

I always feel so terribly depressed after coming back from a holiday to the knowledge that there are another fifty weeks of endless drudgery before the next that I wonder at times whether the benefit of getting away from it all for two weeks isn't somehow offset by the cloud of depression that settles over me on my return.

Facing the box of letters that has accumulated in the time, thinking of how long it will take to get back to normal, of the work one must catch up on both at home and at work, the 14 days of unread papers always waiting to be caught up with so you find out what was going on, and the same endless path going on. There is elation before the prison gates open but only depression when one realises the gates are closing once more and there is no way to keep them open.

For two weeks a year it is possible to become a rich man - by sacrificing other things the rest of the time, so that when one arrives in a different country for two weeks it seems - to the inhabitants - you are rich. Your very presence there gives credence to the fact. One cannot explain to someone who does not speak your language about the other fifty weeks. They probably wouldn't believe you anyway.

But I am ahead of things. I haven't even started the first day.

First Day: "I must have the window open," said the old lady in the funny white hat, "it affects my breathing". There were no doubt many present at Victoria Coach Station on the motor coach who would have indeed liked to have affected her breathing---

The bus sped onward in the early morning for the Dover Roadpausing only for a half hour stop at a wayside restaurant which was simply jammed with coaches, cars and people. There were so many cups and saucers and so little room they were piled two high on every table, seat and window ledge you could see. No one ever seemed to collect any up but just brought more fresh ones from an apparently inexhaustible supply in the kitchen. Or they made them there in their own potteries. They must have done to have that display on show.

In the car park outside three characters were trying to do something with a motor scooter which had pieces falling off it. Searching for one apparently important part was a fellow in a deerstalker hat like Sherlock Holmes. Eventually finding whatever it was, they put it together and hurtled up the road rapidly pursued by Sherlock Holmes who had fallen off the back seat during initial acceleration.

Eventually Dover and the Maritime Station were reached and we waited inside the station while I suspiciously watched a pigeon carefully edging its way down one metal girder over the station with its tailing protruding ominously over the edge. Stepping back I avoided the attack which spent itself on a less fortunate bystander.

Entering the boat quay one notes the first sign of segregation of passengers by a double doorway marked "British" and "Non British", proudly walking through the former I watched gleefully as the latter filled out forms with one hand and held cases with the other.

If you have never travelled across the Channel by boat from Dover to Ostend -- don't! The boat is literally crammed to the hilt with thousands upon thousands of people, a vast unending line that is fed by streams of buses and coaches, and boat trains, long lines of families, streams of old men with their Pentaxes and Voigtlanders slung around their necks - more and more and more. At one time I was under the distinct impression that the entire population of the British Isles was leaving the same day I was.

Ostend is usually chosen because it is a centre of operation for the big Belgian Car Company that hires fleets of buses for tours all over Europe and their network from Brussels starts here. On the boat deck chairs are marked "Gratis". But they are all carefully gathered up before the passengers arrive so the Belgian crew can then offer to get people deckchairs for which they receive a tip for doing it.

It is cold. It is crowded. And every few minutes someone stumbles over me muttering in a variety of accents ranging from, "Gee Mame this sure is crowded", to "Don't you wish we'd gone to Scotland?"

There are so many people you can't get anything to drink or eat or even get to a toilet and there is nothing to see but the backs of heads and miles and miles of grey waves and white sea mist. Time passes so slowly I thought my watch had stopped. I start reading the first of the three books I have brought with me - Robert Bloch's **TERROR**.

Ostend - at last we have arrived. No one has looked at my luggage either leaving England or coming into Belgium. I could be carrying anything - but there are so many things and so many people no one can be properly checked or it would take hours and hours. Passport officials look at my passport but so rapidly one suspects they only want to make sure a photo is stuck in. Any photo.

A loudspeaker is booming **THE LONGEST DAY** no doubt because of some kind of army exhibition nearby, as we step off the boat it changes to "Rose Marie" and we enter the Belgian coach. I wince visibly - it is a Fiat Van Hool coach and these are notoriously cramped for tall people and there is little luggage space and no fans let alone air-conditioning. And elderly Scotsman nearby regails me with his account of travelling by Greyhound Express from Newark, New Jersey that he took to Miami to visit relatives and the ebenefts of such travel. During the trup he encounters many Americans with strange ideas of England. "Do you have fluourescent light in England?" says one American. "Good heavens, no " says the Scotsman "we still use oil lamps. Have a helluva job with the wick."

We sit down. "That's too comfortable. You'll be asleep all the time" says the Fat woman to her diminutive husband. We pass out of Ostend noticing the kiosks selling "Fitten Chips". Incredible - chips in Belgium.

Surrounding Ostend are many heavy Nazi fortifications. Bunkers, pillboxes, gun emplacements. Brown and blackened skulls with eyeless sockets. Some have the sockets boarded up like a pirate with a patch, one is being destroyed by pneumatic drills. It is resisting heavily and the concrete many feet thick filled with reinforcing rods is like new.

Newspapers filled with sexy photos and posters advertise "La vie scandaleuse de Christine Keeler". French and Belgium papers are having a field day.

I have finished Bloch's **TERROR** and found it an inexplicable retitling by the publisher of his **KILL FOR KALI**. "The moonlight poured forth its phosphorescence from the great silver skull in the sky ----" Beautiful, beautiful. For this I will forgive even the script of **THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI**. I look to see if "By the author of **PSYCHO**" is there. It is. I always look for it now. It will one day be carved on his tombstone I am sure. "Here lies Robert Bloch, author of **PSYCHO**". Is only one work from a lifetime of work enough immortality?

We head south towards the French frontier, through fields of graveyards of wrecked cars. Every field, every ditch has a wrecked car, No one ever carts them away. Scrap metal may be too cheap, insurance rules different. Who knows. Each tree wears a necklace of bumpers, fenders and radiators. They have towed away the main boy of the car - but the front has been left. An automobile's life is short indeed, and it's graveyard is long.

Along the infamous Menin Road leading to Ypres we travel, a road countless thousands died for in World War I - more than the whole of WWII even with it's newer weapons of destruction. This is an area many old British servicemen return to for their holidays each year. Visiting the old battlefields of the Somme and Arras and Ypres. Coming home on the boat weating their medals youngsters do not realise they are the remnants of those who fought the War to End All Wars. How can they. How can they believe such primitive weapons could have killed so many more than atom bombs and napalm did. "While we were fighting - the Germans on the Menin Road" a line from an old song passes through my mind. The border between France and Belgium turns out to be in the middle of a busy street. Unless you are driving a vehicle though it appears you can cross anywhere you like. You can enter a cafe in Belgium and leave by a toilet in France. All in the same building.

A bar advertises proudly above its windows - "SUPER REGAL LUST" which it seems we ought to stop and investigate. Further down the road they are advertising "Maes Pils" and "Monck's Pils" but they don't seem half so appealing. Another shop announces intriguingly "O Sole Mio - En Colours" I wonder what that could have been? For further entertainment a poster announces the attractions of a "Grand Festival De Rock" avec LES COMETS, LES SATELLITES, LES ROCKETS and -- yes - LES POLARIS. Hmm. Passing through Lille I see **WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE** is showing in dubbed French version. More posters of Christine Keeler. One a fence a white rabbit is eating a rosebush!

Finally we reached the overnight stop at a smallish French town called St. Quentin. Across the street - the Rue Dachery - is LE SPLENDID showing James Stewart in MR. HOBBS TAKES HIS VACATION, elsewhere HERCULES VERSUS THE VAMPIRES and THE BATTLE OF CARINTH is showing. The waiter writes his bill out over a Dunlop and Rankin calendar the same as the one I have at work and the same as the one I saw last year in an obscure Yugoslavian town called Slavonski-Brod. That salesman certainly gets around.

SECOND DAY: The travellers stagger into breakfast which is as always rolls and coffee and some form of jam, it sounds inadequate to fried and cooked breakfast eaters like ourselves but I have never found the need for anything extra. Different atmosphere, air perhaps. Tracing through most countries I have always found it was apricot jam - always - this time it is marmalade for a change. Sugar is cubed and individually wrapped. This time I am fooled because what I thought was the sugar - wrapped up turns out to be the butter! In a tiny pat. The voices sift from the chatter ranging from "Let's have some cafee fer gawd's sake" to "I could still do with a good night's rest".

We leave and I see the railway station for the first time, and it looks more like San Quentin than St. Quentin. Nice little town though, bigger than you think once you start moving through it. Flying one would miss these little things.

Onto Rheims for the cathedral, as impressive as that at Notre Dame, I don't see the Jackdaw of Rheims famed in the poem but I do see the Squirrel of Rheims. A tiny redsquirrel runs from its island of trees in the street, right into the middle of the thick traffic and then scampers back like the dickens having thought better of it. The third lorry load of empty drink bottles passes us, they must be a thirty lot, I haven't seen any full bottles yet - only empties. Past Vitry le Francois outside is a giant American 77th U.S. Medical Corps Depot. Or a similar title. Lunch is at Marnaval outside St. Dizier where I cannot operate the salt and pepper shakers. You press a button and the condiments fall out of the bottom of the shaker onto your plate. Onward, through the countryside filled with quaint French notice boards reading CAJTEX ANTI SLUDGE, through a town called Cult. Here the signs start to say "Route Deformees" and "Chaussees Deformees" and very "deformee" they are too as on turning to the back of the coach I see the heads at the back rising rapidly to meet the ceiling and then descending. Bessacon for the night, in the twisting mountains near Swtizerland. I have on my bed either a long pillow and no bolster or a bolster and no pillow.

THIRD DAY: We enter Swtizerland and the first thing I notice is all the license plates have VD followed by five figures. We reach Lausanne where fan Pierre Versins used to live but I haven't heard from him in years and we are only stopping a scant half hour so there is no time to establish contact. It is a noisy, traffic laden city, hot and continuously building something or other. First cinema on a bridge I've seen. We stop at a filling station and watch a travelling salesman try to sell brushes and cleaners to a woman in the attached house. Some things are the same in any country it seems. The method, the approach - everything but the language. At Geneva we have time to see the park and the lake and the important buildings, headquarters of many organisations it seems a clean place but not worthy of an annual holiday. Crossing back over the border we stop at Grenoble for the night, the second time I have visited this town. We eat the evening meal at a restaurant outside the hotel, quite a common custom in many countries in Europe. There is a TV set going but everyone is making so much noise we can't hear what they are saying even if we could understand it all. The production is a drama, technically very crude in cutting directly from one face to another, no mobility or motion at all. There are two separate women who come on and talk, a couple of fellows who look like police, a Rasputine fellow in a cell who evidently doesn't know what good mornings begin with and finally three laughing characters who are planting a mine on the railway tracks. This they find very funny because they keep cracking jokes and slapping each other on the back so one wonders just who must be on that train. I never did find out what happened to the train.

"Look what's coming up," said the Man with the Moustache, "Hard boiled eggs and soft boiled tomatoes. Hors d'oevres. You're supposed to eat them with your fingers, mop up the tomato with your hard boiled egg." Turning to look at the television he remarked succinctly, "Wells Fargo - in French" and resumed his eating.

The television was suspended from the bottom of a small balcony on which several people sat eating their meal, those who didn't want TV evidently and everytime the Man with the Moustache turned around the girls up there thought he was staring at them.

He looked at the remains on his plate and muttered, "I'd better not ask her for vinegar, she might bring me a Coca Cola" and when the casserole meat came up he prodded it doubtfully remarking, "This is cooked in a washing machine."

Leaving Grenoble one finds on the side of the road one of the many monuments erected by France in tribute to Germany. An oblong cream stone with a list of names and a simple heading "Victims De La Barbarite de Allemagne".

Three weeks prior to my visit Jacques Bergier, a Frenchman, the Chief of Gestapo of Grenoble and district was finally captured after eluding police for 17 years, sentenced to death in his absence it seems doubtful DeGaulle would allow the sentence to be carried out for fear of upsetting the now wealthy German industrial empire he wishes to trade with. As a similar gesture some months before he released from prison two condemned war criminals, S.S. General Karl Albrecht Oburg the chief of S.S. and Gestapo of France, the "Butcher of Paris" and his deputy S.S. Colonel Helmuth Knocken, as a salve to Adenauer who would not be so willing to deal with someone holding German officers in prison still. Somehow the simple stone block seems to say more than any of this can.

FOURTH DAY: Over the Route Napoleon through the mountains and gorges we stop at the Inn Napoleon rested at on his journey, now run by a former Resistance man who was both heavily tortured and decorated in the last war, but for the chances of fate his name might be another added to that stone block. Finished reading the second book with me Robert Bloch's ATOMS AND EVIL, the billing this time is "Teller of talltales, author of PSYCHO (There it is!) and the inventor of a thousand possible tomorrows". Indeed. Seems from the first few stories a rather more superficial collection than his classic collection of HORROR-7 at first, but TALENT with a man who can imitate everything in the films he sees and the macabre BLOCK THAT METAPHOR with a truly horrific ending and CHANGE OF HEART lift it out of the rut from some of the lighter stories which seem more trivia and unworthy of Bloch.

Finally we reach Nice on the Cote D'Azur, the blue coast, the French Riviera and by now the temperature has risen so much en route the only thing important is drink and more drink. Parched throats must be wetted with gassy lager-type beer, heady local wine, fizzy soft drink and cafe au lait and even tea. "Everything is more expensive in France" is a saying on really begins to notice, a bottle of lemonade that will fill one glass reaches a price four times the English equivalent. Two main companies supply the French soft drinks of orange and lemonade - the "Pschitt" company and the company that uses the brand name of "Verragoud" on it's bottles. So one must remember that in France soft drinks are either "erragoud" or "Pschitt"

"When you stop wanting - you die" said the Fat Woman, "and there's so many thngs I want yet". I can't help feeling how right she is.

"Slices of camel" says the Man with the Moustache, looking at his plate of veal, "I shall have to ask them what animal this comes from. I can't find any bones". The weekend would see us visiting thr French perfume centre of Grasse which prompted him to say, "We're going out to Grasse on Sunday. I don't like the sound of that. That's what they do to old horses."

The French waiter brings up the dessert, a rough doughnut object with custard. "Ah," says the man with the Moustache, "You used these in le Maquis non? With a long fuze?"

Around 4 o'clock in the night a couple of jets always swoop over Nice for the airport bringing night flight passengers at a cheap rate. They boom in and wake anyone not used to the sound, "I thought we'd declared war," says one woman, "I hoped they were on our side".

FIFTH DAY: Exploration of the beaches using the telephoto of my cine camera. And what a beach. All grey sharp pebbled and rocks. Yet it attracts so many of the most attractive girls you can find anywhere. It is I suppose because the heat of the sun can be relied upon. It is regular. It is there. Always. I see an elderly woman floating about in the water fully dressed. Some people will do anything for a lark. Then the police

arrive in their "Hee-hawing" siren ambulance and collect her. She is a would-be suicide who resists.

SIXTH DAY: An excursion over the Grand Corniche Road around the coast to Monaco and Monte Carlo, one of the few places in the world you never pay taxes. All income is derived from the Casino which supports an army of 70 and Princess Grace. No frontier guards to pass through between France and Monaco surprisingly. On to Italy and the most crowded pass since the Brenner, towering mountains of rocks all sides threaten to fall onto the jammed with traffic road. Buses, sweltering in the heat are given priority. A young Italian border guard anxious to practise his English enters the coach and says, "Touta Inglezi? God Save the Queen" salutes and gets off the coach. "We are in Italy."

San Remo is a hot little fishing town converted to a seaside resort. It has several cool fountains, cacti and the usual dishonest stall owners and storekeepers who short change visitors. One man ends up paying the equivalent of seven dollars for three postcards and can do nothing about it. Satellite watches are on sale with no hands. Instead a small sphere runs around the outside of the figures to indicate hours and an inner sphere to indicate minutes.

SEVENTH DAY: At the Librairie-Peteterie, L'ATLANTIDE, Location de Livres 57 Rue De France, in Nice they are selling English and American magazines and books of all kinds, GUNS AND AMMO, WRESTLING WORLD NEW WORLDS, the British edition of ANAALOG all jostle for position with pocketbooks of Charles Eric Maine's SPACEWAYS, John Wyndham's THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS and A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOVITZ, also there is Henry Miller's NEXUS and LE VILAIN AMERICANE which turns out to be a French edition of THE UGLY AMERICAN. At the local cinemas Clint Walker is in LE GEANT DU NORD and Charlton Heston in THE PIGEON THAT TOOK ROME and Lawrence Olivier in TERM OF TRIAL. The Harlem Globetrotters versus the Cherokee Indians are on at the local sports arena.

I start on the third book in my supply, Leon Uris' EXODUS but like Bert Hodson I find it so full of distortions and twisted anti-British vilification of the facts I have to put it down suffering from nausea that such a book could ever become a best seller. Later I will finish it - but not now. I settle for a copy from L'Atlantide of Len Giovaneetti's THE PRISONERS OF COMBINE D. Further down the Rue De France I notice generous selections of original American editions of Ace books, Burroughs' A FIGHTING MAN OF MARS, TARZAN THE INVINCIBLE, Philip Jose Farmer's THE CELESTIAL BLUEPRINT, THE DRAGON MASTERS by Jack Vance and THE FUN HOUSE. There are a number of French editions of science fiction too. Reprints of classic novels like Bester's THE DEMOLISHED MAN to local French author's works.

We tour around Nice visiting the waterfalls, a church containing a number of religious persecution tortures worthy of Dave Prosser's agonised drawings and meet a wonderful white bearded old man outside who speaks perfect English. He must be very old, but a real gentleman. Later that evening there is an optional excursion to two of the nightclubs including one where a nude girl comes onto the stage and the men of the audience have to wash her in a bath provided. I cannot somehow see myself doing this so I retire for the evening reluctantly.

EIGHTH DAY: We do go out to Grasse, in the mountains surrounding Nice and home of the French perfume industry. Hot Sunday afternoon, I should not like to be working and neither are the actual perfumers but there is a French girl who explains the process and shows the machinery used. It is rather like a moonshine still establishment and one inquires whether they can do whisky in the same still used for jasmine? Interesting, but had no idea so much animal fat was used in making perfumes. All this for woman's vanity and man's shaving cream.

NINTH DAY: The opposite way along the coast on an excursion to Cannes and the Isles of Lerin. Passing through Antibes, and Juan-Les-Pins where the shops remain open 24 hours a day for only four months a year and thru the villa belt where Warner Bros, Maurice Chevalier, Dubonnet and others have their villas. They are not as impressive as one imagines and having seen them and the heat I do not really think I want one. First sandy beaches we encounter.

Cannes has the Palais Des Festivals for the Film Festival, a sandy beach and expensive hotels and from the shore can be see the two islands of Ile Sainte Marguerite and Ile Sainte Honorat. The former holds the prison of the Man in the Iron Mask. The bars are two inches thick

and beyond that after a foot depth is a further set of bars, and beyond that a further set of bars. So the window space is actually more than two feet thick and has three networks of thick iron bars. If you could saw through those you could escape down to the sea. Although outside it is baking in the prison yard and the heat scorches everything inside it is as cool as thought it were refrigerated. The whole disused prison lies there - entrance fee 25 centimes, about two or three cents - the chapels, the well, the barracks, the chains, one door even has a list of the troops stationed there and looking out to see is a battery of five cells. To the right the two cells are so badly in need of repair they have been boarded up, the middle cell is that of the Prisoner in the Iron Mask, left of that is another cell with a white stone figure of a monk and beyond that is a further cell containing the metal plate the prisoner etched his message on and threw from his cell window. The prison can be seen clearly from the mainland and these days is floodlit at night for Son et Lumiere performances which are now held in most major cities of Europe.

St. Honorat contains mainly the Monastery where women may not enter, though one wonders what the freely circulating monks must think of the scantily dressed tourists that often walk around the outside of the monastery. Beyond it looking out to see is a splendid example of a white tower with battlements and defences gleaming white like a large pulled tooth. The harbour nearby is filled with beautiful yachts and launches, beautiful women and beautifully clear water. It is like a picture postcard.

TENTH DAY: At the Nouvea Casino back in Nice a British film EXPRESSO BONGO is showing and near the bus station at the far end of Rue De France KRAPFEN are being sold. In brackets it says underneath, somewhat superfluously since you can see what they are, (Doughnuts). A few doors along is the USO establishment which is rather surprisingly placed until one realises the American Mediterranean fleet docks at Villefranche every three weeks just along the coast.

A metal plate on a door further along Rue De France says "Le Cabinet du Doctor Roger Beard which seems ominous until one realises is probably is just a doctor's surgery, on the cinema nearby the paybox says "Dogs not Admitted", presumably not even to a Lassie picture.

Still continuing down the Rue De France one notices a number of exceptionally attractive girls standing around doing nothing, and bearing in mind this was only a few yards from the main sea front and it was the hottest part of the day it did not occur to me till I was back at the hotel what it was they were there for. Unlike their companions in other countries they do not approach anyone, they wait to be approached.

In the afternoon went back to the hills to visit two very charming towns, Vence and St. Paul, the latter being completely walled around and no parking problems because you can't get a car into the town at all. You can't even get a very fat man up some of the streets. A cannon guards the entrance though these days it is choked with tourist paper and rubbish.

ELEVENTH DAY: Sadly we start the return journey home. At Avignon we come to another walled town but this you can drive in as it is much bigger. At the Lido here Richard Vernon is starring in "L'HORRIBLE DR. ORLOF" which gives the warning "Attention le film n'est pas recommande aux personnes sensibles, la direction ne repond pas accidents" which as I vaguely recall says no one sensible ought to go and see it. And the end of the week on Vendredi there might be found two heures de Fou-Rire - "Poussez Pas Grand Pere" - Avec Les Rocks and the Twist Boys.

Onto Montelimar where they make the famed nougat and we encountered a type of toilet I had seen before in Spain but others had not. The floor is glazed earthenware but has a hole in the floor and two raised foot pieces to stand on, and no seat. On pulling the chain one should have a ready hand on the door or one will be flushed under it by the sudden rush of water.

Hammer's HELL IS A CITY is showing nearby with a French title and at Valence is a big factory called "Rhone - Elec" Hmm. Still further on a filling station proudly proclaims in its title "ESSO SERVICE DIANE DE POITIERS" which I always thought was a prerogative of King Henry II of France. Hitch-hikers line the road with boards with their destinations chalked on them. Finally to Lyon where they are

selling "Saucisses Chaudes" which turns out to be hot dogs. There are more young girls, hanging around the cinema and the hotel this time. Like many French towns there are a hopeless number of one way streets and we drive around and around in ever decreasing circles before we disappear up the Avenue Victor Hugo. Repairing the coach later that night the driver is accosted by a 19 year old girl who wants 2000 francs for an hour. Which sounds a lot as most currency does in Europe where you operate in hundreds and thousands of figures. It works out about five dollars.

TWELFTH DAY: We enter Chalon-Sur-Saone which announces outside the town photography was discovered there in 1822. Kodak are present with a billboard outside all towns around here, the board lists the items of interest to a photographer before he enters each town which is a very good idea indeed. By now the temperature has dropped and we are back to English heat almost. At Auxerre it rains and someone asks, "Anyone want to buy a bottle of sun tan oil cheap?"

And to Paris.

The living end in traffic jams. Not only is the King of Morocco visiting but the underground railway the Metro is on strike for two days! "The last time I saw Paris - the street was blocked with cars" croons the Fat Woman. It Rains. And Rains.

At last I get to the hotel room, it is an attic over looking Paris. What I have always wanted. Not exactly an attic, more comfortable than that but six flights up and overlooking a panorama of the Gare Du Nord station, very quiet, and the Sacre Coeur church like most of the rooms I have had it contains wardrobe, sink with hot and cold running water and the inevitable bidet which most tourists wash their feet in. One can quietly now contemplate a vast panorama of Paris in peace.

THIRTEENTH DAY: THE RED SHEIK is showing here starring the handsome American magician Channing Pollock who used to produce live doves on television. Now he is an actor. In a shop on the boulevards filled with accessories for men is a decorative set of jars for the man who has everything. They are labelled respectively "Opium", "Cocaine" and "Morphine"!

The rest of Paris has been described by lovers in so many songs, "April in Paris", "I Love Paris," "The Last Time I Saw Paris" but to anyone not in love it seems like any other big city - in many ways it is identical to London. Even the maps of the two cities have very much in common. In the evening there is a further optional excursion to the nightclubs including Le Petite Balcon where the apache dancers perform, and where the girls get the men from the audience up to dance with them, and then the men have to take the girls' clothes off. Again I retired for the evening instead of going.

FOURTEENTH DAY: The last grey day. More rain and through the graveyards and the battlefields containing so many of the dead of World War I, through Lille and Menin and we stop at Arras for coffee at the station buffett, there is a monument but no other sign of the terrible devastation of that war. It is a solemn journey with the beautifully kept International War Graves commission taking care of the graves that choke the cemeteries around. The mind cannot grasp the fields of crosses are all people that were once alive and might even be alive today if.. The cattleboat at Ostend is finally boarded and worse than last time I have only room on top. And the wind blows and blows and I have no coat coming from the sun, and I am chilled. The rest of the journey back is filled only with thoughts of those fifty weeks to come. What else is there? Just 5 magazines, 1 package, 6 circulars, 1 fanzine, 1 parcel, two book club books and the bills, 2 postcards and 24 letters exactly. A deep depression, a handful of memories, a few reel of film - and fifty more weeks of work.

And then again those gates will start to open....

*****THE END*****

ONWARD - Being an account of a tour through 8 Countries in 8 Days...

I suppose there are some people who like to play Bingo on a cross-channel boat all the way to France and back but I didn't know of it till I was waiting at Victoria Station for the train to Dover and heard the announcement for the Top Rank Bingo boat leaving from Dover shortly. I eventually arrived there by train but not being trampled to death by Top Rank Bingo-ers I assumed their boat had already left, and after a two second glimpse at my passport to see if there was a photo stuck in it I passed through passport control and through Customs that I never saw and onto the boat carrying a packed suitcase and a stuffed briefcase, both of which could have been filled with the stolen fivers from the Great Train Robbery but no one seemed to bother. On the boring boat trip I was struck by only one thing of interest - a piece of eggshell. I thought at first a seagull had been taken short till I realised the shell was hardboiled and someone on the top deck had been presumably peeling it when it flew off in the wind and hit me. Arriving at Ostend, that most English of Belgian towns, I was struck again by an invitation on a restaurant to "Enjoy an evening dancing with the kilt". Hmm. After a lengthy traffic jam owing to road repairs we finally made Brussels staying at a commercial hotel in the centre whose bed and board was more board in the bed. An evening tour to see the superb square of the Market Place and that eighth wonder of the world, the Atomium, with its eight glittering spheres lit up at night with circuit breakers flashing on and off like eight comets and stars dazzling in the sky, plus a further view around town left me so dog tired I could only collapse in bed that night.

Second Day: Onward past Belgium's biggest prison, through the Maastricht area of Holland and into Aachen, Germany - at each border stopping only a few minutes, no one asked for a passport or anything. And through to Germany, which is also repairing its roads, the vast autobahn network built 25 years ago is showing signs of cracking up and the latest German machines are now busy repairing it, thanks to this we missed seeing Bonn and the birthplace of Ludwig Von Beethoven as the only usable road remaining open was incapable of taking the weight of our motor coach. Lunch at Euskirchen, small, semi-medieval town, almost postcard like in its appearance. And onward through the Rhine valley in beautiful sunshine castles on either side of the river, tugs from Rotterdam and all points of the compass trailing up the river carrying everything from fuel to fertiliser. And finally to Rudesheim, a wine town on the Rhine. The Hotel Lindenwirt one of the most unusual I've seen. It is in close conjunction with about three or four beerhalls and rathskellers, which means when we have dinner that night there is on one side a semi string orchestra playing light music, in the next room further back in another place a second group including an electronic organ is playing a la Billy Vaughn, "Sail Along Silvr'y Moon", a third group parallel to the room in the next place is playing popular brass band music, while in the room exactly under my room, which is on a balcony overlooking the beerhall, a real old German bang and singer is roaring its way through all the old Nazi songs you could think of ranging from "In Der Heimat" and "Lore, Lore", to "Erika it is all very noisy and very jolly, especially since they are all playing at once and every half hour a giant carillon clock has four little men come out to bang the chimes in different tunes, I thought at first they were someone in the orchestra, but they were a clock! "Vot will you have to drink zur?" asks the waiter. "Beer", "Beer!?!?" - he looks furtively from side to side as though someone had shouted "Gestapo!" and mutters "Zur, zis is vine country, ve drink only vine here". So ve drink vine. At twice the price we would pay for it in England.

Third Day. Onto lunch stop at Heidelberg, truly a lovely university town, on the Rhine it reminds me much of Oxford or Cambridge, a peaceful cruise along the river in the summer sun is so peaceful and serene it is difficult to recall this is Germany. The world rolls by without touching anything, people sunbathe on the banks of the Rhine, pleasure boats trickle by, life passes without touching, this is the home of "The Student Prince" - it is difficult to imagine that the American military planning genius who selects the most beautiful historical towns in the world to plunk American military garrisons into has also selected this as the biggest garrison in Germany, just as he selected Verona of Romeo and Juliet in Italy and Fontainebleau in France. Not that there is too much trace on this lazy summer September Day, idyllic is mid-day in Heidelberg. Night is spent at the Hotel Drei Cronen in Augsburg, which surprisingly has a Union Jack flying outside the hotel, the waitress is

a merry middle-aged woman, the furniture is modernistic, concealed lighting, clean - quite one of the best hotels I have stayed in anywhere.

4th Day. Onto Munich. After the incredible rebuilding of all other German cities unlike British cities which haven't always rebuilt it is somewhat consoling to see the bomb damage in this city, machine gun and cannon shells have stiched themselves across buildings, fragments of shrapnel have scarred the red brickwork - but in Munich most of the damage is left only on old buildings where total destruction would have destroyed historical buildings. The remainder is one of the most impressively rebuilt cities in the world. Here are the great breweries of Germany and one can drink "Spezial Hell" Edel Hopfenbitter. Onward we travel into Austria and to buried in the Tyrol of wooden chalets and cows ringing with bells as they walk is a big city of Innsbruck, with prices equivalent to London and modern buildings surprisingly numerous. Across the street a business house there are girls typing and using machines, one is sitting bored reading a magazine, one realises then I think, that some things are the same all over the world, little things like this that one assumes are different in other countries, are in fact the same. That evening we visit a Tiroler Abend of Austrian songs and folk music at a theatre in a nearby hotel, it is colourful and entertaining.

5th Day. Through superb countryside, after an early morning trip up the mountain by cable car, always thinking of Mitchum and Jack Palance fighting it out in SECOND CHANCE with the cable snapping... it doesn't.. so we resume seats in the coach to travel through sweeping mountains either side, thickly forested slopes, pines and firs, trickling mountain streams and rocky splendour. We pass a group of single story wooden huts spread out symmetrically in a group, it is unlike the groups of alpine huts used for storing cattle food for the winter. The group of huts is in fact Haring Concentration Camp.// The hotel Zum Schwanen that night could have been designed by the set-planner for a Frankenstein film, disjointed corridors loom into strange angles, mysterious antique cabinets line the corridor walls and big chests large enough to take several bodies lie in the passageways, the owner collects antique clocks - 200 of them, all showing different times, chiming, striking, ticking - and the floors creak whenever you walk down the corridors. The arrogant German who is so insulting in English when we arrive turns out to come in fact from Ohio.

6th Day. Into Liechtenstein, 150 square miles of it, a Swiss independent principality consisting of farmland and Vaduz the capital which is an expensive tourist trap, I inquire the price of a gadget knife costing 2 dollars in America and find the price is ten dollars! Through to Zurich, in Switzerland where I buy a new Solingen steel flick knife, prices here too are expensive, England is still cheaper than any of the European countries except perhaps Yugoslavia. Through to the miniature Niagara of the Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen and back into the Black Forest country of Germany. I see armbands being worn, yellow with three black dots on them - a new para-military group? Sadly, in Germany this turns out to be the sign of the blind. To the Hotel Zum Schwanen at Lahr, a charming little town where in the hotel everyone is watching - of all things - the British TV programme DANGER MAN with Patrick McGeehan, dubbed into German. So much for the "romantic Black Forest". A sinister individual in glasses appears to be watching us intently - "Looking for recruits for that place down the road," suggests someone. He does in fact look like a Gestapo interrogator to the life. He is in fact watching the television which is at an angle to us. The Wurlitzer juke-box in the corner has Elvis and most pop records, the former in original form, and the latter in German versions, there is always the inevitable military music too - but played by the British Grenadiers. "Haven't they anything by the G.S.?" says someone.

7th Day: Through France and Strasbourg via Metz to the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, an odd little principality that seems to take anyone's currency except Austrian schillings. In the afternoon we drive through the Ardennes countryside of Belgium through "Battle of the Bulge" territory and where AMAZING STORIES writer George Wright O'Brien was killed. Monuments to General Patton and later on the ineffectual Maginot Line with its steel cupolas, concrete entrances and neatly networked barbed wire emplacements. Spinneys by the roadside are marked "Danger - Mines". To Dinant, a tiny little Belgium riverside resort, now at end of season. Quiet in the evening - like home almost. Very much unlike the Italian, Spanish and Yugoslavian towns who are masses of life at night. Of all the countries in Europe perhaps Belgium itself is nearest to England in similarity: 8th Day: Homeward, hot waiting, cold on boat -result-a cold!
