with instructions to see to its implementation. That meant getting access to Field, and getting him out of the country without delay. Ambassador Joseph Flack called me in, discussed the messages we had received and told me to proceed with carrying out the instructions. As Number Two, I would be dealing with officials in the Foreign Office at my

own level, below that of Foreign Minister or Deputy Minister, whom the Ambassador would see in the normal course. In point of fact, I had known Deputy Foreign Minister Winiewicz when he was publisher of a Poznan newspaper back in my United Press days, and had dealt amicably, if not effectively (because of a difference in bookkeeping methods), on the question of surplus-property-credits with the head of the American section, Bogdan Lewandowski, later Poland's Ambassador to the United Nations. In this instance, however, I did not have access to either of these officials. Lewandowski at least, was absent, which must have been a relief to him since the Poles had been caught red-handed in one of the crassest, most transparent abuses of international comity that could be imagined, tool of the Russians though they may have been. Repeated calls to a Mr. Sie-radzki, the official in charge of the British section who was assigned the Field case, got us nowhere in terms of seeing our man. The Police temporized for days while we grew more impatient. It now seems likely that, having transferred Field from his prison cell to a villa at Otwock, north of Warsaw, the Poles wanted to restore him to at least a semblance of health before the Ambassador saw him. God knows, he needed rehabilitation.

Warsaw is already cool by October, (it had been 40° below zero in February of that year), and the October evening when Ambassador Flack and I were finally taken to see Field was very crisp. I remember the long, dark drive out to Otwock. We were guided over the rough country roads by a small UBEA car. Neither the Ambassador nor I had the slightest idea what to expect; we were bringing a few food supplies, some American newspapers, a bottle of whiskey and minds full of anxious concern for the poor wretch we were about to meet. Would his mind, after five years, wander like the Ancient Mariner's? Would he be an embittered, cynical, vengeful, wasted man? Would he be frightened and withdrawn? I think I almost dreaded the encounter. But human beings are remarkable creatures; and some more remarkable than others. Whence come the resources for meeting stress, for remaining balanced under torture, we do not know; from men's genes, from their endocrine systems, from their culture, their society, their parents? From all, indeed, and from all, Hermann Field had inherited richly: there was no reason to be anxious about him. To feel awkward or sorry or to commiserate. He was simply an emaciated, gravelly-courteous, rational and intelligent man, who received us with composure as if he had been in his own living room, asked us to be seated, apologized with a smile that he had no hospitality to offer us, and proceeded to tell us what had happened to him. Not all at once, for he was too weak for protracted talk, but on the occasions, almost daily, when we saw him in the next three weeks.

What he did not tell us, Flora Lewis does, as she had it from him years later.

Upon his arrest on that August day in 1949, Hermann Field had been taken back to Warsaw and held for two weeks in Secret Police Headquarters. Intermittently he was questioned by Swiatlo, but was neither beaten nor tortured. He was not told why he had been arrested, nor was that clear from the questions he was asked. He kept telling himself that there had been some preposterous mistake. All requests to get into touch with his family, friends or American officials were refused. Although he did not know it then, all of his Polish friends had been arrested when he was. After a fortnight, he was blindfolded and driven at night outside Warsaw to be placed in a deep basement cell. He was interrogated steadily for three months, always at night, and he was not permitted to sleep in the daytime. It then became clear to him that he was to affirm that he was an American spy who had subverted leading Poles and established a widespread spy-ring, beginning with the Layton Trust days. Over and over he was told to write his life story, listing all the people he knew. These versions were checked for minor discrepancies. He considered, but reconsidered, a fake confession in order to secure freedom. He thought of suicide, but his captors wanted him alive, and that gave him a lever. He went on intermittent hunger strikes to force improvements, to get an extra blanket; but he was permitted no exercise or any escape from the bright electric globe that shone on him day and night. His eyes were so inflamed when we first saw him that he looked as if he had been racked by a terrible illness.

For the next four years, nothing happened except privation and suspense; the one relief was that he was finally given a cellmate, a Polish agronomist whose only offense appeared to be that he had been in the Polish anti-Nazi underground, but who, in some obscure way was also to serve Stalin's weird design.

The first evening that Ambassador Flack and I visited Field, we noticed a flat steamer trunk in the corner bulging with papers. He answered our question about it with a wry grin, "That," he said "was what kept us sane." He went on to explain that these papers were the manuscript of a novel which he and his Polish cellmate had written and into which, carefully masked, they had poured all of their emotions, their anger and hatred—a perfect catharsis. They had secured a daily supply of fresh paper, handed completed to the guard each night, only by means of a threatened hunger strike, but this had been effective. The book "Angry Harvest" was later published in the United States, and on its jacket Hermann Field explains that he and his co-author conducted "an intellectual collaboration which is one of the most extraordinary in literature." They exchanged knowledge,

they produced fantasies, each taught the other all that he knew about their respective professions of agronomy and architecture. Finally they began a book. In part, it originated in Polish in the mind of one prisoner; in part in English in the mind of the other, and then it took form slowly as a whispered account in German.

Once freed by the Poles, and in touch with his own Government, Hermann Field needed guidance. His re-entry into the world was going to be difficult after five years of living in a small cell without knowing what had happened in the outside world in all that time. Above everything, he said, he did not wish his experiences to heighten international tensions; he wanted to be cushioned in some way against endless questioning about his experiences; and he wanted peace and quiet with his wife and two sons, preferably in Switzerland where he had spent his honeymoon. A visit to the Swiss Minister, Dr. Werner Fuchss, facilitated courtesies which finally enabled Field to realize this desire.

But all was not over yet. Though the Poles had released Field, they were not prepared to meet all of the demands which, with incredible determination, he insisted be met before he left Poland; and, although they agreed to give him \$50,000 as indemnity, they wanted most of all to have him remain voluntarily in Poland. They exerted every effort to this end, offered to bring his family from London, to educate his children, to give him a home in which to live. This would have been a very bright feather in their cap, and one which Noel and Herta Field, upon their release in Hungary, had accepted. But Hermann was having none of this. At one point, upon my visiting the Foreign Office on some detail of Field's repatriation, Sieradzki read me a prim little reproof in which the Poles protested that "the U.S. Government was exercising pressure upon Field to get him to leave Poland." This was so ludicrous that I could not refrain from replying that Hermann Field, as well as the Poles, knew where the real pressures were, and that no one need be under any illusion whatever as to whether Hermann Field was going to leave Poland or not.

And leave he did. On November 19th, three weeks after the Embassy had first contacted him and five years after his arrest, Hermann Field, American citizen, decent, unoffending husband and father insisted on going absolutely alone to the Okęcie airport and boarding the selfsame plane for Prague that he was to have taken half a decade earlier in his life. It had been "a long wait between planes," as I said at the beginning of this tale.