



AMSTERDAM . . . LISBON . . . STOCKHOLM . . .

By K. H. ABSHAGEN

It is one of the aims of our magazine to point out new developments in the world, to analyze them, and to look for explanations. There are probably few people who have given much thought to the fact that the date lines under which news reports are printed nowadays are not the same as those of a few years ago. Yet this change is highly significant. It means that the entire traditional system of news gathering has been turned upside down.

The author is known to our readers from previous contributions. After the outbreak of the war in 1939, he worked for a considerable time as a journalist in several of the new centers of war news, such as Amsterdam, Madrid, Lisbon, and Stockholm.—K.M.

WHEN they open their favorite daily papers, newspaper readers the world over find that a considerable part of the news about the war and about the countries at war appears under such date lines as Lisbon, Stockholm, Buenos Aires and, though perhaps not quite so frequently, Zürich, Berne, and Madrid. Till September 1939, news reports from these cities rarely got into the columns of the press outside their own countries. Moreover, the news emanating from them dealt mainly with local affairs. Thus Buenos Aires would send out reports about events in Argentina and, occasionally, about one or the other of the minor South American republics, particularly when there happened to be a revolution or when a war was being fought in the wilds of the Chaco.

Before the creation of a strong and stable government in Portugal through the energy of General Carmona and Dr. Salazar, Lisbon's news to the outside world would consist of reports, two or three times a year, of the latest *Putsch* of either the army or the navy, of some attempt at assassination of a prominent politician, or of the latest phase of the then permanent state of national bankruptcy. Of course, Lisbon and Madrid

gained temporary ascendancy as news centers during the Spanish civil war, but with the end of the war both had once again become backwaters from the point of view of international journalism. The other places mentioned were even less productive as far as news of world-wide interest was concerned, if we except such transitory events as the Kreuger scandal, when for some weeks Stockholm provided the world press with plenty of news about the fallen idol of finance.

All this changed very suddenly with the outbreak of the war in Europe. When hostilities began between Germany and Poland on September 1, 1939, and between Germany and France and Great Britain two days later, the system of news supply and distribution, as the world had known it up to that time, collapsed.

THE OLD BROTHERHOOD OF NEWSMEN

International co-operation between the press of various countries, particularly the press of the major powers, had been very close indeed, at least as regards the supply and distribution of news. For instance, the great official and semi-official news agencies, such as Reuter, DNB (*Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro*), Domei, Havas, PAT (Polish Telegraphic Agency),

and TASS (Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union), to mention only the most important ones, had arrangements for an almost complete exchange of the news accruing to each of them through their elaborate networks of correspondents; in many capitals their offices were even under the same roof. Similar arrangements existed between many of the unofficial news agencies, such as Transocean, Europapress, Exchange Telegraph, Central News, United Press, and Associated Press.

Last but not least, the special correspondents of the great newspapers of many countries had contacts of varying degrees of intimacy with the newspapers and with individual journalists of the country in which they were working. In London, for instance, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* let offices in their buildings to numbers of foreign correspondents and supplied the latter with the reports of their own correspondents at home and abroad. This system of co-operation between the agencies and correspondents of many countries had, on the whole, functioned remarkably well. In spite of widely divergent views and openly hostile policies, the comradeship of the common hunt for that most elusive game, real and genuine news, withstood to the last the long series of political crises leading up to the final clash. The collapse, when war broke out after all, was all the more complete.

THE EXODUS

Strictly speaking, the international exchange of news, at least as far as the European countries are concerned, broke down even before the armed forces had begun to move. On the night of August 23, 1939, Sir Nevile Henderson, the late British Ambassador to Germany, advised British press correspondents to leave Germany, advice which was followed by practically all of them. It is significant that Sir Nevile does not mention his advice to the journalists in *Failure of a Mission*, his propaganda book written after the outbreak of the war, for that would have allowed the conclusion that

even at that comparatively early date the British Government had made up its mind that there would be war. In any case, the departure of the British journalists from Germany left the German Government without means of retaliation if, once war should actually break out, the British dealt unfairly with the German newspaper men in London. Hence, two days later, the latter were advised by their Embassy in London to leave the country without delay.

Then the French correspondents left Berlin, and the German journalists departed from Paris. Thus it happened that, during the last fateful days preceding the outbreak of hostilities, the press of the countries mainly concerned was almost entirely without direct reports about the last phases of the diplomatic game in the capitals of what was soon to be the enemy side. For instance, the only "feelers" of the German press left in the British Isles between August 26 and September 1 were the DNB correspondent in Dublin and a young lady secretary left by one of the German news agencies in London for the sole object of clearing up its Fleet Street office, but who, when war did not break out immediately, succeeded with remarkable initiative and intelligence in reporting singlehanded for four or five days to her German head office about the main developments in Britain and the British Empire.

EARLY WAY-STATIONS

It was during the last days of August 1939 that the first freakish news centers, which have dominated the headlines and news pages of the papers in the whole world ever since, came into being. The British and French correspondents from Berlin did not return home: they only crossed the German frontiers into one of the countries that were regarded as likely to remain neutral, at least for the time being. Similarly, the German correspondents leaving London and Paris took up observation posts in the small countries along the northern fringe of Europe.

The idea on both sides was identical: in all the countries which were almost immediately to be involved in war, newspapers and news agencies were not inclined to rely exclusively on such news from and about the enemy side as would reach them through the medium of correspondents of neutral nationality. Both sides were unwilling to forego the experience and judgment of the men who, in many cases for long periods, had represented them in the enemy countries. So these correspondents were moved to countries which offered the best possible means of observation and the best opportunity of collecting information about the enemy side.

At this early stage of the war, Lisbon and Madrid were regarded as too far away to be useful. The majority of British correspondents in Berlin had followed their Ambassador's advice by going to Copenhagen, which was the easiest neutral capital to reach from Berlin; but very soon several of them traveled by air—avoiding German territory—to Holland, where they split into three groups, one staying in Amsterdam, another going to the Hague, and yet another making Rotterdam their headquarters. It was in Holland, too, that the majority of German journalists coming from London settled down, while others went to Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm.

Both the French correspondents in Berlin and their opposite German numbers in Paris went mostly to Brussels, only a few on either side to Switzerland. The Swiss Government—quite contrary to its attitude in World War I—was very reticent in granting visas and residence permits to journalists from countries at war, probably from fear that, by harboring too many of them, it might endanger its neutrality. Newspaper men from both sides had chosen their points of vantage rather cleverly in countries which could be regarded as connecting links—not only in the purely geographical meaning of the word—between Germany and Britain and Germany and France respectively.

PARADISES LOST

The sudden inrush of some dozens of "newshounds" fresh from the hectic journalistic life of London, Paris, and Berlin, into the quiet and dignified atmosphere of the royal capitals of Brussels, The Hague, Copenhagen, and Stockholm, and the sober air of commercial centers like Amsterdam or Rotterdam, was bound to create an upheaval in the journalistic life of these cities. Up to this invasion of colleagues from the nerve centers of international politics, the foreign correspondents in these smaller countries had led peaceful lives. Sensational news had been rare; the birth of a royal princess or the occasional visit of some distinguished foreigner to an empress in exile had been events long to be remembered. The day's work had been done at regular hours; nobody had thought that it really mattered very much whether a cable containing local news were sent an hour or two earlier or later. Competition had been mellowed by the recognition that life would be more comfortable for all concerned if they marched more or less in step, giving head offices in London and Berlin no opportunity to complain that so-and-so had sent the news several hours earlier than their own correspondent. Moreover, the most important part of the reporting had often not been done by cable or telephone but by what the French call "*articles de fond*" sent by mail.

This placid world of small country journalism was suddenly all but overthrown by the newcomers who, with scarcely a by-your-leave, commandeered the offices and telephones of their local colleagues, ran up terrific telephone and cable bills, rushed about, talking excitedly and working at the most unearthly hours, keeping themselves and others awake with strong coffee and strong drinks until two, three, or four o'clock in the morning. It was some time before the two groups of men—belonging to the same profession but used to working in different surroundings—came to understand each other's qualities and adapted themselves to each other's methods. But

in the end a very close and fruitful collaboration developed in most cases.

ENEMIES RUB SHOULDERS

It must be put on record that the development was, for all practical purposes, the same in both camps of the belligerents. Either side was able to observe how the other fellow got along with the new situation. Although, naturally, what personal contacts between journalists of the now hostile nations had existed were broken off by the outbreak of war, there remained many occasions for newspaper men of both camps to rub elbows with each other. In the ante-rooms of the government authorities of the country whose guest one had become, one would more than once be seated next to one of the journalists of an enemy nation.

In the office building of the ANP (*Allgemeen Nederlandsch Presbureau*) in Amsterdam, the correspondents of DNB, Reuter, and Havas had adjoining rooms and shared a washroom as well as the room in which they kept their coats. In Stockholm, I think to this day, the Swedish Foreign Office has rented two large and comfortable rooms in the Grand Hotel as a kind of club and information center for the foreign press. There one can see German, British, French, and nowadays probably Japanese, correspondents writing their despatches in the same room, perusing, one after the other, the news telegrams of the official Swedish news agency which are brought in every hour, and taking their turn to talk to the Swedish diplomat who comes in every day for a few hours to be at the foreign journalists' disposal with advice, information, and whatever help they may require.

Similarly, in Madrid correspondents of the belligerent nations had to share a small waiting room when they went to submit their cables to the censor. Even though it had no results, we might mention that in Holland, early in the spring of 1940, several British correspondents, through the medium of a Netherlands colleague, approached the

writer with the suggestion of joint representations of the British and German journalists to the Press Department of the Netherlands Government in some matter concerning the handling of the Netherlands censorship.

NEWS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

The intelligent newspaper reader will be justified in putting the question: What are the sources of information on which these journalist evacuees base their reports? As they are not reporting primarily on the events in the country in which they are residing but about the affairs of a country they have left, their reports cannot but be secondhand. The most valuable sources of information for a correspondent watching the enemy country he has left are that country's newspapers. The observation posts in all cases were chosen from the point of view of obtaining the press of the country under observation as early and completely as possible. During the first phase of the European war, Holland offered the greatest advantages for the German correspondents reporting on British affairs, as the London morning papers were usually available about noon of the same day, having arrived by air. Copenhagen and Oslo received the English papers much less regularly and with considerably more delay. During the same period, the Paris papers were available in Brussels only very little later than in the French capital, while they would reach Geneva with a delay of from eight to twelve hours. The leading German papers were rather late in Belgium and Holland, Berlin being far away and international air services having ceased on the Continent with the outbreak of the war.

The importance of distributing newspapers and periodicals in neutral countries was very soon recognized by all governments at war, with the result that keen competition in that respect developed in many regions. Although these efforts at propaganda are intended in the first place to influence the population of the neutral countries in which these publications are sold, there is undoubtedly also

a chance that, through the correspondents of the enemy country carefully scanning the pages of these papers for news items, propaganda may creep into the press of the enemy country itself. The people responsible for the press policy of the belligerent countries are well aware of this danger, and therefore only experienced and reliable journalists are entrusted with the task of reporting about the enemy countries from the new centers of news and information in neutral countries.

RADIO REVELATIONS

Only second in importance to the newspapers and periodicals of the country under observation are for the trained observer that country's radio broadcasts. It can safely be said that, in all the offices of foreign news agencies and foreign newspaper correspondents in what we have called the freakish news centers of the present war, the wireless receiving sets are turned on practically twenty-four hours a day. In the bigger offices, there are probably several sets worked simultaneously by experienced radio operators.

Radio news in war time is, of course, no more to be taken at face value than newspaper reports. It is compiled from the angle of its propaganda effect on the folks at home and on neutrals and enemy nationals as well. It is, therefore, not the contents of "hot" news in the radio broadcasts from the enemy country under observation that the correspondent is primarily interested in — although, of course, he has to be posted as to what the other side is reporting, so as to assure actuality to his own despatches. It is rather the undertones of the enemy broadcasts that give him the most important information as to the state of mind and the conditions in the country he is observing. He is able to draw conclusions from the choice of personalities presented by the broadcasting stations to the audience in the country itself and to the world at large, because during his previous work in that country he has acquired a wide knowledge of personalities in all walks of life, of their relative

importance, their background, opinions, and connections.

In the same way, the subjects dealt with in the radio talks, the atmosphere of the radio plays, the whole character of the programs, help him day by day to correct in his own mind the picture he is building up of the state of affairs in the country on which he is reporting. From what has been said, it is evident that the long-wave broadcasts destined for home consumption rather than those directed by short wave to foreign parts are the ones that are most helpful to the correspondent. This offers one more reason why the tendency on all sides has been to establish their observation posts as closely as possible to the country under observation.

NEUTRAL DIPLOMATS AND JOURNALISTS

The more time passes since the newspaper men left the countries about which they are still called upon to report, the more difficult it must necessarily become for them to keep abreast with the development of political conditions, of national morale, of popular feeling in these countries, and the greater becomes the danger that their reports get divorced from reality.

There are, however, one or two ways of counteracting the danger of losing one's grasp of the developments in a country, developments which one was formerly able to follow mainly through the media of its press and broadcasts, both strictly controlled in time of war. One of the most important of these additional sources of information is the reports of neutral diplomats to their home governments. They are sometimes available to a correspondent who succeeds in establishing friendly contacts with the diplomatic missions of one or more of such neutral countries. Though such reports are in most cases rather belated (at least from the newspaper man's point of view), they have the one great advantage of not being censored at the source.

Of more immediate importance for the correspondent's day-by-day work are the reports from neutral correspondents in

the enemy capital appearing in the press of the country in which our observer has taken up residence. Although they had to pass the censors of the belligerent and often of the neutral country too, they may tell a great deal to the knowledgeable journalist who fits the data thus obtained into the mosaic of information gleaned by other methods. These press reports have the double advantage of giving a picture seen with the eyes of trained journalists who are not nationals of the country about which they report. They possess what little impartiality one can expect in time of war. Their value for the correspondent is enhanced if the latter has the means of rightly assessing the gifts of observation and the intellectual integrity of the reporter. It may well be that both the neutral reporter and our correspondent have known each other through years of journalistic work in the same surroundings.

TRAVELERS AND CROSSROADS DWINDLE

Most of our freakish news centers are, or were, important crossroads of international war-time traveling. For instance, during the early stages of the European war, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Stockholm were places where travelers by air from all the countries then at war used to break their trips from one capital to another, not so much of their own free will as because the neutral air lines were unable to deal with the throng of would-be passengers without delays. Among these travelers were politicians, diplomats, and journalists, in particular the correspondents of the great American news agencies and leading American papers, then still neutrals, who were plying more or less regularly between Paris, London, and Helsinki. They were eagerly sought after by colleagues from both the belligerent camps who wanted to get firsthand information about how things were shaping in the Western democracies.

The more countries became involved in the hostilities, the more did the number of neutral news centers shrink. The first to disappear were Copenhagen and Oslo,

in April 1940. The Netherlands and Belgian cities followed suit. Owing to their geographical situation, they had been the most important places where belligerents could legitimately gather genuine information about the opposite camp. A few weeks later, when Italy entered the war, Rome disappeared as a center of international news supply. For a while, both the belligerent camps had to draw mainly on the news supplied by American correspondents reporting from both sides of the front lines, or rather from both sides of the North Sea and the English Channel. But the more the United States came down on the British side of the fence—on which, officially, she pretended still to be sitting—the more the reports of the American news agencies and papers lost what little impartiality they might have had. The outbreak of the Greater East Asia War and Germany's and Italy's declaration of war on the United States closed the last loophole for independent news from that part of the world.

LISBON AND MADRID

Thus, today, there are only very few places left in the world where news from both camps can be gathered, digested, and sent out again. The city most often quoted in the world press at present is probably Lisbon. Situated on the westernmost fringe of Europe, the last remaining European seaport where ships coming from the Western Hemisphere and Africa call regularly, the European terminus of the Atlantic Clippers, and at the same time connected by an air service with Great Britain, while normal railway and air services are maintained with the Axis countries and the rest of Europe, Lisbon enjoys a unique position as an international war-time news center. The newsstands on the Rossio, the central square, contain newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and books from all quarters of the globe. Almost every day, prominent representatives from one or more of the countries at war are in town; or they all but run into each other in the Hotel Palacio, or try to size each other up across the gaming tables at the

Casino in near-by Estoril. The very air in Lisbon seems to whisper the latest reports and rumors about what Churchill has under his hat, or what Roosevelt intends to do next, or what new surprise Hitler has in store for the Allies.

The only thing that is lacking in Lisbon, from the foreign newshawk's point of view, is firsthand news in the Portuguese press from the countries at war. For, since Portugal is a small country where interest in foreign affairs and foreign countries (beyond neighboring Spain) used to be limited to a very few people, Portuguese newspapers never spent money on having their own correspondents abroad. There is not even an official news agency. Hence the news pages of Lisbon papers consist mainly of reports from the news agencies of the warring countries, the Government insisting in the interest of the country's neutrality that both parties to the conflict be given equal space.

In Madrid, the situation is different and, in this respect, more interesting, as some of the Spanish newspapers have correspondents in foreign capitals. A few of them, in particular one of the Spanish journalists in London, have made a world-wide reputation for themselves with their informative reports. But otherwise Madrid cannot claim to be a first-class international news center. It has, however, an importance all its own as the source of information about events in the Western Mediterranean and French North Africa, these reports being generally based on information gathered at such subsidiary observation posts as Algeciras—close to and overlooking Gibraltar—and Tangier.

STOCKHOLM AND SWITZERLAND

Stockholm's contacts with the outside world have become limited through the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, which severed the connections with Soviet Russia. Contacts with Germany and Finland, however, continue to be frequent. Now and again a new British face also may be seen in one of Stockholm's many sparkling restaurants, which

means that another British courier plane with mail and propaganda material for the British Legation and some parcels of London newspapers has succeeded in crossing the North Sea and slipping through the German air patrols along the Scandinavian coasts. The attention paid to the reports issued from Stockholm is due mainly to the work of some very able correspondents in the capitals of several of the belligerent powers. Stockholm's prominent position as a clearinghouse of international news is further enhanced by a particularly efficient telephone and telegraph system and by the virtual absence of censorship on all news except reports dealing with the defenses of Sweden herself. And lastly, there is more genuine and intimate knowledge of Soviet Russia in Sweden than in most other countries.

The importance of Zürich and Berne, not to forget Geneva, as centers of news has dwindled since the collapse of France in the summer of 1940 and even more as a consequence of the latest events in France. Aside from the reports of a few Swiss correspondents in the countries at war, not much genuine information comes from these places. Most of the reports are a rehash of the broadcast news of all the world. It is possible that a few British correspondents stranded in Switzerland find satisfaction in reporting the more or less, mostly less, credible tales of an occasional traveler coming from Germany or Italy.

BUENOS AIRES AND SHANGHAI

It was only after the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War that Buenos Aires caught the full limelight as an international center of news. Today, it is probably second only to Lisbon in this respect, and this is bound to continue as long as Argentina is able to withstand the constant pressure of the United States. The special importance of Buenos Aires for the supply of news to the world at large rests mainly on two factors: first, it is here, more than anywhere else in the Western Hemisphere, that unbiased information from and about the

United States can be gathered; and secondly, in Buenos Aires there are a number of very able and experienced German, Italian, and Japanese journalists at work, collecting, probing, and sifting this information and making it available to the newspaper readers of their countries.

Last but not least, we ought to mention Shanghai as a news center that has played an important part in the wartime news supply of the world press. Shanghai has, of course, always been an important source and clearinghouse of news, so that we cannot compare it with what we have called the freakish news centers. However, while in peace time the news sent out from Shanghai was

mainly about China and her neighboring regions, the city gained added importance during the earlier stages of this war as a source of news and information from and about the eastern parts of the British Empire, such as India, Australia, and New Zealand, and about the Dutch East Indies. With the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War, Shanghai's contacts with the Allied countries were cut, and its part in the world of journalism was once more changed to what it is now and what it is bound to remain in the future: one of the most important news centers of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere. As such, it will flourish long after all the other news centers we have dealt with have fallen back into oblivion.