

The Woman in Columbus

Margaret Brunson Rees

A WOMAN, shapeless and disheveled in a soiled trench coat, labored to open the heavy iron doors of the Columbus City Market. Her arms were clasped around paper bags weighted with over-ripe fruits and with vegetables too brown to be sold. As the door swung heavily behind her the cold wind struck her in the face, carrying with it the filth from Broad Street. With a shiver, she turned her face away from the cold draft, and slowly began the long walk home. Her low black shoes were so run over that she actually walked on the outsides of her feet, and the wrinkled stockings showed thin, calfless legs. Her hair, greasy, uncurled, and of uncertain color, hung lifelessly on her narrow shoulders.

As she passed glittering shop windows their lights fell upon her, but she did not glance up at them. Her eyes, if they saw anything, were watching the mushy slush on the sidewalk at her feet. Even at the street crossings she was not aware of the cars hurrying by her, dangerously close. A large red truck swerved to avoid striking her. Its muddy wheels slid in the car-tracks and a spray of dirty water lifted from the street hurled toward her, but she did not look up. With slow plodding steps she staggered on under the burden she was holding tightly against her breast.

As she shuffled along, the packages began to shift in her grasp. Her worn-out mittens groped for new places to hold. She was in front of the bronze gate of the fence inclosing Fort Hayes. Soldiers clad in fatigues glanced at her through the grating. She was a familiar figure around Columbus. Everyone had seen Ma Grogan fetching vegetables and fruits not fit to be sold. The cluster of soldiers were laughing, and one called out something derisive; but she either failed to hear, or else she did not wish to hear, for she still kept her head bowed toward the street.

Beyond Fort Hayes, with its grim structures, she began the incline toward the bridge passing over the railroad freight yards. A passing trolley splashed water from a puddle in the street onto her legs and coat. She turned to utter a complaint, but remained silent. Only her eyes showed the bitterness she felt.

Through smudgy windows of the soot-streaked trolley, passengers peered at the railroad yards below. The overpass was crusted with smoke directly over each set of rails. It was as though a paint-sprayer had left a wide swath of lampblack at intervals, on the abutments of the grey cement bridge. The trolley rolled on, leaving the freight engines puffing up their dark, choking blackness, from the criss-crossed tracks below.

It was March and a cheerless rain that had begun to fall chilled her to the bone. The soot-mixed slush on the bridge made walking more difficult. Her feet were nearly numb with cold. The wind had now grown bitter, and the yellow glare of twilight put a sickening pall on the dingy scene. On either side of the street were doubles or duplexes, built years ago and not repainted since. The blistered siding showed weathered wood under peeling paint. Black smoke from the many trains had so impregnated the ground around these houses that it was very nearly sterile. For years no plants had grown in these black yards. Water trickled onto the sidewalks and oozed into the gutter to join more murky water in the sewers.

As she reached a narrow alley she suddenly turned into the rutted lane. The sign, which had once named this alley Howard Street, was no longer legible. The lane was as unkept as the sign and no houses faced on it. There was only a dilapidated garage whose brown stain had long ago faded. Approaching the garage were narrow uneven cement steps, up which the woman trudged. She was home. There were faded curtains at the windows. The porch, which had been added to the old garage, had a long gaping crack from one end to the other. A well-worn rat run followed the side of the house to the back. She opened the sagging door, which gave out a mournful creak. It groaned as she shut it behind her.

The Handling of Prisoners of War

Hans Steilberger

MODERN warfare is not merely a series of haphazard advances, attacks, withdrawals and counterattacks. It is, rather, a series of carefully planned moves directed by the decisions of high echelon commanders, based on such factors as enemy strength, equipment, location, disposition, organization and movement, to mention a few. The knowledge of these factors, in turn, is derived from a number of sources, the more important ones of which include front line troops, reconnaissance patrols, aerial observers, observation posts and listening posts. Intelligence thus gathered is analyzed and interpreted in terms of enemy capabilities, and forms in most cases the basis for the strategy to be employed.

While the aforementioned sources play no little part in military intelligence activities, their combined efforts would frequently be fearfully inadequate, were they not supplemented by what is, perhaps, the one origin of the highest percentage of information—prisoners of war. Much useful knowledge can be gained from them through skilled interrogators, but much of the success or failure of interrogations depends upon the manner in which PW's are handled.