

Reopening Heidelberg University

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[This piece was probably written for the *Stars and Stripes*, the U.S. Army newspaper, after the war.]

Overlooking the German city of Heidelberg, long famous as a center of scientific learning, are the relics of its noted Renaissance castle that have stood on the hill unchanged for 850 years. Virtually the only ruins in the town that has been spared from bombings during this war, they date back to the seventeenth century when the castle was burned down by the invading French. Ever since, the picturesque spot has been a source of inspiration for artists and poets who saw in it a monument to a great past. More recently, pictures of the building have adorned German history books, as a steady reminder of the age-old conflict with the western neighbor.

Just below the castle, amidst the town's busy narrow streets and squares, are the lecture-halls of the university that was founded in 1386 and is the oldest institution of its kind in Germany. A new page was started in its archives this week as the university's renowned Medical School opened the gates again for the first time since U.S. troops had occupied the town last fall.

Not all had been well with Heidelberg University under the Nazis. The school's academic reputation was defiled by professors who threw the book away and went all out in order to "adjust" scientific findings to the Nazi doctrine. Their interference was not limited to faculties with obvious political implications, like law and economics. With typical totalitarian thoroughness they also pervaded the medical sciences when "*Rassenhygiene*" was added to the curriculum as an important topic.

This Nazi version of eugenics extolled the master-race, branded other racial groups as inferior and thus forced the first link of the fatal chain that ended in the SS-extermiation camps. In the fields of psychiatry and heredity, similar trains of thought raised havoc with the scientific tradition and laid the ground for inhuman operations and the killing of the insane. However, many professors did not join in this trend and would have no part of nazified science.

In the semicircle of the Ludolf[?]-Krehl clinic auditorium, students and civilians connected with the school gathered to attend the opening ceremony. Among American officials present at the occasion were Lt. Col. William H. Hanson, deputy military government officer for the Mannheim area, Major John H. Powhida, education and religion officer of the Mannheim area, and Dr. E.Y. Hartshorne, civilian representative for the Education Branch of the U.S. Group Control Council.

Dr. Hartshorne, an instructor on leave from Harvard University's department of sociology, had supervised the denazification and reorganization of the Medical School faculty in collaboration with the Seventh Army Military Government officials and the Seventh Army's Surgeon's office. The initial program is a ten-week refresher course for

about 500 former *Wehrmacht* doctors to enable them to brush up on their hurried wartime training.

Students applauded in their customary manner by pounding their desks with their fists when the new acting rector, agile Dr. Karl Heinrich Bauer, made his entry to deliver the opening address.

“Old Heidelberg, formerly a stronghold of German democracy, is reasserting itself,” he commenced. “The true university represents the sum of human knowledge about the universe, as perceived by its faculty members. Only those can claim to be scholars who incessantly strive for the truth, reexamine earlier findings and take nothing for granted.”

“Now that the fight with weapons is over, the battle of the minds can begin. Truth must be glowing on our hearth as we strive with our military opponents of yesterday to gain their and the world’s esteem for the good of mankind.”

On the subject of Nazi atrocities, the speaker declared that he was deeply ashamed of these crimes committed by Germans, but he questioned whether every citizen could be held responsible for them.

“Perhaps only those who actually lived under the Nazis can fully understand the magic of these evil forces, their demonic lies and clever temptations. Spellbound as they were, the people could not free themselves without outside help. In this matter, too, we hope to discover the historic truth eventually.”

“In the world of tomorrow,” the rector concluded, “an honest Germany will have an honest change. Hard work, combined with ability, will create new values—there lies the key to our future.”

Dr. Bauer, who is married and has two children, was born as a peasant’s son in Franconia fifty-five years ago. A graduate of the University of Göttingen, he is author of many medical books and is a well-known surgeon. His strictly scientific books on heredity displeased the Nazis, and he was never a party member.

The main address of the occasion was delivered by Dr. Karl Jaspers, internationally known professor of philosophy whom the Nazis dismissed from his chair at Heidelberg in 1937. His numerous writings on philosophic subjects were also banned by the Hitler government.

“The beginning of the medical course is a great day for our University,” said Dr. Jaspers, “and we hope that other faculties will follow. However, there can be no mere going back to the conditions before 1933. Too much has happened. The catastrophe has been too overwhelming.”

“Thousands of persons in Germany sought or met death through their resistance against the Nazi regime, most of them anonymously,” continued the professor, whose thin face and white hair testified to his own sufferings. “We survivors did not choose to die in

resistance, we preferred to survive in the weak, though perhaps justified, belief that even our deaths would not have changed anything. Our guilt consists in our being alive....”

“That we are alive is our own decision. It requires that we take upon ourselves the consequences of an existence under such conditions. After the loss of our dignity all that remains to us is truthfulness. We want to earn the lives that have been saved to us.”

“We do not want to live out of the negation of the evil,” said Dr. Jaspers, “but out of saying Yes to the good. In that situation we are about to reconstruct the University. The reconstruction can be accomplished by individuals only, but will contribute to a community spirit....As yet, we have not found the ground to stand upon when we talk to each other.”

“Under the Nazi regime,” he continued, “doctors were sometimes forced to perform operations against their conscience. Some of them even murdered the mentally insane....The two pillars on which medical science rests are truthfulness and humanity. If these two pillars had been firm, the invasion of Nazism into the world of medicine would not have been possible....A stream of untruthfulness had been running through the greater part of our scientific and medical literature. That stream opened the doors for Nazism. For example, what was taught about race in our schools was mainly humbug. But the consequence was a pernicious pseudoscientific myth followed by murderous elimination of races which had been declared inferior.”

“The pillar of humanity is respect for human existence,” he stated. “Each individual is always more than can be known of him. During the Nazi regime the understanding of man was lost, especially in many medical books. There is no real understanding of man without God.”

“Originally, the University was made up of three components, each serving a human need: the theological faculty for the soul, the faculty of law for social order, the medical faculty for health. This basic unity has been lost, and we must strive to recover it.”

“Nazism,” Dr. Jaspers concluded, “has proved that the idea of the university and dictatorship cannot live together. The realization of the idea of the University requires a constitutional state of free men. These are high aims, but the mind is capable of the highest tasks even in material poverty....Our task is to meet and face our fate and then to do what is still possible—hard work for a distant future, with little hope for immediate happiness, but in service of an ideal of intellectual progress, scientific progress and deeper understanding.”

Dr. Jaspers’s address marked the end of the ceremony.

Some of the students’ comments on the new university could be heard the following day when a lecture on general therapy was given. Class was held in a modernistic auditorium which, among other impressive features, had a combination of blackboard and projection screen, interchangeable at the turn of a switch.

Asked whether he expected a noticeable change in the curriculum from the program under the Nazis, one of the young doctors replied cautiously:

“It’s too early to tell, but some of the subjects we used to have will be eliminated. There will be no more of those lectures on ‘*Rassenhygiene*’, I guess.”

The prospect seemed to please him.

Another student who seemed to share the viewpoints of the speakers the day before commented on some of the Nazi professors.

“There was an eeriness about these characters that is hard to describe. Sometimes they seemed possessed by evil spirits....But that’s over now,” he added, “and to prevent it from coming back, we Germans will have to take an interest in our politics.”

One tall six-footer, pretty cocky and still in *Wehrmacht* boots and uniform, was noncommittal when asked about the race theory.

[Possibly incomplete]