

FEBRUARY 3, 1969WALTER C. LANGSAM

In the summer of 1934 it was, in Innsbruck, site of the old bridge across the River Inn, that first we saw him, my wife Julie and I. In time more than a third of a century ago, the memory is as of yesterday.

It was a beautiful day in this capital city of the Tyrol - a fortified town since the year 1180. The sky was clear; the sun's rays glistened on the Eastern Alps; and the narrow streets were crowded with joyous and laughing throngs. Except for obvious visitors such as ourselves, the people were attired in Tyrolese costumes - colorful, comfortable, and chic. They and we - we standing outside our hotel, Her Graue Bar - eagerly awaited the passage of an automobile, a car in which rode the diminutive and popular Chancellor of Austria, Dr. Engelbert Dollfuss.

As the open car approached, reached our vantage point, stopped briefly, and drove on, we saw his happily smiling face, his energetically waving arms, and his swinging, feathered Tyrolese hat. His charm was captivating. He reached out frequently to shake outstretched hands. He called out humorous words in broad dialect. And then his car disappeared around the next corner. Engelbert Dollfuss had paid his first triumphal visit as Chancellor to the province of the sturdy Tyroleans, the rugged land of the Austrian national hero and defier of Napoleon, Andreas Hofer, As it happened, we did not see him again until a few weeks later in Vienna. Only then he was not standing up in his car. He was lying in a casket, dead at forty-two.

We had left Innsbruck for Vienna because there I was to carry on research in the National Library and the State Archives, gathering materials for the first biography in English of Emperor Francis the Good - grandson of Maria Theresa, father-in-law of Napoleon I, and grandfather of the last of the Emperor-Kings, Francis Joseph.

The work in the archives, adjacent to

the State Chancellory, was especially fascinating. I pored over old manuscripts, leafed through bulky folios, read time-blached letters, and revelled in the knowledge that, in some instances, I was reading letters and petitions and documents that last had been read and filed away eight-score years and more ago.

When I found something that I wished to have copied, I passed it along to Julie, for in 1934 the Wiener Staats-Archiv had no copying machines. And Julie, though she knew but little German, proved to be adept in the deciphering of alphabetical letters, whether these were in the precise script of professional court secretaries or the scarcely legible scrawl of emperors and empresses. Actually, knowledge of one or two or even three languages would not necessarily have been sufficient, inasmuch as all the Hapsburg rulers were proficient in the tongues of all their subjects. Maria Theresa, for example, in one brief note often would use words in German, Latin, French, Italian, Magyar, and one or another of several Slavic languages!

The work progressed well and we enjoyed it—and enjoyed Vienna and its cultural and musical offerings in the evenings and during the week-ends. For we walked each weekday morning from our pension to the archives, carried on research until one, walked back to the pension for luncheon, and returned to the archives from two-thirty until closing time at four-thirty.

We developed friendships with the archivists and the other visiting scholars, most of them foreigners like ourselves. Eventually one of the archivists asked whether I would care to see such unique and literally priceless items as the parchment proclamation of Charlemagne as King on Christmas Day in the year 800, and the original patent establishing, in 1430, Europe's oldest continuing honorary order, that of the Golden Fleece. Naturally I accepted, sorry only that women were not allowed down the steep, narrow, and winding stone steps that led several stories underground to a rock-hewn vault. This storage area had

a year-round temperature of about fifty-eight degrees, and possessed just the proper humidity to preserve from cracking the ancient documents that there were housed.

As we descended, the archivist, by pulling dangling strings, lighted successive and weak electric light bulbs – until we got to the vault itself. There he reached into a niche, withdrew a small tray holding a candle, and lighted it with a sulphur match. Then, having taken out of its cabinet the proclamation of Charlemagne, he held the dry parchment up to the flickering light of the candle – flickering all the more since his elderly hand shook and trembled, with both palsy and excitement. Concerned over the nearness of the precious document to the almost jiggling flame, I said – foolishly as it developed – "Heavens, why don't you have an electric light down here as you do above?" "Electricity?" he stammered indignantly, as his hand began to shake even more violently, "Electricity down here? My dear Sir, think of the fire danger from a possible short circuit!" Happy indeed was I, after a half hour, to have seen a number of historical treasures and to have returned to the reading room with neither short circuits nor fires.

But it was not all so gemütlich and pleasant that Slimmer, for this was the July during which Reichsfuhrer Adolf Hitler planned to absorb his native Austria into a Greater Germany. Let us, therefore, leave the story of the archives for a few minutes and glance at the progress of Austro-German relations after World War I.

By the terms of the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye in 1919, the old Austria-Hungary was divided among seven new or enlarged older states. The Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy was reduced in area and population by three-fourths. Vienna, once the hub of a Great Power with a population of 52,000,000 and the largest area in Europe west of Russia, now became the capital of the small, German-speaking Republic of Austria with a population of fewer than 7,000,000. The wartime Allies, fearing that the weak republic very naturally might wish

to unite with Germany, specifically prohibited such union, or Anschluss as the Germans and Austrians called it, in the peace settlement. There simply was to be no Wilsonian self-determination of peoples insofar as the German-speaking nations were concerned.

Throughout the difficult period from 1919 to 1932, Berlin and Vienna tried several times to bring about Anschluss, for the new Austria seemed not to be a viable national unit. But each time, the attempted union was frustrated by the Allies and by the League of Nations. And then, the elevation of the Austrian-born Adolf Hitler to the German Chancellorship in 1933 moved the question of Anschluss to a different plane.

Some years previously a Nazi party had been established in Austria. The members wore the same uniform as their German counterparts and adhered to similar anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic principles. They were recruited mainly from the lower bourgeoisie, the service professions, and a portion of the peasantry, who all placed their chief hope for economic improvement in political union with the Reich. The movement grew slowly, and not a single Nazi was elected to the Vienna Parliament in 1930. Upon the triumph of the Hitlerites in Germany in 1933, however, the Austrian Nazis determined to bring about union. Led by a Dr. Alfred Frauenfeld, they decided to act first and talk later.

In this endeavor they had the support of Germany. Although Berlin realized the possible danger of outright annexation of Austria, there appeared to be no serious obstacle to the accomplishment of this end by indirect means. Since the Austrian Nazis obviously were ready to take orders from Hitler, it was believed that a National Socialist victory at the Austrian polls would complete de facto Austro-German union despite the objections of the former Allies and the League of Nations.

To force the Austrian Government to hold elections, and to ensure a Nazi victory in these elections, the German Nazis exported funds, arms, and agitators to the little republic. Slanders,

assaults, and the detonation of paper bombs in public places and along railroad rights of way became frequent occurrences. These activities, which often violated Austrian sovereignty, encountered the determined resistance of Chancellor Dollfuss, who until recently himself had favored Anschluss.

Engelbert Dollfuss was born on a small farm near Vienna in 1892. After working his way through school he studied law at the University of Vienna and economics in Berlin. During the First World War he served at the front in the Austro-Hungarian army, advancing from private to lieutenant. Because he was less than five feet tall, he liked to refer to himself as "His Imperial Majesty's littlest recruit."

In the postwar period he entered politics as a Christian Socialist and in due time became a parliamentary deputy with some renown as an agricultural expert. He was appointed minister of agriculture in 1931 and in the following year was asked by the President to form a cabinet of his own. Dollfuss' simplicity of manner, his sunny disposition, and his religious fervor readily won over those who came in contact with him.

Obviously, a prime minister, who at his full height measured little more than four feet eleven inches, was the butt of numerous jokes. Some of these perhaps were a little crude, but all were good-natured. Among the things that were said, sometimes in his hearing and to his amusement, was, for example, the one that the government ought to honor his achievements by printing a new postage stamp - with a lifesize portrait of Dollfuss.

Or, since he was a very good skier, it was suggested that, as a youth, he obviously had had ample opportunity to practice - in a neighboring butcher's walk-in icebox. And again, some stories were tied to the circumstance that his wife, whom he dearly loved, was an unusually tall and statuesque beauty. Thus, some wag started an oft-repeated story, probably not told in Dollfuss'

hearing, that, on a certain warm day when he thought he was reclining in a hammock, his wife saw him and called out in astonishment, "Why, Engelbert, what on earth are you doing lying in my brassiere!"

At any rate, when Dollfuss became Chancellor in 1932, he was backed by a coalition that had a majority of only one in parliament. Hence he found it difficult to introduce the economic and financial changes that he thought the country needed during the great and world-wide depression of the early 1930's. When, by odd chance, the speaker and both deputy-speakers of the house resigned in 1933 in the midst of a heated parliamentary debate the legislative body automatically adjourned itself. And since, by the constitution, only one or another of those men could call a meeting, the parliament was unable legally to reconvene. The President thereupon invested Dollfuss with emergency powers. The little Chancellor became virtual dictator of the republic and soon issued hundreds of emergency decrees.

Many of these decrees were aimed at the Nazis and other political groups objectionable to the government. Restrictions were placed on the freedom of the press and of assembly. Nazi propaganda was barred from Austrian radio broadcasts and German agitators were arrested and expelled. Soon the Nazi, the Socialist, and the Communist parties all were abolished.

Dollfuss then tried to build up a concrete alternative to both Nazism and Communism — a Catholic, anti-socialist, authoritarian, Austrian movement. He had come to believe that the republic "could live alone," and he hoped to unify it on a basis of Austrian patriotism. To this end he created the Fatherland Front, which was to be above all parties. Its chief support was from his own agrarian Christian Socialists and from a patriotic peasant militia organized as the Heimwehr or Home Guard by his friend, Prince Ernst Rudiger von Starhemberg.

As the months went by and economic

conditions worsened, to a large extent because the former Allies paid little attention to Dollfuss' personal pleas for loans and for increased foreign trade, the activities of the Austrian Nazis, egged on by German agitators, again became serious. The first week of 1934, for instance, witnessed 140 bomb explosions. Railroad trains were blocked, powerhouses were destroyed, bridges were demolished, individuals were assaulted, and every effort was made to frighten away foreign tourists who might be bringing in much-needed foreign currency. So serious, indeed, did the attacks on international trains become that, for example, to Julie's and my amazement, we noticed armed soldiers patrolling every foot of the main railway tracks all the way from the Swiss and German borders eastward to Vienna.

The Vienna Government responded vigorously to these outrages. Eventually it ordered all private persons, on pain of death, to turn over to the authorities whatever supplies of explosives they might possess. Dollfuss himself ordered the arrest of hundreds of suspected Hitlerites. But thereupon the leaders of the Austrian Nazis, fearing that in time they would be seriously weakened by the determined actions of the government, sought advice from their German supporters. With Berlin's encouragement, they decided to attempt an armed Putsch, or coup d'etat, in July 1934. And here we may return to our personal narrative.

On July 25, 1934, Julie and I walked to the archives as usual, worked all morning, and, since our landlady insisted on punctual appearance at the luncheon table, left the archive reading room promptly at one o'clock. As we went out to the Minoriten Platz, through the huge double doors of the Staats-Archiv, we passed an entering troop of men in Heimwehr uniforms, led by a young officer with a major's insignia. And as the major stood aside to let Julie pass, he smilingly saluted her in approved Viennese fashion.

We wondered why soldiers should be entering the building, with its dusty documents and its

scholarly attendants, but really gave the matter little thought since the sight of armed units was no rarity to any who, as we had done, recently had traveled throughout Central Europe. But then, after we had arrived home and entered the dining room, we quickly sensed that something was amiss. We almost literally felt the silence of the usually noisy and bustling luncheon company, silent despite the wonderfully appetizing odor of Wiener Schnitzel and fried potatoes.

About an hour ago, our hostess soberly informed us, armed Austrian Nazis apparently had seized the government radio station near St. Stefan's Cathedral, while another Nazi unit now was holding Chancellor Dollfuss and his aides imprisoned in the Chancellory. The Nazis who were holding Dollfuss prisoner, it seemed, had disguised themselves in Heimwehr uniforms and had entered the Chancellor's quarters through a connecting door from the archives building. This building, our building we called it, the Nazis had freely entered through its huge double doors - the very doors that had afforded us egress on our way to luncheon - because the Staats-Archiv in effect afforded a back entry to the Chancellory.

To put it mildly, we were relieved to have got out, all the more so when we later learned that we had been the last to leave before the Putsch. All the archivists and all the attendants and scholars, native and foreign, who remained after we left, were being held incommunicado - the men in one room, the women in another. They suffered no physical harm or mistreatment during the several hours that they were held prisoner; but neither did they know what was going on nor were they given any food or drink during the prolonged afternoon of mental anguish.

After lunch and after talking things over, Julie and I agreed that, though we were worried, we were even more curious; and so we decided to risk a walk to the center of town. Our eventual goal was to be the Italian Consulate-General, where some days earlier we had been invited to have tea and then dinner with friends.

The walk was interesting. During its course we heard the one rifle shot that we were to hear close by, and that occurred when a young soldier fell off a moving military truck and dropped his weapon. But there was plenty of action and excitement, with machine gunners and young and nervous men with fixed bayonets at every intersection leading from the broad and tree-shaded Ringstrasse into the Inner City.

It required a carefully balanced mixture of seeming worry on Julie's part and seeming determination accompanied by much passport waving on my part to get us through the ring of armaments, at perhaps our seventh or eighth try. Or maybe it was neither seeming worry nor determination that triumphed, but just Julie's good looks and "disarming" charm. In any case, in the late afternoon and well ahead of schedule, we arrived safely at the consulate-general, housed in an old and sturdy palace. Our somewhat worried friends welcomed us warmly, and it soon appeared that, by being with them, we were in the best possible position to learn the circumstances of the attempted Putsch.

The Nazi plan evidently had been for an "Austrian Legion" of exiles in Germany, reenforced by some German soldiers, to cross the border from Bavaria into Austria as soon as the Vienna radio station and government officials were in Austrian Nazi hands. But the German invasion was inhibited by rapid Italian action. Benito Mussolini, who was a close personal friend of Dollfuss and who had no desire to see strong Germany replace weak Austria as his Alpine neighbor, threatened to send Italian soldiers to meet the Germans and contest any attempt by Berlin to occupy Austrian territory. Naturally the Italian Consul-General was in close and continuous communication with Rome, and so we, as guests, promptly learned at least outline details of the passing events.

Then, after an early and somewhat hasty dinner, our hosts took us for coffee and further news to a nearby cafe, whose proprietor, Hermann Himmelstoss, was a close friend of theirs. The

cafe, small and thickly vaulted, occupied the basement of a stone building that was erected shortly before Columbus discovered America. Its smoky and subdued atmosphere, broken only by the crackling of a radio set, well suited the dark mood of the few guests who risked going out along streets peopled chiefly by Starhemberg's Heimwehr.

We were served by the host himself, a normally genial giant, more than six feet and a half in height and well-named Herr Himmelstoss or "Skybumper." He, alas, and even more his family, not long after had true cause for sorrow; having developed a reputation as an intensely patriotic Austrian and an equally intense anti-Nazi, he was one of the first to be killed by the Germans when they finally did annex Austria in 1938.

The Nazis in the radio station, we learned, had forced the regular announcer to broadcast a statement that the Dollfuss Ministry had resigned. Shortly thereafter the false Heimwehrmen took Dollfuss and several members of his cabinet prisoner in the Chancellory. The Nazis were so easily able to seize the Chancellory because the government, warned of a plot, had asked for a Heimwehr guard - and when the disguised conspirators arrived they were welcomed as the requested protectors! The real Heimwehr guard arrived shortly afterward - in time only to lay siege to the building.

Among the invaders of the Chancellory was one Otto Planetta, uniformed as a sergeant in the group that had passed us in the archive-building entrance. This Planetta, a notorious roughneck, on his own initiative fired two bullets into Dollfuss as soon as he saw the Chancellor. No one else was injured, but of all this the outside world knew nothing until several hours later. Indeed, the loyal troops who besieged the invested Chancellory withheld their fire lest harm come to the captive officials.

But, as the hours dragged on, Dollfuss was slowly bleeding to death. To keep the fact of his condition hidden, the Nazis refused to call for

a physician and paid no heed to Dollfuss' prayers for a priest to administer to him the last rites before he expired. President Wilhelm Miklas meanwhile deprived the imprisoned cabinet of its authority and announced that no agreement forced from its members would be valid.

Eventually the conspirators began to negotiate for their own surrender. They had discovered that the radio station had been recaptured by the government after a short battle, and that Dr. Anton Rintelen, the Austrian Minister to Italy with whom they had planned to replace Dollfuss, already was under arrest.

Through the intercession of the German Minister to Austria, the Nazis agreed to free their victims in return for a promise of safe conduct to the German border. In the early evening the government forces entered the Chancellory. The Nazi conspirators, contrary to their expectations, were arrested - because the safe-conduct had been promised only if none of the captives was injured. Dollfuss' death, kept secret from President Miklas by the Nazis at the time of the surrender agreement, had altered the situation.

The loyal soldiers and police had to put down other Nazi uprisings throughout the state, for the conspiracy was widespread. Prince von Starhemberg became Acting Chancellor and ordered the trial of the Dollfuss murderers. Hitler in Berlin denied any complicity in the affair, and at the trial itself the prosecutor was unable to establish any direct connection between the Austrian conspirators and the Berlin Government. But Otto Planetta and several others who were sentenced to death for murder or treason, shouted "Heil Hitler" just before they died.

And here, too, we were unexpectedly close to the event. For, a few days after the death of Dollfuss, our landlady invited us to a party at her sister's house, in the hope that we might have some fun and forget the dreary events of attempted revolution. Just as a group of us were singing lustily to the accompaniment of some lively piano

playing, there was a knock on the door. Upon opening it, our hostess was confronted by a high-ranking police official. Very politely, and with an apology, he asked that we cut short the festivities, at least for an hour or two. Immediately across the square from us, he explained, in the chief city prison, Otto Planetta was about to be hanged.

And so we come to the end of this story of the summer of 1934. It was the summer that brought an untimely end to the life of a great patriot, a loving husband, a good and genial friend to many, a brave soldier, and a statesman of courage and integrity. He it was whom his faithful followers then, relating his small stature to his firm direction of the government, and recalling the strong governmental control exercised by the tall Prince Clemens von Metternich a century earlier, affectionately nicknamed "Millimetternich."

Walter C. Langsam

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