

# A Papal Audience in War-Time

The author of this article arrived in this country in the refugee ship Nyassa.

It is on a sunny Wednesday morning in the autumn of 1941. An up-to-date Roman bus takes me from the centre of the Eternal City to the Vatican. In the pocket of my dark suit I have a permit to enter the Palace of Vatican City for an audience with His Holiness Pope Pius XII.

As the bus crosses the Tiber I can see the complex of Hadrian's Tomb. A moment later we arrive at the huge square in front of St. Peter's.

The *portal di bronzo*, leading to the Governmental Palace, is guarded by foot soldiers, who look like the lansquenets of some centuries ago. They are the Swiss Guards, and their multicoloured uniforms and polished halberds and swords seem to be taken from a museum. An officer with a big moustache gives me the pass permit. The Guards take up their halberds and salute while I enter the Palace and mount a staircase. On the second floor a footman, in tight velvet trousers, shows me into a vestibule, where about 80 people are waiting. Among them are many German soldiers, in field uniform, their caps in their hands. For about an hour I stand around or pace the parquet floor among those warriors of Herr Hitler — probably on their way to Benghazi and Tripoli, anxious not to miss the chance of taking a papal blessing with them for further heroic deeds.

After some time we are led into another hall, its walls are decorated with oil paintings, antique engravings and maps. We then pass through a corridor into another anti-chamber, and, finally we stand before huge double doors ornamented with gold.

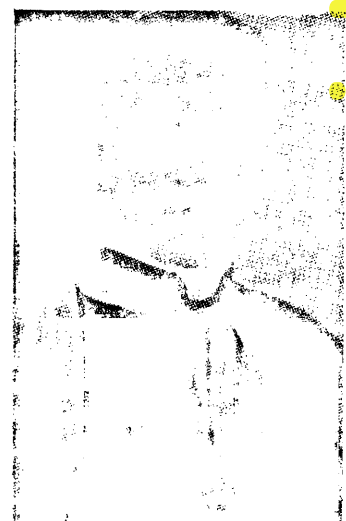
One of the Papal under-secretaries, appears, and gives us instructions about what to say to His Holiness, and how to behave. Then one after the other, we are allowed to enter the richly furnished hall, where the Pope receives visitors.

I am the last one to enter, after the German soldiers. The Pope, sitting in a throne-like armchair, dressed in magnificent vestments, resembles some wise doctor, a good friend. His

## His "Refugee"

eyes shine in a friendly way through goldrimmed glasses as each petitioner kneels to kiss the ring on the thin fingers of the Father's right hand.

The Pope speaks to everybody — asking the soldiers in fluent German from which part of the Reich they come and whether they have a special wish. And he speaks so naturally and so simply that one cannot but feel his benevolent influence. Afterwards the Holy Father gives his benediction and hands over the petitions to his retinue: cardinals, bishops and other high dignitaries of Mother Church, offi-



POPE PIUS XII

cial of the Vatican Government, secretaries and diplomats. They stand respectfully in the background behind the audience chair, dressed in richly-coloured garments of mediæval style.

At last it is my turn. I step forward, feeling very uneasy and shy. Then I kneel down on a velvet cushion, bow over the Papal hand, and breathe a kiss on the ring...

Then I look up and address him, stammering some Italian phrases.

(But the Pope interrupts me: — "My son, you can speak your own language with me; you are German, too, aren't you?" —

— "No, your Holiness, I was only born in Germany. But I am not a German any longer — I am a Jew!" —

— "So you are a Jew, what can I do for you? Tell me, my son!" —

I begin to explain why I have come. I report about the shipwrecked Jewish refugees, saved by Italian warships in the Aegean Sea and now starving in a prisoner of war camp on one of the islands. The Pope listens carefully to my explanations of how to help these poor people either by taking them to Palestine or by bringing them back to Italy to avoid epidemics and further starvation. Then Pius XII says:

"You have done well to come to me and tell me this. I have heard about it before. Come back tomorrow with a written report and give it to the Secretary of State who is dealing with the question. But now for you, my son. You are a young Jew. I know what that means and I hope you will always be proud to be a Jew!" And the Pope raises his voice that everybody in the hall can hear it clearly. "My son, whether you are worthier than others only the Lord knows, but believe me, you are at least as worthy as every other human being that lives on our earth! And now, my Jewish friend, go with the protection of the Lord, and never forget, you must always be proud to be a Jew!" — — —

After having pronounced these words in his pleasant voice, the Pope lifts his hands to give the usual benediction. But he stops, smiles and his wonderful fingers only touch my head. Then he lifts me from my kneeling position.....

I join the others by the wall, not caring for the expression on their faces. Have they heard it, too?

Now the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, rises from his chair, spreads out his hands over us and speaks the general benediction. I bow my head.

Afterwards, after leaving the Palace, I walk alone across the piazza before St. Peter's, back to the Tiber embankment. I sit down on a bench looking at the Eternal City, at Rome, her ruins and palaces, at the Capitol on which the sun shines brightly from a Roman sky.....

# GOLDEN EPAULETTES FOR RED ARMY OFFICERS

By NICOLAS BASSECHES

In this war, the appearance of Russian officers has undergone a fundamental change. Gold-embroidered collars and lapels, and broad golden epaulettes have replaced the former proletarian-revolutionary austerity.

For many years Soviet publicity was on the look-out for a new type of officer. A leading Communist journalist, the late Larissa Reissner, wrote a much commented-on article on the new German army officer. At that time relations between Germany and Soviet Russia were still friendly. Larissa Reissner drew a vivid picture of the new German officer in mufti, mostly with large horn-rimmed spectacles, more like the head of a big business concern than the traditional military type. Her article was in the nature of a suggestion — shouldn't our officers be modelled on that pattern? Raskolnikov, ex-Imperial naval officer, subsequently Commander of the Red Fleet and Soviet diplomat who, finally, died in exile in Nice in mysterious circumstances, proposed a different type. He described the English naval officer and his relations to his subordinates, resembling, he thought, an engineer and his mechanics and workers. He liked the matter-of-fact and informal tone between commander and men in the British Navy. Then Soviet propaganda discovered the intellectual French officer, a type similar to a writer or artist, who was as

well versed in philosophy and literature as in the rules and regulations of high strategy.

A synthesis of these types was aimed at, always with due regard to Russian characteristics. A certain amount of outward show, with special emphasis on authority, was considered advisable for the Russian masses. A deliberate policy sought to raise the self-respect of the officers' corps. The profession of officer became the highest-paid in the Soviet Union. The best graduates of the secondary schools applied and were subjected to rigid tests, and were increasingly vested with the outward attributes of military authority. In order to underline the élite character of the corps, the officers were more and more frequently appointed as members of parliamentary bodies. Nowadays, the Colonel gets a seat in the Soviet of his garrison town, and the Generals and Commanders in the higher parliamentary bodies.

For many years past now the Russian military training schools have approximated to their pre-revolutionary prototypes. Certainly, the spirit is entirely different. Ten-year old boys don military uniforms and undergo a seven years' course. Not all boys by any means are admitted to this corps which is reserved for the children of privileged parents. For the post-war period the Soviet is planning a large new army for which officers are already being carefully trained.

## Representative of State and Regime

Cadet training schools served a special purpose. Not all big armies train their personnel from childhood onward. Old Russia too had more than twenty cadet corps. The majority of its officers put on uniform at the age of ten. The Cadet Corps system was a complex one. Imperial Russia was and thus the cadet corps were a state of hereditary nobility reserved for the sons of certain classes. A specially privileged corps, the reserve of historical families in Petersburg, would not admit any scion of the nobility, either, unless he was the son or grandson of a very high Court official or General. The majority of the other corps took

every youngster is admitted to this either — it is a privilege reserved for the sons of dead officers, high-ranking officers and officers who have gained high military distinctions. Thus an élite is being formed traditionally bound to the Red Army.

The new war-born officer type is being made into the outward representative of the state and régime. The stronger the state the more brilliant the representative. That is the reason for the revival of the cadet corps in Russia, as well as of the elegant appearance of its members, and the re-introduction of the once cordially detested golden epaulettes. But these ancient forms and institutions now have a new meaning.

## "E. PERICOLOSO"

By E.R. STAFFORD

try, sort of thing, E Pericoloso was really enough for me."

"Yes" she said; she is a clever girl. "And it should have