

Millions of soldiers on leave have had that strange experience of stepping into another world, far behind the front.

THE OTHER WORLD

By GERHART WEISE



THE motors whined as they coasted without power. They gasped once or twice, as if they were choking. The men in the plane, absorbed in watching a number of trembling instruments, red and yellow control shutters, quivering indicators, and metal joints, sensed the sudden stopping of the ceaseless soft whipping of the propeller blades. Without waiting for a signal from the lieutenant, they buckled their straps with a few careless movements. The humped little mechanic wrote hurried notes and figures with a stub of an indelible pencil on his block of pale-green squared paper.

For a moment the plane hung four thousand meters above Lake Constance. From the noon-day sky, bluish gray mist sank down in thin waddings to cover the horizons. The lake slept far below, small and leaden. No ship could be made out, no train, nothing that moved. The Swiss Alps lay gray and misty in the south.

Without looking back, the lieutenant raised his right arm and dropped it again, his hand describing an arc back to the steering wheel. All this time he kept his eyes on the instrument panel and looked at the luminous hand of the velocity indicator. Hunching down over the wheel, he dived the plane over the right wing. At the end of the wing a dark, screaming eddy formed. Behind the glass panes of the pilot's cabin, a bit of the earth's surface glided up swiftly, fields, meadows, hilltops, churches and villages with red roofs fleeing toward each other and with a lot of yellowish white paths among them.

He caught the plane very low down. Then they roared along the shore of the lake, so that the countryside appeared as on a travel folder. Just before reaching Friedrichshafen they rose again in a steep, wide spiral and, with a last high-spirited turn, flew straight at the Zeppelin hangar. They landed right in front of the plane hangars.

The lieutenant unbuckled his parachute, took a cigarette offered him by one of the men standing around, and walked over to the office barrack with the supervisor of the airfield, a Mr. Voss, who had given him his first flying lessons many years ago. He walked with slow strides, young and broad-shouldered, and radiated on everyone who saw him some of that feeling of well-being you get from test flights

in good new machines, flights of no fixed route, without danger of being attacked by the enemy, and with all the freedom of three dimensions to which one can abandon oneself as in play.

"Right after we started there were some exhaust gases in the cabin," said the lieutenant. "It smelled like burned rubber. But the men found the defect very quickly. It was quite easy to fix."

The lieutenant had started the subject to force Voss into an impersonal conversation. The older man sensed this. He hid behind the many wind creases in his red face and spoke about the peculiarities of the new plane type. The lieutenant hardly listened. He soon left in a car waiting for him.

He casually noticed a girl from the drawing office who ran past the car in a long white coat. She had freshly waved brown curls, regular brown features, and pale-gray eyes, and her lips were parted in a smile, as if she were enjoying something nobody else could see. She was very young and slim and had a light, elastic step. Among the little group of men in overalls, in the unreal scenery of an airfield—on which, once the noise has stopped, there is always an atmosphere of exhausted boredom—she seemed a creature of flowerlike strangeness. It was a memory which glided past like one of the many trees along the road, like a snapshot, with gay colors and sharp outlines, a little too small and of photographic indifference, as everything appears when one returns to earth after a long flight at great height: houses, people, paths, vehicles, gardens, memories, plans, everything.

At the hotel the lieutenant got out. He went to his room and opened the window. He looked across the lake, whose surface, a shiny, arched metal plate, disappeared into the glare. Later he stretched out on the bed. Outside the window he could hear the excited humming of a wasp. He smelled the air coming up from the water. Somewhere in the house a woman laughed. In the distance, a steamer bell rang out. It sounded very far away.

LIEUTENANT Reusch, together with three other officers, eight sergeants and corporals, and nineteen men, had been given orders by his squadron in Flanders to go to Friedrichshafen and fetch a group of new machines which were to be flown to a field near St. Omer. In Stuttgart there had been a

telegram for them. The work of the inspection commission had been delayed. The planes would not be ready to start until two, probably even three days after the date announced. Accordingly, the officers and most of the men had made use of favorable train and air connections to visit their families. Since Reusch's parents lived in Milan, and since he had no girl and his only friend was a soldier in the West, he had indifferently taken it upon himself to look after the rest of the men as far as Friedrichshafen and to report there to the military commission and the management of the works.

He gave his men leave. Most of them went to a near-by rest home for aviators where they had friends, or they traveled around the lake to take in the sights. The lieutenant had driven out to the works in the early morning of the first day, had arranged the necessary formalities, and had finally, in front of the construction office—a square box of glass and gray brick—met a friend from a former glider camp. The latter had invited him for lunch at his parents' house and pressed some comfortable civilian clothes on Reusch for the few days he would spend in Friedrichshafen.

Since he first saw action in Poland, the lieutenant had never been out of uniform, first that of a sergeant and later that of an officer. That was more than a year ago now. During all this time he had had no leave, nor had he asked for any. Toward the end of the campaign in France, he spent a week in Paris, but the city was half empty and full of fear.

So it had been more than a year, a year in which the weekdays and Sundays and often even the nights resounded with the roar of warming-up motors, the whip of propeller blades, and the thunder of flights into enemy territory, in which boredom was strangely mixed with tiredness felt after many hours and with an overwakefulness eternally on the alert; a year built of miraculously beautiful cloud mountains, glowing interplay of colors, of high blue summer skies and sudden storms in treacherous, dripping nights of rain; a year in which thousands and thousands of bombs were lifted into the bomb wells and in which the pilots raised thousands and thousands of targets in three corners of Europe into their sights like the dummy targets in maneuvers; a year in which they saw huge battles develop like in a strategic instruction film, tiny, far below them, with the precision of geometrical figures; a year of machine guns and aircraft cannons barking at each other in the skies, of sky-high magic wire entanglements composed of countless luminous tracers, until now and again a wildly flaring torch tumbled down, billowing smoke; a year during the climaxes of which the bombs tore wounds and more wounds into the tortured earth and blew up sluggish fountains of mud, stones, plants, houses, vehicles, animal carcasses,

bridge girders, flowers, and worms or thin-walled submarine turrets, until a small white flag over a battered motorcar or a huge pale, foaming vortex in the sea gave the signal for the end, for some kind of an end that did not mean much in a plane several thousand meters above the earth, as there would soon be another beginning again. That had been the year. Sometimes they slept in tents, sometimes in strange houses, and now they had a properly organized flying field again. They had been near stunned towns which seemed to be dissolving or near a village in which a spring sang day and night and where there was a good smell from the stables in the evening. It had been a year of brave, loud songs burning with desperate avidity for happiness, for success, for bliss and for hell, for women or just for a pair of eyes, a mouth, a face that was waiting for you, a year of loneliness and of noisy parties, while always a hundred yards further on the radio instruments were clicking, the officer on duty was making entries in his maps and lists, and somewhere in a clear night which had no end a flight was moving.

Many a man did not return in that year. You usually felt as if they had been transferred, far off, to an unknown squadron. Suddenly they were not there any more. But sometimes you had just been sitting a few hours before with one of them. They had sent him new snapshots from home; he looked happy; and on his upper lip there was a little brown spot; all the people in the photos must have known this funny little spot. That was only a few ridiculous hours ago.

What do any of us know about this year? It will be a long time before we shall comprehend it. Or we shall soon forget it. That is also possible.

AFTER he had changed his clothes, Reusch went along the lake promenade to the harbor station and then, having nothing else to do, walked this way and that through the many narrow, crooked streets. He watched the whitish gold light reflections trembling over the green water and dazzling the eyes. He heard young mothers babble affectionately into their baby carriages as they passed by. He saw how people were hurrying to get to some destination. They were all intent upon something and knew where they belonged. They knew it so clearly that it was noticeable. Three soldiers crossed the road and did not salute him. You only needed to change your suit and at once you were one among those in the other world. It is difficult to adjust yourself right away. Reusch had often been told by comrades returning from leave that—coming from out there—one at first feels an inexplicable rage, an anger with no object, a sudden fury, which may originate from the feeling of uncertain strangeness in a surrounding which was

once beautiful, one's home. So this was it. Reusch tried to shake it off. He exerted his reason and endeavored to see in all passers-by highly useful people. He pointed out to himself that he was only in the no-man's-land between two lives for a short time and that he would soon succeed in getting across into the other world. He almost started to talk out loud to himself and caught himself just in time. And nothing changed.

So it had been more than a year. Reusch did not think about the year. But it was there. Reusch passed through the life of a small town which appeared to him very close and at the same time very remote, like a puppet play in a foreign language in which he heard every word and could interpret every movement—the way in which young women walked into shops, the dragging gossip of the old people on the benches along the promenade, the hot-eyed whirling haste of the children, the shouts of two workmen between steamer and wharf, the fat red fingers of a merchant who stood with a vacant smile at his door, playing with a button of his spotty white coat and staring down the street. It was Saturday, and the town was particularly busy.

Then a car slowed down as Reusch happened to stop in front of a church. The airfield supervisor Voss with the many wind creases asked his former pupil whether he would like to try out one of the new machines that had just been released. The lieutenant got into the car and felt sheltered. It was good to fly out over the town and over the mountains, to hear motors, to climb over the peaks, and now and again to call out something to the little humped mechanic who noted it down on his green block, in clear figures and well-defined mechanical terms.

WHEN the lieutenant woke up in his hotel room it was just before seven in the evening. He washed, put on his coat, and went out, with a light, contented heart, as if he had never felt any differently, into the garden to have dinner. He stepped out of the pillared porch, from which a few steps led down into the little park, and noticed the girl at a table who had caught his eye as he left the field. He recognized her by her freshly waved curls and her gray eyes. She was now wearing a dark-blue dress. She looked across at him a little longer than is decorous for a young girl in a small town, as if she were trying hard, with a polite smile ready in the corners of her mouth, to place him. Reusch took it as an invitation and went over to her table. He suddenly felt gay and carefree and said: "Pardon me, Miss X, I am Lieutenant Anonymous; I am a stranger here and would like to have

dinner with you."

She was not expecting anybody. She smiled uncertainly, and Reusch sat down opposite her. He asked her to choose a supper for him. She did so and recommended a wine to go with it. During the conversation—it was a meaningless, superficial, jolly exchange—she looked at him now and then with big eyes, as if she suspected that he came from the war. Perhaps someone had told her at the works. Or she just knew it. Young girls have a special knack of recognizing strangers.

As darkness fell, a mild late-summer wind drifted in from the lake. Behind an open window someone was playing the piano. In the harbor the last steamer, the *Konstanz*, rang her bell. It was getting dark, and the waitresses were clearing the tables. Miss X talked about her life in one of the drawing offices of the works. They laughed a good deal.

After a while she said: "I'd rather be called Anonymous and you can be Mr. X. It's because—Anonymous sounds nicer."

Arm in arm they walked down the short street leading to the lake frontage of the château. It was very dark, and they met no one on the way. And it was very quiet, except for the subdued play of the wind in the gardens.

Anonymous did not seem to be particularly well-educated. Nor was she a very clever girl. But the lieutenant felt as if, with silver and secretly tender words, she were building for him a sort of Venetian bridge into the other world, a bridge of starlight and many gay arabesques. And she had the self-assured straightforward freshness of young girls who know how to deal with technical terms and current opinions, with their own lives and, among other things, even with a flying officer.

Under the colonnade leading from the park to a pierhead in the lake, a police motorboat came alongside to a grinding stop. In the light of a hurricane lantern they saw a man in a battered hat carrying a gull in his hand, a dead, blood-encrusted pale-gray bunch of feathers. The night before, some English planes had flown across Lake Constance; an anti-aircraft splinter had apparently killed the gull. It had been drifting out in the lake, and the policemen had found it and wanted to bury it in a garden. On the ships and at many places along the German shore, searchlights began to practise. Their white arms stretched thin and long and steeply into the darkness. In restless change, they combined into strange vaults and tents, to go out suddenly only to shoot up again less than a minute later, to grope their way toward each other, to flee from each other and overlap, and finally to cut out half a dozen huge lighted squares from the starry sky.



The lake lapped in small black waves against the stone embankment. On the opposite shore the lights of Swiss villages and roads blinked in the distance. The policemen had tied up their boat. They went off toward the town.

"Let's go on," said Reusch. He drew Anonymous by the arm. Without speaking they tramped across the iron causeway leading in front of the château wall, across the water, to a large round pierhead. The rhythm of their steps resounded through the loneliness. Then Anonymous got the idea of walking in such a way that her steps always sounded between the lieutenant's, the result being a concert of delightful hollowness. They smiled, and Reusch felt for Anonymous's hand and pressed it gently. It was a cool, small, yielding fist which snuggled a little into his palm. They sat down on a bench near the water and looked across the narrow dark pier into the night and spoke now and again, only to hear the sound of their words. At one time, somebody played a harmonica on an anti-aircraft ship anchored near by. Reusch forgot his encounter with the town. He drew Anonymous closer to his side. Their shoulders touched, and then their hands.

They stayed at the pierhead till it was almost midnight. It got very dark, and they could only make out each other's outlines. Shortly before they left, Reusch turned the girl toward him so that he thought he could see her clearly, and she was quite quiet and in her face were surrender, anticipation, and fear. Then he took her in his arms. He kissed her neck, her breasts, her hair, her face. He held her in a furious grip and felt her resistance cease and was close to her. And suddenly he released her. Suddenly he had become conscious of how alone they both were, each of them, and how lonely one can be in being together. It just occurred to him.

Anonymous slipped down from the bench. He saw her kneeling on the stone and lift her arms, half in defense, half to cover herself, and once she cried out: "What are you doing? What are you doing?" But she was startled by the sound of her voice and fell silent. And then she softly repeated the same question many times, till he rose and pulled her up.

They walked back a little apart from each other. They did not speak. In front of the house where she lived she suddenly put her arms around him and kissed him with many quick, cool, surrendering kisses and told him that she loved him. He said he loved her too. He was not sure of it, but it made him feel good. They stood together for a long time. They fixed a meeting place for the following afternoon. When Reusch tried to put his arms around her again, she ran off into the house and he heard her steps hurry over wooden stairs.

As he walked to his hotel, he thought that

he was in love with Anonymous. He felt melancholy, and his thoughts were dull, as if he had been drinking. It was a happiness which hurt him. And everything he thought of while walking remained in the subconscious. And the memory of the gull and the search-lights and the hours at the pierhead seemed to come through floating veils. A telegram was lying on his bed. Without opening it, he threw it on the table and forgot it.

ON Sunday he walked along the lake promenade with Anonymous. The town and the people, who all knew where they belonged, remained foreign to him. But it did not bother him. It felt as if morning had rained down, so that the world was now washed by a thinner, purified air which could not support great emotions, and as if the world moved gaily and efficiently and effortlessly behind invisible glass. Reusch and Anonymous sat in front of a restaurant in the sun, eating cake. In the radio the news was being announced and then the communiqué of the High Command. The last sentence was: "Two of our own planes did not return." The lieutenant looked out across the lake and nodded. He lit a cigarette. There were many thousands of planes. Two more had joined the unknown squadron.

Anonymous looked at him and was alarmed. But he smiled at her and said: "You needn't be afraid about that."

The radio now played light music, and they left. Arm in arm, they stopped to look at shop windows in which dresses were to be seen, piles of underwear, stockings, men's and women's shoes, bicycles, books. One window displayed furniture. Behind an armchair stood a reading lamp with a large yellow silk shade.

"That would look nice in our living room," giggled Anonymous, nervously avoiding Reusch's eye. He felt a slight glow of pleasure and gently pressed her arm. But he was lying. He was sure of that now.

Then they both noticed a window with double beds. They passed it without stopping, and Anonymous looked for other windows. Reusch had opened the telegram at noon, when he had woken up. His captain said he would be arriving from Munich at 5.38 p.m. Reusch reflected that he would go to the station in uniform. He had to get back to the hotel and change. He accompanied Anonymous to her house. She had pleading eyes, so that the pale gray seemed to darken slightly, and she stared into a garden on the other side of the street as she said softly that he could drop in for a while in the evening if he liked. Reusch acted a polite bow and a grateful smile and promised to see whether it would be possible. Otherwise they would meet on Monday evening after office at the old place on the promenade. He walked off without turning to look back.

THE captain began to give vent to his wrath while he was still getting off the train. He had been given an urgent courier case in Munich for some special headquarters in Brussels, and at least one of the released machines would have to start the next morning. Reusch declared indifferently that he did not mind carrying out the Brussels assignment. The captain looked at him. Reusch suddenly knew that the captain, although he had a wife and child and could not have found the other world so incomprehensible, had experienced the same feelings as he had himself and all the comrades who had been on leave and had later tried to talk about this other world. You get over it after three or four days, they had added. Reusch knew now what they meant.

After dinner they went into the bar and had a lot of drinks; they spoke of military affairs, and both discovered how impatient they were at heart to get back to Flanders. They did not say so to each other, but each knew it of the other. For more than a year, things had been as they were, and nobody could get away before it was all over. It is no use trying to discover the reason. That is simply the way it is. They ordered more drinks and became very jolly. The captain's nose grew red with large pores. The "signal nose" they called it at the officers' mess. He noticed Reusch looking after the cigarette girl because she had a pair of slender, well-shaped legs, and he laughed understandingly and suddenly began to talk about soldiers' girls. He was a good fellow. He did not say anything disrespectful. But he had been a lieutenant, too, once, and unmarried, and soldiers' girls are creatures about whom one can speculate, perhaps not so much in peace time, but definitely now during the war. In war everything, even the most transient and negligible thing, appears before a new background, doesn't it, Reusch? But what stuff we are talking. They ordered a bottle of wine and discussed what was to be done in case one of the

men should not arrive in time.

At ten o'clock the band stopped playing, and from the loudspeaker the evening news was followed by a repetition of the High Command communiqué.

They stayed on for a while, but their conversation would not get under way again properly, and the captain soon went up to his room. Under the pretext of wanting to smoke a cigarette, Reusch stepped out onto the street leading to the lake frontage of the château.

The wind had grown stronger, but the sky remained cloudless. For an instant Reusch remembered that Anonymous was in her room, waiting for him. He walked to the colonnade and saw the police boat lying tied up alongside. Then he turned and walked back to the hotel. The sound of music came from the bar. Reusch slowly walked up the stairs and did not know why he felt tired.

On the following morning, when dawn had scarcely broken, he started for Brussels with the machine he had already flown on Saturday. The noise of the warming-up motors filled him with a light, contented happiness. He shook hands with his wireless operator and his mechanic and slapped them on the back. He put his arm around old Voss and asked him to forgive him for having paid so little attention to him. Voss, his head a little to one side, beamed out of his red, wind-creased face, and growled that he knew all about it; Reusch had better get a move on, they had work to do on the field, and there was no relying on these youngsters.

The earth slid away from under them. Reusch saw gardens, the hotel, the lake, the pierhead in front of the château. It was a barren morning, with high gray clouds, and on Lake Constance there were white caps. Reusch wondered in which of all those gardens the man from the police boat had buried the gull. Then he pulled the plane up more sharply and flew in a wide spiral toward the west.



BOOK REVIEW

Mensch und Tier im Japanischen Sprichwort (Man and Animals in Japanese Proverbs), by *Taiji Takashima*. (Shanghai, 1945, Max Nösterle & Co., 75 pp., CRB\$1,000.00)

Proverbs and sayings, which contain the inherited wisdom of a people, throw a revealing light on its mentality. As a rule, however, because of their abbreviated, condensed form, they are very hard to translate. Hence those who wish to explain the proverbs of one people to another must be thoroughly acquainted with both languages and peoples. Dr. Takashima is a Japanese who spent several years

in Germany and has mastered the German language in all its nuances. His thoughtful and witty translation of Japanese proverbs give us an engaging insight into the Japanese way of thinking and an idea of Japanese humor. Curiously enough, a number of sayings are more or less identical in Japan and Europe. So it seems that even people living on opposite sides of the world arrive at similar expressions of popular wisdom. The book is attractively illustrated with old drawings of animals taken from Japanese family crests, and is, we hear, to be followed by further publications of other groups of proverbs.