

Brave Old World

by CLAYTON C. BAUER

WAR is hell. It respects neither persons nor places.

For all but two months of World War II Wurzburg, Germany, escaped the Allied aerial hammerings. A city of 101,000, its burghers sensed the end of fighting, hoped to pass the war unscathed.

Its atmosphere was peaceful enough. Vineyards dotted the hills round about. Its fame rested in its university, in its churches. The Chapel of Our Lady was a proud example of late Gothic architecture. It could boast no vital industry.

But Allied commanders worried about Wurzburg. They knew the *blitz* columns moved on ball bearings, and Germany was making ball bearings at Schweinfurt, only 30 miles away. Wurzburg also had its bridges spanning the Main River, a web of railroad lines. A British RAF officer drew a circle around Wurzburg.

For twenty minutes, on the night of March 16, 1945, bombs rained on the town. A fire storm consumed or gutted 85 per cent of the old city.

Five thousand people perished, many smothered in their cellar refuges.

Afterwards, there remained living space for only 6,000 people. The destruction frightened residents. Would not it be better to abandon the old town, build anew on another site?

The one important building remaining, its roof burned, but its steeple soaring high as if in affirmation of human struggle, was the Marienkappelle, or Chapel of Our Lady. The burghers took heart, and began rebuilding from the ruins.

Wurzburg is still rebuilding, after 20 years. There are smart shops in which you can buy anything from a color TV set to the newest Paris dress creation. Tandem busses compete with electric trolley cars. The population is now 122,000 and swelling by as much

as 2,000 a year. In the gaps between buildings newcomers notice broken walls the bombs left.

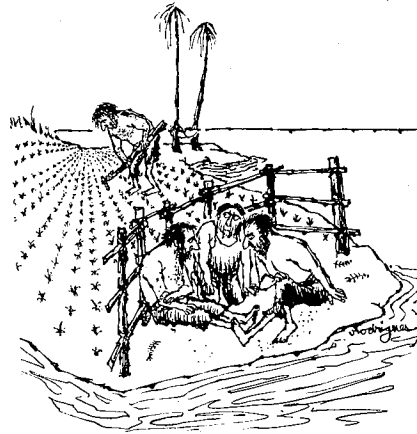
Workmen comb the rubble for usable materials of stone or wood and restore the buildings to their original appearance, dating back as far as the 14th century.

Nor have the city fathers ignored the constructive force of land valuation taxation. Desperate for housing, they set aside a hill on the edge of town for homesites where residents could lease lots for 99 years. Thus they were not required to make large down payments or to buy at inflated prices.

They have full use of the lots at the very reasonable cost of 3 per cent of the land's value each year. Under this modern program 800 homes have risen on the war-scarred hill.

The 3 per cent annual land use levy just about squares with what the Wurzburcher homeowner would naturally owe his community for public services.

War *is* hell. It respects neither persons nor places. But when bombs strike there's no better way of rebuilding than with the self-generating force of LVT.



"What we should do is plan some kind of land reform..."—*From Dare*