

Maryland Girl, 3 Babies Flee Reich, Reach Yanks

With U.S. 3d Army, April 19 [By Radio]—Mrs. Jane Donner, formerly of Chevy Chase, and her three small sons, who fled across central Germany by horse and wagon from Mecklenburg to Bavaria, where they were picked up by American troops, are temporarily domiciled in a hotel at the town of Hof, while American military authorities make up their minds how to handle the case.

Mrs. Donner, wife of a German professor at the University of Berlin, and her three children are living on German civilian rations which the town burgomeister has been ordered to provide.

By LEE McCARDELL
[Sunpapers War Correspondent]

With U.S. 90th Division Near Czech Border, April 18 [By Radio]. A former Maryland girl and her three small children, the youngest a year-old baby, are sleeping in a small town here tonight, after a 300-mile flight by horse and wagon across central Germany, through the lines of the retreating German Army into the territory occupied by American troops of the 90th Infantry Division.

She is Mrs. Jane Donner, aged 29, daughter of Fred Esch, United States Department of Justice attorney, who lives at 6301 Brookville road, Chevy Chase, Md. Evacuated from Berlin, where her husband is a university professor, Mrs. Donner and her three small sons, the oldest aged 4, had been four weeks on the road from Mecklenburg to Bavaria. Her difficulties did not end yes-



MRS. JANE DONNER

terday when she entered the American lines. One among the thousands of "displaced persons" in the eyes of the military authorities, she had to undergo the routine screening process, telling her story in minute detail and submitting her American passport and other papers for study and examination.

Slim, brown-haired, blue-eyed,

wearing slacks, a blue woolen turtle-neck sweater, ski shoes and gray, knit, wool socks, her Alice-in-Wonderland bob caught up with a black ribbon, Mrs. Donner told her story with a cheerful good humor and perfect poise.

"My children, thank goodness, are tough," she laughed, "but they've all got miserable colds. And the

diaper problem for the baby these last two days had been acute. I feel like the worst of it is over now. The war can't possibly last more than a few days longer, don't you think?"

Mrs. Donner was born in Chevy Chase, attended high school there, took a degree in English at George Washington University in 1936. The following year she attended the University of Maryland at College Park where she took courses in education with the intention of teaching school later.

Styles Self Footloose

"But I was rather footloose and wanted to see the world," she said. "My parents did not altogether agree with me on that. But in June, 1937, I came to Germany to visit my mother's sister, Mrs. Mildred Harnack, whose husband was an economist in Berlin.

"There I met my husband, who is 43, a professor at the University of Berlin, where he teaches money, banking and statistics. We were married in Berlin. My father came to Germany the next year and in the Summer of 1939, during my husband's vacation, my husband and I went back to America to visit my family.

"But we came back to Berlin to live. Life was rather pleasant then in Germany. And living in a foreign country appealed to me. It seemed romantic. I taught for a while, I small children in an American school in Berlin, but only for a short time.

"I remember my first Christmas in Germany. It was happy and charming. You know Germans make a great celebration of Christmas. The shop windows were full of toys and little sugar houses with

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Maryland Woman, 3 Babies Flee 300 Miles Across Reich To Yanks

By LEE McCARDELL
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figures of Hansel and Gretel. And there were Christmas markets.

"Food was plentiful even after the war began at first. Then it grew difficult to obtain butter. It was harder and harder to buy many other things. I remember you could not buy any sweets. The first of my babies was coming. And I had a struggle with myself to decide what to do.

"I had kept my American citizenship. I did not know whether to go back to Chevy Chase, where I knew it would be simple to give my baby the things he would need, or stay in Germany, where he would have his father.

"I finally decided to stay in Germany. I had married my husband for love and while I had been trying to make up my mind whether to go or stay he had been so decent about it all I couldn't leave him.

Born During Air Raid

"My first baby, Andrew, was born during an air raid. We had been out at the home of friends when the raid started. Everything was blacked out, of course, and we couldn't get a taxicab to take me to the hospital. The trolley cars had stopped running, too.

"Well, they finally got a cab for me, but my husband had to walk home, about a mile, to get my suitcases and bring them to the hospital. A policeman stopped him on the way and said, 'Don't you know no one is allowed on the streets during an air raid?'

"I know, but my wife is having a baby," my husband said.

"Anybody can say that," the policeman grumbled, but he finally let my husband bring on my things.

"My second baby, Neil, aged 2, was born in the little town of Werand my third, Michael, now 1 year old, was born in the town of Waren in Mecklenburg. Meanwhile, I had been evacuated from Berlin in the Summer of 1943 and had gone to Mecklenburg to live in the home of an American-born countess, Rachel Grother, the former Rachel Derby-Smith, of Boston.

Easier In Mecklenburg

"She had a big castle of 60 rooms and gave me an apartment in the castle. We had a dreadful time get-

ting our furniture there from the apartment we had had in Berlin. But at last we found a moving wagon, got the things loaded on the train and finally arrived. Life was easier in Mecklenburg. We could buy vegetables in the country and the rationing system for other foodstuffs seemed to be managed very well.

"My husband continued teaching in Berlin. He has never been in the German Army. As far as I know he is still teaching in Berlin. I haven't heard from him since we left Mecklenburg four weeks ago. But the University of Berlin was still operating then. These people who run things in Berlin want life there to go on as nearly normal as possible.

Rationing Still Working

"I was in Berlin for the last time in January. It had not been

ters from them might cause us to fall under suspicion. And I do not know exactly what my father's position is now. I really do not know what his job was with the Department of Justice when I left. I was not interested in such things then. All I cared about was dancing—and travel.

"Fascinating Experience"

"International marriages are difficult," she said, "and yet if I had to make my decision over again about going home, I would do it the same way. It has been a fascinating experience.

"One of my husband's cousins had a farm in Pomerania. When the Russian advance overran that part of Germany, the Nazi Government ordered the evacuation of all Germans there. Our cousin started out with four wagons and twelve horses for the farm of another relative near Nuernberg. He came through Mecklenburg and I joined him with my children at Muenchen-Reuth, a town about 150 kilometers above Berlin.

"Germany is full of such wagon parties now, all moving west. 'Treks' they call them. Sometimes whole villages are on the move. You will see as many as 30 wagons in one group. They are the villages from which the big land-owners, the Junkers, are moving all their people.

Nobody Asks Questions

"Sometimes the streets of the little towns through which the treks pass are so packed with wagons that the traffic cannot move. The treks travel by day and stop at night at a farmhouse along the road. The farmers have been ordered by the German Government to provide food and shelter.

"Nobody stops you or asks questions. The people moving in the treks have been ordered to get across the Elbe River, to try to reach the lines of the American or British troops. The Germans are terrified of Russians. They have been told so many stories of what the Russians might do to them.

"In our trek, besides my cousin myself and my children were a coachman and three French prisoners of war who had been working on my cousin's farm in Pomerania. The French were in uniform but they wanted to go with my cousin and they had been given

Wagons With Persian Rugs

permission to come.

"All the worldly possessions we could carry with us were in those wagons. And six of the horses were good Arabians, which my cousin was anxious to save. We had two of the wagons fixed up like covered wagons with rugs over them. It is quite a common sight to see wagons on the trek covered with beautiful Persian rugs. The children and I rode in one of our covered wagons.

"We crossed the Elbe two weeks ago. And, as I say, no one stopped us to ask any questions. We did not see many signs of the German Army. But I understand that SS troops stopped some treks whose wagons were hauled by tractors and took the tractors away.

"You hear all sorts of stories from other travelers as you move along in those treks. The war last

front passed us and we never had time.

"Saturday night we pulled our wagons into the woods a few miles north of here. We could hear the guns firing. We built a tent out of rugs and all day Sunday I kept the children in the tent. Yesterday morning the firing was closer, so I took the children and hid there while some of the men in the party crept down to the edge of the woods to keep watch.

Waves White Flag

"Then saw the American troops take possession of the woods. So I went out on the road with our French prisoners of war waving a white flag. We stopped a jeep full of American soldiers, told them who we were, and asked them what to do.

"They told us to go to the next village and report to the Americans there. That afternoon a truckload of Americans came into the woods where our wagons were and they brought all of us into the village.

"The three French prisoners of war were released. They said they had to go back to the wagons and wait for us. We have not seen them since and I am beginning to grow a little anxious. Everything I own is in those wagons. I hope the French have not become tired of waiting and gone on without the rest of us.

"Ice Cream"

"We have been staying in the house of a German family, which the Americans ordered to take care of us. They haven't much to eat. For supper last night the children had potato salad. For breakfast this morning they had black bread and malt coffee, the German ersatz morning drink.

"I have had a dreadful time about diapers for the baby. I have borrowed a couple of towels and washed them out each time a change was necessary. We left everything back in the wagons in the woods. I did not bring a thing with me, not even a toothbrush."

Nothing, that is, except her passport and a few other papers which she carried in a little drawstring linen bag with the embroidered word "Fruestueck" (breakfast) worked into its face with red wool. She explained that it was one of those bags that German housewives used to hang on the outside knob of their front door for the baker boy to leave the breakfast rolls in.

We asked Mrs. Donner what she had missed most in Germany and what she wanted first when she got back to the United States.

Without a moment's hesitation she smiled and said:

"Ice cream."

was still operating then. These people who run things in Berlin want life there to go on as nearly normal as possible.

Rationing Still Working

"I was in Berlin for the last time in January. It had not been entirely leveled then. Berlin is a large city. People were still living there and business was going on in some sections but there was no part of the city which did not show some semblance of damage. In the western section where we used to live, an area called Hallensee, I should say about every fourth house was down.

"Food rationing seemed to be working rather well. I understand that it is better managed in Berlin than in almost any other part of Germany.

"But one person was rationed only three pounds of bread per week. That is not very much, only a loaf about so big and very little when you consider that Germans eat nothing but bread for breakfast and supper.

Can't Say About Politics

"When I had been in Berlin with my children, before we were evacuated to Mecklenburg, each child up to the age of 3 received three quarters of a liter of milk per day; children from 3 to 6, one half liter; from 6 to 8, one quarter liter. This time when I went back milk was available only for children up to the age of 6, each receiving one half liter. And, of course, you had to stand in line almost continually to get food.

"I haven't been back to Berlin since then because of travel restrictions. You have to have special permission to travel on the train now. I can't tell you much about politics in Berlin. Although my husband was a member of the Nazi party I never kept up with their party affairs. I have no idea where the party leaders are now, but as far as I know they haven't appeared in public in Berlin recently, I did not hear them mentioned.

Nazis Never Bothered Her

"My husband and I were anxious to get our children out of Germany. As an American citizen I kept in close touch with the Swiss Embassy, which handled American affairs. And the Swiss had promised that they would get us out in April. But I suppose that is all off now.

"The Germans never bothered me because of my citizenship. I did not talk much about it. I always spoke English when I talked to my children and some people regarded that a little suspiciously. But my two oldest children speak English as well as they do German—as well as you could expect for children their age.

"I haven't heard from my family in America since the war began. I presume my parents are still living, and I have a sister and two brothers, the younger 14 years old and the eldest in the Army now, I suppose. There is no bitterness over my marriage, although my mother did not like it at first, my marrying a man she had never seen and marrying him away from home. She burned up the mails with letters, when I first told her I was going to marry.

Hasn't Heard From Family

"But my family grew quite fond of my husband, when we visited them at Chevy Chase in the Summer of 1939 and I think my husband would have been content to remain in America if he could have found a position there as a teacher.

"I think that the reason that I have not heard from my parents is that they thought that any let-

Army. But I understand that SS troops stopped some treks whose wagons were hauled by tractors and took the tractors away.

"You hear all sorts of tales from other travelers as you drive along in those treks. The well, best that I heard was about a family in which the grandmother had died along the way.

"The family had slaughtered a pig, wrapped it in canvas and tied it to the side of the wagon. They had no means of burying grandmother when she died, so they wrapped her body in canvas and tied it on the other side of the wagon, intending to bury her later. During the night when they stopped both the pig and grandmother's body was stolen.

30 Kilometers A Day

"We started out four weeks ago. We have traveled about fifteen days, averaging roughly 30 kilometers per day. We stopped each night at some farmhouse along the way. We stayed on an abandoned farm Easter. The farmers gave us milk for the children but about the only food we had was potatoes boiled in the skins.

"But we were fortunate. One of the French prisoners of war traveling with us had been a chef in southern France before the war. He was an excellent cook and now and then we had a feast. The worst place in which we stopped was at one farmhouse, where they gave us a room not more than ten feet square, without windows, without furniture and only straw on the floor.

Were Not Strafed

"My cousin grew tobacco on his farm in Pomerania. He had brought along a supply of leaf in one wagon. He usually gave a little of this to the farmers where we stopped. Tobacco is so scarce in Germany that this is always gratefully received and probably made our overnight stays a little more welcome than we would otherwise have been.

"Fortunately we were not bombed or strafed along the road. One day some bombs fell near us. We all got out of the wagons and jumped into a ditch. We had hoped to use up our food before we entered the American lines. And we wanted to paint three of our Arabian horses white. They were such handsome animals and so conspicuous my cousin was afraid they would be stolen. But yesterday morning the