

Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No. 785015

ACC

10000/100/1120

11/15

Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No.

785015

10000/100/1120

CENSORSHIP REPORTS
OCT., NOV. 1943

574

CONFIDENTIAL

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF BASE CENSOR
Base Censorship Detachment No 5
APO 550 U.S. Army

22 November 1943

SUBJECT: Special Report - AMG.

TO : Commanding General, MATOUSA, (Attention: A C of S, G-2)

1. Forwarded herewith is special report dealing with civilian unrest in Sicily as the same pertains to AMG. Written request for such report was duly made by AMG and forwarded to you for approval by indorsement 12 October 1943. Request was approved by 2nd Indorsement 23 October 1943.

2. The report is limited in substance to excerpts from letters referring to AMG or to general economic and political conditions on the Island as they pertain to Military Government.

3. Topics contemplated are:

- a. Black Market.
- b. Criticisms of Military Government.
- c. Allegations of Fascist Influence.

h. BLACK MARKET - Civil unrest and rumors of food riots are consistently associated with black market operations. The following excerpts from letters of military personnel are considered pertinent:

a. "Everybody tells you how there is no bread, no pasta, no this, and no that. And if there is any to buy, it's usually on the black market at sky-high prices. With the winter coming in, to make matters worse, I don't know how the people are going to manage. Somehow or other, somethings got to be done. A certain Major gave a speech the other night at the Red Cross, in a sort of round-table forum, on the subject of the effects of twenty two years of the blackshirt regime in Sicily. This Major was an AMSCOT official, and he admitted that the people feel very disappointed and bitter about the fact that the promise to feed the people by the allies is not being wholly kept. He said that the job facing AMSCOT is of far greater proportions than they had realized.

For instance, on the subject of education, he said, they want to re-open the schools, but every single text-book on every subject is tied in with the praise of the Duce and the fascist regime, and he said that it has been a tremendous task to go through every text-book and eliminate all this fascist propaganda, and that the actual best thing,

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Special Report - AMG (contd)

of course, would be to re-write the text-books, but that too is a tremendous task.

He also said that one thing they had not counted upon in such large numbers was the large anti-fascist underground movement. He said this surprised them very much, and that although they expected to find anti-fascist friends, they didn't expect the numbers to be as large as they were." (T/5, Hq, 7th Army) (10-1/a)

b. "We have spent a lot of time trying to scare up some screen wire lately but the AMGOT people who are supposed to know everything can only refer us to the black market, where nearly everything is sold these days. I must say that it is very disconcerting to be referred to the black market by those who are supposed to be keeping things on the up and up..... I thought that the Army was unstable and always in a state of flux but perhaps AMGOT is more so. If I could but tell you of some cases I am sure you would agree but will refrain for the sake of morale."

(Lt, Hq, 7th Army) (10-2/a)

c. "Am finding out something about AMG. It used to be AMGOT, but someone discovered that AMGOT is a dirty word in Turkish, so they cut it down. Lt. Col. Chas Polletti is head of it here, and we heard him speak here a couple of days ago. My opinion of the whole business (unofficial of course) is that AMG hasn't the slightest idea of what it is going to do with Sicily and Italy during the war, and probably not afterward. Certainly neither AMG nor the state department has put forth anything concrete in the way of reconstruction. Don't know how the food situation was before we took over here, but at present civilians are allowed 100-150 gm of bread per day, and no pasta, which was a more important item of food here than bread itself. Prices are skyrocketing, and AMG is attempting to curb them. The difficulty is, of course, that the lowest paid private gets about twice as much as a municipal judge here and more than any civil servant. Police are paid about 25¢ (25 lire) per day. The soldiers don't care where they buy, or at what price; coupled with scarcity of most items, a lot of stuff is pushed out of reach of the civilian. Situation in general not good. Don't know what assistance is gotten or solicited or allowed from native anti-fascists; policy in general confused and confusing." (Lt, 69th Cml Co) (10-3/a)

d. "You have no idea how conditions are among the people here; and by the people I don't mean the principessa or the mayor of 'X' or the owners of the villas by the sea. I mean the fisher folk, the laborers, the workers. The black market is rampant; prices are fighting among each other in the heavens. A man makes a dollar a day here if he's lucky. A loaf of bread is 50¢. A little spaghetti is 65¢. A man has 3 to 13 kids. Now you figure it out. AMGOT (now AMG) has its hands full. Today I was talking to a woman AMG interpreter who lived in Flatbush for 30 years. Some of these people have been without bread for a week now, she said, and if they don't do something soon they're going to have trouble on their hands." (Lt, 849th Sig Int Serv) (10-3/b)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Special Report - AMO (contd)

5. CRITICISM OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT - Allegations of inefficiency and lack of unity in A.C.C. is consistent and general. Criticism is not confined to personnel outside of organization but is caustically indulged in by officers within the organization. Excerpts from letters show:

a. "You should congratulate yourself for not being in this Armistice Control Commission thing. A combination rat race and flea circus, - owned, operated and participated in by lunatics who are in a spin from looking at uniform catalogs and wet commissions, speaking a combination of Harvard accented - Oxford - Yiddish - all trying to be barkers for their own side show - only the poor spade-worker juniors sweating like hell and knowing that no-one knows what it's all about. (Please do not quote). Poor Uncle Sam! I mean Uncle Sap!!! (Lt Col, 2675th Regt, A.C.C.) (10-4/a)

b. "The work of this fantastic organization can't be described. But imagine a set-up in which there are more Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels, Majors (not to mention a few Brigadiers) than there are Captains and Lieutenants. The former class are, on the American side, the sort of people who came to Washington to offer their services and whom even Washington weeded out, and on the British side, venerable civil servants with the minds of second-rate bookkeepers. The Captains and Lieutenants are mostly ex-cops, some with a refreshing directness of approach to problems which might baffle the more sophisticated, but most of them with the kind of oafish stupidity which makes the perfect foil for the great detective in the whodunit. There are exceptions to these descriptions, of course (mostly Treasury), but they are lost in the shuffle. In general, the chief purpose of all these people appears to be to land some well-paid and not very demanding British, American or international post-war job on the strength of their wartime titles, of which they are super-conscious. There are no objectives in this organization and no ability to realize them if there were any. The other day a commander went out and did something and on his return was given a dressing down by his superior in these terms, "We can't do anything, we're not an action agency".

There are innumerable conferences, endless fussing (and I mean fussing) over inconsequential and irrelevant details, such rank consciousness, and so the day passes (7 days a week). There are occasional conferences with Italian "experts" (nebb subordinate officials who have been left behind to go thru a few emotions to wheedle what they can) which are the biggest joke of all. Yesterdays afternoon was typical.

Present: 1 American Major (the more usual complement is 1 British and 1 American Lt Col) - this one ex-RFC via Jesse Jones politics and now married to a Phil. Bank heiress and trying to act the Main Line Squire - reminds me of Max Elser.

myself:

1 2nd Lt. as interpreter. This one was a naturalized German who speaks fluent Italian and has all the quarrelous arrogance of the typical German. The usual interpreter, however, is likely to be one of a dozen or

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Special Report - AMG (contd)

so of young Italo-American 2nd Lts. whose father's probably peddle pizze on 2nd Ave and who are excessively brash with their new found importance.
1 Italian professor of "financial sciences" - a courtly and dogmatic old party with no love for Americans.

1 bullet-headed old Italian "official" - completely ignorant but with pig eyes which revealed considerable peasant cunning.

1 small, much be-mustached and unhappy looking Sicilian who is now liquidating a bank of which, I suspect, he used to be about assistant cashier (this was the "sound business element" the Major had introduced into the conference).

I can't go into details of the conference, but the above cast of characters should give you a rough idea. Sometimes, to pass the time of day, I or some other irreverent young soul try to get these "experts" by ourselves and get some information out of them. That is funny too, especially with the professor of "financial sciences", since the others can't even speak French. I try to talk Italian, he tries to show off his English. We both bog down in the middle of every sentence. I fill in with French, he fills in with French, a little German gets thrown in, so there is complete misunderstanding all around.

Meanwhile life goes on in Sicily no better and probably no worse than it otherwise would be. The really valuable education here is watching this disintegration of the local social fabric. But of this more anon." (Lt, (jg), USNR, Hq, 2675 Regt, AC) (10-5/a)

c. "If..... is being investigated for the draft, I suppose he'll take a cue from Brother.... and grab himself a commission so he can go to war as a big shot. (Another military ignoramus in gold braid). It's certainly disgusting to see the political "quickies" in AMGOT who come in straight from Civil life as Majors and Lt. Cols and take command of men who have years of reserve or National Guard military background, and also an equivalent or better civilian background for the work indicated. By so doing they block promotions for those already in and make asses of themselves because of their total ignorance of the military aspects of their job. Too bad we can't have a war without politics taking precedence over merit." (Lt Col, Hq, 7th Army) (10-6/a)

d. "Have had a chance to see AMGOT function here in the island. Along with the good there is so much tactlessness and waste. Americans are really lousy governors and such dreadful bargainers." (Lt, Btry B, 62nd AA) (10-7/a)

e. "AMGOT means 'Amateur Military Gentlemen on tour!'" (Capt, Hq, IBS) (10-8/a)

6. ALLEGATIONS OF FASCIST INFLUENCE - Accusations of Fascists influence in A.C.C. appears on the increase. The following are examples:

a. "The local Fascists are still in control and a very favored

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Special Report - AMG (contd)

position everywhere I've seen. The local poor opinion of Badoglio and the King goes best unmentioned. The only casualties have been the group directly surrounding Mussolini. His departure shook merely the top the local boys are the same. AMGOT declared by military necessity (?) has followed scrupulously a policy of doing business with the existing powers. This has come to mean complete control in the same old hands. For example in the nearest town to us the AMGOT Mayor hasn't shown up in the last two weeks. Who is running the town? The old Mayor. The flood of American cash through the land has as everywhere sky-rocketed prices. The wealthy and merchant classes who "do business" with the Americans can jack up rentals and prices as the cost of living goes up, but the poor people stand the brunt and are infinitely worse off now than they were under Mussolini. AMGOT has little time for the problems of these people, being busied with the weighty problem of how much indemnity is due the Count of Alaviva for a chair damaged in his villa which some headquarters had taken over." (Lt, 849th SIS) (10-9/a)

b. "This darn war is progressing very slowly. It seems ages since I left the states. We all want to get back. Europe is no place for us poor Americans. Especially during a war. But the real tragedy is that after we have conquered it, after spilling so much blood, money and machines, lives, we practically hand it back to the enemy. Here in Sicily there is a recrudescence of fascism. The rise of mafiaism, communism. Why? Because we don't give a damn so long as our troops aren't touched, so long as our supply dumps aren't affected. Is that all? No. Because we don't distribute bread, or flour to the people. The famine here is terrible. A few boatloads of flour would relieve the situation. But no one seems to give a continental. These people who formerly welcomed and cooperated with Americans are now beginning to hate us. And former anti-fascists have become fascists. Empty victories do we win. Thank God we don't need these people. Tomorrow they will throw stones instead of flowers at the invading Americans. It must have been a nazi who conceived and offered the idea of AMGOT to the Americans. Its full of men of good will. Everyone seems to be doing something, but we still have dangerous fascists at large, still have members of the mafia in gov't positions, still have this dread famine. When will boatloads of flour arrive from Africa or America." (Civilian under military jurisdiction, 2677 Hq Co Exp X-2, Hq, 7th Army, G-2) (10-10/a)

7. For your information.

BOYCE F. BETZER,
Captain, Cavalry,
Chief Base Censor.

1848

