Written by Pte. Michael P. Coyle who served during WW2 with The Essex Scottish Regiment and was taken prisoner at Dieppe in August 1942. This booklet was given to the Regiment Ass'n in 1995. Coyle died in Dec. 97.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

by Michael P. Coyle

Foreword

In undertaking to write about a series of events that happened over half a century ago, one is surely stretching the limits of memory. For this story, I did have the advantage of notes that themselves were made over fifty years ago, with the object of writing the full story at a later date.

In reference to the pseudonyms assigned to the various people of the Partisans, for the most part they are as I remembered them. In a few cases, however, I have assigned names to some of the characters. While the characters themselves have been remembered, their pseudonyms have not survived.

In the cases where village names have not been included, particularly in Germany, all the names were converted into Polish after the war as that area of Germany was ceded to Poland. As a consequence, I don't have a ready reference to determine the German name that I knew the places by. As a result, the village names were left out altogether.

It is only now, with the passage of time, that I am able to put this story to paper. There are still elements of it that I do not feel would serve any useful purpose to bring forward. That my own naivety was father to many of the problems that I fell prey to goes without question. However the fact that Official Commands were so callous with our Freedoms did not, and still does not sit well.

Over the years I have learned that resentment is a self-serving emotion that offers precious little nourishment to the soul. It should not be encouraged.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

Index

Chapter	Title	Page
1.	The Capture	1
2.	Chained	07
3.	Enterprise	10
4.	Camp Life	13
5.	Treachery	18
6.	The Ball Game	24
7.	Escape	30
8.	On The Run	35
9.	The Underground	40
10.	A Polish Welcome	47
11.	A Change	56
12.	Ambush	63
13.	Some Highs, Some Lows	70
14.	Halt! WHo Went There	74
15.	Dr. Franks	79
16.	Para-Drop	84
17.	The Other Bandits	89
18.	Hopes Dashed	95
19.	The Railroad Caper	101
20.	Farewell To The Forest	108
21.	To Be Or Not To Be	115
22.	Imprisonment	120
23.	It's All Over	127

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

I

The Capture

The monumental carnage that took place on the beaches of France on the 19th of August 1942 has been described in graphic detail time and time again, through both print and film media. At this distance from the events, it would be impossible to describe the numbing onslaught on the psyche of a nineteen year old, witnessing the totality of war for the first time. To encounter the mangled body of your officer, with whom you had spoken only moments before. To see your comrades rush to boats that would retrieve them from the hellish cauldron that the beach of Dieppe had become, only to watch those same boats be blasted by aerial cannon and from the heavy shore batteries of the entrenched German defenders, leaving the tides to care for the broken bodies cast into their midst. The real miracle of Dieppe is that anyone came off of those beaches alive. Among the Canadians, there were nineteen hundred men out of over four thousand who became prisoners of war. Of those, about six hundred bore their wounds into captivity; the memory of how they came about went with them into the infinity that was to be their future in the prison camps of Germany.

By the hour of three on that historic day the ordeal that had begun ten hours earlier, ended with the official surrender by our senior officers. As the guns fell silent, those who could walk made

their way to an area designated by the Germans where they were checked for weapons. Stretcher parties were organized and detailed to scour the beach, under German supervision, for severely wounded. While most weapons were disabled and discarded on the beach, there was a growing pile of them at the check point. Off to the side was a huge pile of discarded helmets. Somehow that pile of headless helmets haunted my memory for a long, long time. It was as though we had been stripped of all our strengths, that we had become a lost band of individuals instead of members of a great Canadian Regiment. The sight of it left me with an empty, numbed feeling.

All of the newly captured were assembled at the hospital where the wounded were sorted out. Those who were seriously wounded were taken away for treatment, while those with minor wounds were treated and then marched off with the main body. We were marched through the country-side for about seven miles. Along the way, French citizens brought water, and milk to the roadside for us. Some of them were clubbed by the Germans for their efforts, but there were a lot of the German soldiers who turned a blind eye to the acts of mercy by the French. We passed a wedding party and the groom gave some of his clothes to cover a prisoner who had left the beach naked. Years later, I've been told, the two men met again in peacetime. I'm sure those were poignant moments for both men.

We were marched to an abandoned cheese factory about seven to ten miles from Dieppe where we spent the night. Despite the fact that we had no blanket and we huddled together on the dirt floor of

the old factory, sleep did come, albeit a fitful and troubled one. The next day we were transferred to a camp near the French town of Verneuil. The days were extremely hot, and both food and water were in short supply, but most of us were still trying to sort out for ourselves the new reality that we were facing, so we paid little heed to the creature comforts that were not there. It was the time to contact one's buddies and try to find out who had survived, who had been wounded and as many of the details as possible of what the day had brought, to as many as one could manage to talk to. It was from this camp also that the Germans took down statistics about each prisoner for the International Red Cross. From that information, our families back home were notified as to who was a prisoner, in some small measure allaying their fears and uncertainty.

There were many men who were quite severely wounded who had been forced to make the march out from Dieppe. There was no treatment for them until we got to Verneuil and even then there was precious little. As a consequence many suffered severely before their condition became so bad that the Germans had to provide medical attention for their wounds. Doubtlessly it was the atmosphere in the camp that initiated in me the first stirring of the idea of escape. Having ones' needs for basic human care, such as dressings for wounds, food and water, minimized to the point of hardship, was enough of a catalyst to start one thinking of ways to effect change. If conditions are unchangeable, then perhaps it's

time to look for greener pastures. Having just came off of a losing battle with the Germans, it was not a good idea to get tangled up with them again, so soon. However, there would be a time in the future that would be in my favour. That would be the time for an escape, not before. The words of the German officer who spoke to us in front of the hospital galled to the very bone. He said,"For you the war is over." German troops were in occupation of most of Europe and a large section of North Africa. People were held in servitude in every country that they occupied. It is doubtful that anyone who heard that statement truly believed that it bore real truth. Our North American heritage of freedom was too strong to allow any of us to bow our heads to the Nazi slavemasters.

While we were being held at Verneuil, the Germans tried to play the French-Canadians off against the non-French. They conspired with the Vichy French to send a delegation to the camp, with the express purpose of determining the needs, if any, of the Canadians of French origin. Right away, the boys from Quebec smelled a rat, but decided to play along. They told the Vichy representatives that they needed food, clothes, and cigarettes, and sent them off. A day or so passed, and the Vichy people returned with a truck loaded down with goodies. A parade was called of all the French-Canadian men, where the Vichy officers obsequiously extolled the virtues of the French Canadians, all of which was listened to with great stoicism by the Canadians. When it was all over, and the Vichy people had left, the Quebec men all took their

newly found fortune and divided it with their fellow prisoners. C'est la vie !

After about ten days, we were assembled and told that we were being taken to a P.O.W. camp in Germany. They marched us to the loading area, where a long line of box-cars awaited. Printed on the side of the cars, in German, were the words, 'Forty men or Eight Horses.' We were each given a loaf of Military Bread, (a very hard loaf of something that appeared to be a mixture of saw-dust,dark grain and possibly petrified molasses). There was straw on the floor and a large metal vessel in the middle of the car that was to serve as our toilet. Forty of us were on - loaded to each car, the door slammed shut, and we were off to Germany and Stalag VIIIB.

The prisoner of war camp known as Stalag VIIIB was located near the village of Lamsdorf, in the region of Upper Silesia in the eastern section of Germany. It was a huge, sprawling camp that housed about fifty thousand men, all prisoners of war from campaigns in France, Greece, North Africa as well as airmen and seamen from actions wherever German forces had been involved. The prisoners came from all races and nationalities, and in most cases within the camp, they were so grouped. There was a large contingent of British troops who were captured at the time of Dunkerque. This group had been there so long that they had organized several very successful networks within the camp. They were very quick to extend a wholehearted welcome to us. Their help in getting to know the ins and outs of P.O.W. life was invaluable to us all.

II

Chained

For the first month we were mixed in with the other prisoners. Around the first part of October, though, that all changed. Our mid - morning tea ritual was rudely interrupted by a burly German Corporal bawling out the order to fall in on parade. This was very unusual, as normally we only had a roll call in the morning and one again in the late afternoon. The assembly only applied to those of us who had been at Dieppe, and we were told that we would all be going into a compound separate from the other prisoners. Although we viewed this action with some trepidation, there was nothing that we could do to alter the decision, and that afternoon we were marched off to our new quarters. The whole operation had a rather sinister quality to it and there were rumours flying about that some action was to be taken against the Dieppe P.O.W.s, but at the time of the move, nothing had been confirmed. After a couple of days of speculation and rumours, our fears were put to rest.

About noon on or about the ninth of October, a company of heavily armed troops entered our compound, and we were all summoned to parade. The parade was formed with the men lining up in files of five. There were approximately forty files of five in each group, representing the hut that the group had been assigned, with about eight groups present on parade. The situation was very sinister,

the German troops could well have been a firing squad, and these our final moments. After a couple of hours of standing in the hot autumn sun, a contingent of high - ranking brass arrived. Forming up in front of us, they glared out at us with obvious distaste. One who appeared to be the interpreter, stepped forward. We were called to attention, and that officer began to read from an official - looking document. The gist of what was read is as follows. "In August, the British gangsters attacked the Reich at Dieppe. Our brave soldiers defended the City, and defeated them. After the attackers had surrendered, orders were found that instructed the invading force to capture as many German prisoners as they could and to bind their wrists with ropes for the trip back to England. Such an order contravenes the Geneva Protocol governing the treatment of prisoners of war. The Fuehrer has offered the British the opportunity to apologize for those offensive orders, but they have refused. We are left with no alternative but to retaliate in like manner. Therefore, the Fuehrer has ordered that all Canadians, soldiers and airmen, be bound at the wrists until an apology is received from England for such barbarous orders." To a man, we were stunned to think that we could be so used as pawns. It never occurred to us to think that two warring nations would stoop to such idiocy against the prisoners of each others' country. A rumour had been afloat that there had been some papers captured but no one had paid it heed. Suddenly there we were, caught in the middle. After all punitive measures against us were announced, we knew that

we were in deep trouble. No Red Cross food parcels were to be issued until further notice. Cigarettes would be restricted to five per person, per week. All personnel would be confined to their hut until further notice. With the last of the orders read, German soldiers moved along the lines with lengths of binder twine. As each prisoner presented his wrists, one over the other, he had them trussed with the twine. We were warned against any attempts at freeing ourselves. A medic was appointed to each barrack group to assist in toilet usage, but that was the only concession allowed. We were dismissed to our huts, a dejected, woeful group. Our defeat at Dieppe had just bought us yet another bitter pill to swallow.

The discomforts of having ones' wrists tied soon became evident. There was just enough freedom to take care of an itchy nose, but neither enough to make a brew of tea or lift a teacup. Cooking was totally out of the question, so the immediate diet was restricted to bread and biscuits.

The order that provided one orderly per hut to assist with the toilet carried with it some absurdities. In the first place it soon became apparent that such an order wouldn't work as it created a long waiting period for everyone, as well as a line - up. Most people had taken off their shoes to lie on their bunk. When a call to nature came, one would simply slide on his slippers and make for the latrine. Our slippers happened to be wooden clogs, that made a very loud clacking noise on the cement floor. Anyone who sought refuge in a quiet sleep was literally pulled back to full awakening

by the clatter.

About one o'clock in the morning the Germans returned, and removed the ropes. We had despaired of freedom for that night at least, so it was with great relief that we worked the cramps out of our wrists and arms. The hour not withstanding, we took advantage of the freedom of movement to wash up and get a bite of food. It was a good thing that we had done so, as right at the hour of six the familiar cry of "Raus, Raus,' was heard, calling us to roll call. The count was taken and once again our wrists were bound, as of the day before. This was to be our schedule for the next three months, although the ropes were removed each day at five o'clock, never again at one a.m. as on the first day.

III

Enterprise

The daily ration of food that the Germans gave us was hardly enough to sustain life. They did relent on that score and allowed us to have some bulk food such as powdered eggs and dried milk powder from Argentina. These products were terrible, and challenged one's ingenuity to find a way to successfully use them. We all missed the Red Cross parcels tremendously but there was no relief forthcoming from the Germans. It did come from another quarter, though,- the British compound. It was immediately adjacent to our compound and at night when the ropes came off, we carried out a clandestine trading program in cigarettes for food. While the ration of five cigarettes per week was still in force, most of the Canadians had a stockpile from home and continued to receive their mail, which brought more parcels each week. Thus we all had ready currency for the black market that existed on our doorstep. This exercise in free trade was not without its dangers.

In order to go from one compound to another, one had to 'run the wire.' A guard tower was located at intervals along the outer fence of the camp. In the tower, a guard had a searchlight that he could play back and forth along the outer fence, and internally along the fence separating each compound. He had orders to shoot anyone prowling at night, an order that we were fully aware of. In order to go from one compound to another, one waited until the

light had played over the spot that one had chosen. Running swiftly and silently, one vaulted the fence and ran to the closest hut or defile in the ground and lay very still as the light came back over the area. Once it had played back, there was plenty of time then to make ones' way to whichever barrack one had chosen as the place to do his trading, and carried on with his enterprise. When the business of the evening was completed, the booty was firmly stuffed inside ones' jacket, and the return trip was negotiated in the same manner as the trip over. Things don't always go as smoothly as one would like them to, and on one trading mission, one of our men got caught in the light just as he sought safety near his hut on the way back. Everything had gone quite well and he was almost home free when the guard must have sensed some small movement and quickly swung the light back, catching Dobbie (Dobson) full in its beam. He couldn't stop to open a door, so he made a daring rush and got in behind the hut, just out of sight of the tower. As he dashed for cover, the guard fired a couple of rounds which missed him but put the fear of God into all of us in the hut. Fortunately for Dobbie, there was a window at the spot where he stood shivering from his narrow escape. Quickly we opened the window and pulled him into the safety of the hut, bare minutes before the foot patrol arrived to investigate the gun - fire. As Shakespeare would say," All's Well That Ends Well,"and so it was that night, although future trips over the wire were made with more caution.

In mid December, the ropes were taken off. In their place,

however, iron manacles were put on us. These went on our wrists, and were joined together by a piece of chain about a foot or so in length. The ritual continued to be as before, every morning the chains were put on at the morning roll call, and they were removed that evening at the evening roll call. Each of us had a metal ID tag, on which our P.O.W. number was engraved. We soon discovered that the disk could also be used to open the handcuffs. The Germans very ponderously used a large key to lock the chains in place when they put them on us. We found that by inserting the edge of the disk under the catch of the handcuff, one could give it a quick twist and voila! --it opened. So it was that we could all be on parade in our great coats, receive our chains, and be sitting in the comfort of the hut playing cards, in our shirtsleeve. The Germans were most perplexed. The ultimate prank came as a German Sergeant came upon two men having a shower, clad only in their chains. They had both worn greatcoats only moments before. The Sergeant was one of those NCO's who always went by the book. His orders only said that he was to discipline anyone caught without their chains. In this case, he simply shook his head and went on about his business.

IV

CAMP LIFE

The impression that one is left with, from the previous pages, is that our whole lives were consumed with being tied up and being untied. This couldn't be more wrong. Even with the discomfort caused by the chains, we still managed to go for walks around the compound during the day, play bridge with a foursome of friends, engage in great discussions on the most varied of topics, and of course, to take each day's happenings as they came along.

The most stressful part of life in the camp was probably centred around food. During the colder months, heat also became of prime interest, particularly as the barracks were more or less a shell with no insulation, set on a cement slab. It was built as a double unit with the shower and washing facilities shared from the centre of the structure. Heating was achieved from two ceramic tiled units set at each end of the barrack. They seemed to take forever to heat up and the Germans never provided enough coal to heat them to their full capacity. Each unit also had a small oven for heating food. As for cooking in the ovens, I didn't think they got hot enough. Some of the other people did use them for that purpose although one had to keep a sharp eye on it to make sure that it didn't disappear into some sneaky chap's stomach. Theft of food was severely frowned on and anyone caught at it was in for a

very rough ride at the hands of his mates.

The Germans provided us with hot ersatz coffee in the mornings, which came as a blessing in disguise. It worked wonders as shaving water, a use that it frequently was put to. At noon a detail was sent to the cookhouse for the daily ration of soup. Some days it would be cabbage soup, others it might be made of turnips, and on some occasions we were issued a thick, gluey concoction containing woody fibres , - the German version of dried vegetable soup. This had a unique sour taste, reminiscent of the taste that one is left with after chewing on a burdock leaf. With it's colour, and it's fibre, it soon earned the label of "bed-board soup." No matter how hungry one might get, that soup never did make it as a preferred dietary item.

For breakfast, we also received a ration of Militaire Brot, - a loaf of unknown ingredients that defied all the tests for freshness. It was hard and had a fibrous texture not unlike sawdust. It was dark brown in colour, and had a sourdough taste. Sometimes a ration was as high as eight men to one loaf, while in more generous times one man might get a whole loaf; but then that was a rarity. A ration of margarine made from coal-tar along with turnip jam often accompanied the bread.

The evening rations generally comprised of a bucket of mint tea, a ration of cheese, and on particularly hot days we might get Danish pickled herring. These came in a huge bucket, out of which a serving of rather slimy fish eyes, guts and tails were ladled

onto a mess tin. Another delicacy that always seemed to appear on those hot days was fish cheese. This was an aromatic morsel of fish encased in a surround of cheese much like Limburger cheese, both in smell and in texture. The heat of the day made the entry of this little delicacy known from a great distance. Needless to say, without the availability of Red Cross parcels from Canada, the U.S., and Britain we would have been in much more serious trouble than we were.

Christmas is always a time when the emotions seem to peak. The one of 1942 evoked a myriad of emotions within all of us. The thought that was foremost with all was of friends not with us that year. Next, I suppose that we gave a lot of thought to home and family. There was no roasting fowl, no Christmas cake nor any of the delightful smells that one associates with the Yuletide. We did, however, get some of our privileges back. Red Cross parcels were distributed, although six men had to share one parcel.

On Christmas eve, one of our group took a grey army blanket and with a bar of soap as his sketching tool, reproduced from memory a scene of London Bridge, Big Ben, and Westminster Abbey. Perhaps it lacked the finesse of Michelangelo, but to those of us who gazed on it hanging there in that bare - walled hut, it was glorious. Some of us got together and sang the few carols that we knew, and each of us nurtured our private thoughts.

The Australians introduced into the camp a portable stove called 'the blower.' It was a Rube Goldberg type of contraption

consisting of a fire-pot, a fan, an air channel, a couple of pulleys (one small, one large), all mounted on a portable board of about two feet in length. With only a few twigs in the firepot and the flame being brought to a high heat by the fan which was turned by the rotation of the larger pulley, a brew of tea could be had in a couple of minutes. The beauty of the invention was that all the necessary material to make it came in our Red Cross parcels - jam tins, coffee tins etc. Unfortunately, wood was needed to cook with, and it was always in short supply.

One ready source of wood was the bunks on which we slept. The floor of the bed was made up of six inch by one inch thick pine boards set in along the length of the bunk. One board could be judiciously removed, the remainder spread out and there was still plenty of support for the straw mattress on which one slept. A problem did arise, over time, as more and more boards were removed. The idea of the Germans replacing them was out of the question. To compensate, a rope was made by braiding the strands of binder twine that came with the red Cross parcels. This was worked together to form a sling which was then fastened on the bunk to replace the wooden boards. It was a great idea, but in fact it lacked some of the sturdiness of wood. The chap on the lower bunk was often in a state of panic as he looked up and saw his upper bunk buddy projecting dangerously through the straining rope-sling.

The wood shortage was epidemic. One time, the Germans were stringing a power line through the camp. They made the mistake of

leaving the poles unguarded for the week-end and one of them disappeared completely. Never a sliver was ever found, although the search was massive. At another time, so the story goes, there was a guard patrolling back and forth between two sentry boxes. One of the sentry boxes was outside of the gate into the hospital and the other was outside of the main camp. The sentry had about a hundred yards to patrol between the two. It began to snow as the guard left the post by the hospital. He paused for a suitable time at the main gate, while the storm grew in intensity. He staunchly marched back to the hospital gate, turned and stepped back into the void that used to be his sentry box. In the interval that he had been away, under cover of the storm, the sentry box had joined the world of brew-kindling, never to be seen again by Aryan eyes. We did hear that another new recruit had been found for the Russian Front.

V

Treachery

From the time of our capture, most of us had been resolved to escape and return to England. The conditions at the main camp were hardly conducive to that end, so it was thought to be a better idea to get ones self sent to a working party where security would be a little less. Thus, when a working party was planned for the new year of 1943, myself and my friend Red McAfee made a conscious resolve to be on it. Along with having the most sophisticated trading operation, the British from Dunkirk also had the most current information on escapes, as well as an organised escape committee. In the weeks that preceded the final selection for the working party, Red and I made several sorties over the fence to confer with that committee. We discussed our options at length and, although they couldn't give us material assistance, they did give us many pointers on what to do and what not to do while escaping. When we were satisfied that we really wanted to go, we approached the senior members of our group and had our names registered as volunteers for the work party.

There were sixteen men chosen for the work party. It was essentially a forestry party, cutting timber. The official use of the wood was for mining timbers. Since I have come to know more of what actually took place in the concentration camps, I am convinced that the timbers that we cut, one meter long, went to stoke the

funeral pyres for the dead in the concentration camps. There are no mines that I know of that could use timbers of that length or that quality in shoring, thus the real usage for the wood that we cut had to lie in some other end use. As well, there were no specific quality requirements layed down regarding what we cut, only quantity. One cubic meter per man per day.

The working party was to be located in the old Polish border - crossing house that had been revamped to house a P.O.W. work party. From the Essex Scottish Regiment, my regiment, came the largest number of volunteers. Myself, Harry McAfee, Harry Manchester, Tommy McMahon, Mason Dobson, Moose Mason, George Hale, Roddy McKenzie and Ted Martin. The remainder of the party came from the Engineers and the Royal Regiment.

When we arrived at the new quarters, we were in for quite a shock. George Hale had registered with the Germans as a Sergeant on capture. In reality, he was only a private, but on the working party he came forward as the representative NCO. Harry Manchester was a bona fide Corporal from the Regiment, and it was to him that we turned as the representative NCO. As the Germans had designated Hale in the job, a real conflict of personalities opened up. Mason Dobson had studied German at University, and had been boning up on his use of the language, so he became our interpreter. He tried to get the Germans to appoint Harry as our NCO, to no avail. So, to begin our travail on the working party, we had to accept the fraudulent Hale. Right away, as quotas were set for the cutting, Hale sided with the Germans. Whenever a decision had to be

made that affected our living conditions, or our working conditions, Hale's love affair with all things German came to the for. Hale's love affair with the German cause became so blatant that we called him before an assembly of the entire work party. This happened in April, right after we received word that one of our people, Private Wiggens, who had escaped in late March, had been shot dead by the Germans, on recapture. This seemed most sinister to us, especially since the first word of Wiggen's status had been that he had been recaptured and was in close custody, awaiting return to the main Stalag at Lamsdorf. Hale was given an ultimatum, either go back to the main Stalag at his own request, or suffer the wrath of a very angry group of his peers.

It was only a few days later that we returned from the forest to find that he was gone. The German in charge told us that he had been transferred to another work-party. We heard after the war that he had been nearly hanged by the people on that party, only saved at the last moment by the intervention of a guard who inadvertently entered the barrack in time. Hale later joined the Free Brigade, an act of treason that bought him several years in Kingston Penitentiary after the war. Wiggens was the first of our work party to attempt an escape. Even though his attempt had failed, this didn't act as a deterrent to the rest of us,- we continued to develop our own escape plans for a future date. Around about the seventeenth of March, as I was busy stripping branches off of a tree that I had felled, my axe hit a dry knot on the tree-trunk and, before I

realized what was happening, it glanced off of the knot and slammed into the base of the big toe on my left foot. We were working in the bush some three miles from the barracks, and there I was, unable to stand let alone walk. The rest of the party fashioned a stretcher out of some poles, with coats tied across for support. They loaded me onto the stretcher and, taking turns with the carry, they brought me home to the barracks. Our medical capabilities were limited to a few bandages while the nearest medical facility was ten miles away at the Army Base in the town of Loben. As a first step, I knew that the wound had to be cleaned so a pan of warm water was brought and I immersed the cut foot into it. Without even a 'by your leave,' one of the men who had somehow found a bag of salt dropped a handful of the stuff onto the open wound. The pain hit like a sledgehammer and I blacked out cold. When I eventually came to, the foot was bandaged, courtesy of Dobbie, our interpreter, and I was ensconced in my bunk, most comfortably. My comfort was very short-lived. After a couple of days the foot began to swell, and by the end of a week, the whole leg was throbbing and was quite swollen. At this point, the German Sergeant in charge of the working party decided to take me to see a doctor at the Army base in Loben. The trip to town was uneventful except for the fact that the back of a half-ton truck in March can be mighty cold on the Polish frontier. (Our barracks were in the pre-war border crossing between Germany and Poland. The upshot of my examination by the German doctor was that I was to be taken to the hospital in

Kattowitz, where the infection in my leg would be taken care of. After a brief stop at the barracks for a change of clothes, some toiletries and a few foodstuffs from the Red Cross parcels, we set off for the hospital. For that leg of the journey I was allowed to ride in the cab with the driver so it was a much pleasanter and warmer journey than the trip to Loben had been. On arrival at the hospital which was under the supervision of an order of Catholic nuns, I was examined by someone who appeared to be the head nurse. She spoke no English, and at that time my German was still in its embryonic state. As a result, on finding that I had a high fever she mistakenly ordered that I was to be placed in the scarlet fever ward. I was duly put on a stretcher and wheeled off to a room that housed about thirty patients, all German soldiers who had been wounded on the Russian Front. I was given a bed in the centre of the ward, one lone "Englander" as they called me, in a room of Deutsche Soldaten. A whole day passed before a doctor arrived, who examined me and determined that my problem was a badly infected leg, and not scarlet fever. With the help of sulpha drugs and sterile bandaging, I was soon on the way back to health, with a few pleasant and, in some cases, amusing surprises along the way. The German soldiers, rather than resent the presence of a soldier from an enemy country, treated me quite well. I, on the other hand, did share the odd cup of real coffee with them and practised my new German studies. Thus, when Hitler's birthday came along, my hospital mates reacted with great enjoyment out of my treatment at

the hands of the German Red Cross volunteers who visited us to honour the occasion. At the time, I had absolutely no idea of what was taking place. Apparently, it was the custom in Germany to honour AH on his birthday, which fell on April 20th. On the Friday before the momentous occasion, our ward was visited by a group of about four very pretty young ladies from the German Red Cross Society. One who appeared a little older than the others, and who was the obvious senior member, came forward and planted a kiss on the cheek of a soldier and greeted him in the name of the Fuehrer. Next, a small bottle of Schnapps was presented by one of the accompanying cuties, followed by another who presented the soldier with a litre of Champagne (Argentinean). The fourth girl presented each patient with a package containing an orange, some candies, and a brief note with a message from the Reich about service and honour. As there was nothing to identify me as an Allied POW, and no one clarified the difference to the girls, I received every thing as did the Germans. After the girls had left, the soldiers on the ward made a great joke about it. I, on the other hand, being once more fully mobile, made a beeline to a room on the ground floor where an Australian and a Scotsman were ensconced, carrying my treasure. So, in the middle of April of 1943, we three Allied soldiers drank to the swift defeat of Adolph Hitler with booze supplied to us by his own people. To us, this was a marvellous irony.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

VI

The Ball Game

On my return to the working party from hospital, around the middle of April, I was excused from going back into the forest for a few days. It was during this respite from work that I was alone in the barracks for the entire day. This gave me an opportunity to assess the actual plan that we would use for our escape, and to fine tune some aspects of it. As I did not draw any Red Cross parcels for rations while I was away, a back log had accumulated. This was squirrelled away, to be used as rations on our trip. To carry these rations, I took some old army shirts that I had found and made a couple of haversacks, one each for Red McAffee and myself. The forthcoming escape didn't take over our lives to the exclusion of other events. With the advent of the beautiful spring days, we tried to spend as much of our free time in the outdoors as possible. Perhaps a brief description of the layout of our quarters should be given here. As previously stated, our quarters were in the pre - war Polish custom house. The front part of the house had no bars, and housed the German guards, a Sergeant, a Corporal, and a private. From a mid - point on the north side of the house around

to a mid - point on the south side, a ten - foot high fence had been constructed. It was made of barbed wire, and had an inward sloping, meter - wide section at the top that was covered in its entirety with concertina wire. (Rolled, barbed wire.) This fence enclosed the back section of the house, which had all its windows barred. This was the living quarters of the prisoners of war. The fence extended about thirty feet from the house and enclosed a yard of about twenty feet wide. In it stood the outhouse, hardly a work of architectural beauty, but serviceable nonetheless. It not only did the job it was designed to do, but it offered a place where conversation could take place without the fear of it being overheard by the Germans. One door opened from the barrack into the yard, and was locked at night. Nature's calls were taken care of by a night bucket in a small room immediately inside the yard - door. A daily roster was posted and certain duties, taking care of the bucket being one of them, were rotated among us all. The yard had been designated as a place for us to exercise, but the presence of the outhouse reduced its capabilities greatly. Thus, when the idea for a ball - game was broached, we had to look for more room. Indirectly, the Germans themselves had inspired us to hold a ball game.

The location of our quarters being the pre - war custom house of Poland, the native population of the area was predominately Polish. The war years had been hard on the people of occupied Poland, and there were many items that we in North America had

taken for granted that just were not available to them. For instance, tea, coffee and chocolate were non existent, while cigarettes were in short supply. However, farm produce such as eggs, cured bacon and Polish salami were in fairly good supply, as was rye bread and homemade butter. When the Germans were not observing us too closely, it had become relatively easy for us to trade cigarettes, tea, or chocolate through the fence with the locals for some of their produce. As in so many other aspects of life, when a clandestine act is carried to the extreme, it is discovered. With us, it was purely by accident that a couple of Poles were caught leaving the fence area with Canadian cigarettes. Normally, the Sergeant would have stayed in his quarters after his evening meal, but on that occasion he had decided to go to the pub in the village. While they were not actually caught trading with us, they were hard - pressed to explain possession of Canadian cigarettes. The Sergeant was a regular army type, and, while he had to follow his orders, he did have some leeway in carrying them out. In this case, he gave them a lecture, confiscated the cigarettes, and sent them home. He did, however, rake us over the coals in fine style. Then, after a couple of days, a sign was posted on the fence outside of the barracks stating that it was strictly forbidden for anyone to have contact with the prisoners. So it was that the Germans forced us to plan a ball game. By cutting off the normal method that we used for trading, we had to become inventive; the ball - game was our way of becoming inventive. One of the men had

received a softball in a parcel from home. It was no trick at all to fashion a couple of bats from a tree while at work in the forest. Everything was ready for the game; all we had to do was obtain permission from the Germans to play in the larger field outside the wire, and to ask the locals to watch it. When the subject was first broached to the Germans, they were cool to the idea of the game taking place outside the wire. We hastened to assure them that escape was not on anyone's mind, - we wished to play outside of the wire because it offered enough room to hit a ball. On the subject of the locals attending, they were adamant. A very decisive "Nein" was all we could get on that one, so we decided to let whatever would be, happen. The game would be held on the following Saturday afternoon.

On the day of the game, we laid out the bases, marking them with pieces of cardboard. For the pitcher's mound, we scraped away the sod, and built it up. The game was to be a scrub game, where everyone eventually came to bat. Three batters would be chosen to start the game, after which the rotation would follow the positions of the players on the field, - i.e. first base, second, third etc. The object of the game was not to have a winner or loser, but to have everybody play. At least, that was the stated objective, for the record. By two in the afternoon, all was ready. Let the game begin !

The Sergeant had a family close by, and had gone home for the week - end, leaving the Corporal and the private officially in

charge. They took up positions on each side of the field, close to the compound. Being young, and like young soldiers everywhere, there were probably a million places they would rather be than playing nurse - maid to a bunch of P.O,W.s. To give them their due, though, they did seem interested in the game, and how it was played.

Play got under way, and soon a drifter came over the plate. It was hit with a mighty swing, and soared over the head of the nearest fielder and into a stand of young trees that bordered the field. Both guards were in a state of panic as the fielder dove into the trees and disappeared totally from view. Only a minute or so passed and he returned, proudly clutching the ball, firing it belatedly into home. The guards both relaxed after that, now confident that it was inevitable that the ball would sooner or later be hit into the trees, but that no one would take advantage of that fact to escape. They both seemed quite at ease after that first big hit. They were heard to yell out at a good hit, and became downright gleeful when someone got tagged out.

When every player had the opportunity of chasing at least one ball into the trees, the game wound down. The guards seemed not to notice how the players found the need to return to the barracks shortly after having chased a ball into the trees. It had been a good day for all, prisoners and guards alike. For the guards, no one had escaped, and the P.O.W.s had been generous with their cigarettes. For the P.O.W.s, it had been much more than 'a day in

the park.'

When evening came,and the doors had been locked for the night, a gourmet feast appeared. There was salami and boiled eggs, curds of fresh farmer's cheese, rye bread and fresh honey, - a galaxy of forbidden fruit. Comfortably tired, and with the demons of hunger suitably dispelled, we settled around for an evening of song. Out came the harmonica and the accordion. The old songs rose on the air that night and, yes, it was a long way to Tipperary, but God willing, we would soon be there. Turning in to sleep that night, several quiet prayers of gratitude rose to the heavens for the safe - keeping of all the young Poles who had risked much that day to trade with us. They had taken their trade goods into the woods, and waited for the ball to be hit there. As a player came into the trees, a deal was quickly struck, the ball given over, and the guards were none the wiser.

VII

Escape

During that short period that I had to myself to recuperate after returning from hospital, there were a few very necessary things that needed looking into. After Wiggens' escape, the Germans had called in some brick - layers and completely bricked in the window of the wood - storage room from which he had escaped. The bars had been straightened out on the window, and the room was locked. In addition, a large armoir was brought in as a cupboard for clothes - storage, and had been placed in position covering the door into the storage room. During my few days alone, I managed to shift the armoir out from the wall sufficiently to allow me access to the door. This I was able to jimmy open. Once inside, I began the tedious job of chiselling away at the cement between the bricks. As each brick was loosened, care was taken to see that it remained relatively proper in its place so as to be unnoticed from the casual passerby who might glance up at the window. The loose cement was disposed of in the outhouse. Each day brought us a little closer to freedom, or the hope thereof.

Another logistical detail that had to be overcome involved boots. The Germans had initiated an evening bed-check which was really an escape - check, wherein each of us had to set our shoes out on a landing outside of the living area. There was a door that was locked each night, only being unlocked at the morning roll -

call. There was a main storage room on the second floor where all of our Red Cross parcels were stored, and also our quartermaster - supplies,- spare uniforms, shirts, and shoes. That room was opened on Saturday afternoons for the distribution of parcels, which was always made with one or two of the guards closely watching the whole operation. We convinced the Sergeant that a dangerous build - up of boxes and paper had happened, and that the entire room should be given a thorough cleaning. He agreed, and gave the Okay to do the job. Saturday came, and after parcel distribution, four or five of us stayed on with one sentry to get on with the job. During the clean - up, the guard was keeping an eagle - eye on every movement, making it impossible to get away with anything. One of the men picked an argument with the him over some point and, in the heat of the argument, gave him a slight push. He went backwards into a pile of boxes, and, while he extricated himself, we were able to snaffle two pairs of boots and toss them into a box of refuse that was going out for disposal. Quick apologies soothed the damaged ego of the sentry, and all was soon back to normal. This effectively resolved the boot problem for two of us, but there were three men to consider. As it was now out of the question to attempt to steal another pair, we were forced into the use of a little ingenuity instead. Taking some cardboard, we cut out the pieces that we would use to make a pair of fake boots. After cutting and shaping, we sewed the pieces together. Once the boots were assembled, we used shoe polish to blacken them. With laces

installed, and a pair of socks dangling from them, they actually looked like the real thing. With that problem out of the way, we were free to finish plans for our escape.

Early in the evening of the sixteenth of May, 1943, we completed final preparations. As the Sergeant was away for the week - end, and the corporal had also been given leave, only the private was left to look after us. His girl - friend was spending the week - end with him in the residence, so we more or less had a free reign of the place for the week - end, i.e. until Monday morning. The armoir was pulled out, giving access to the storage room that over - looked the fence. Two men, with the help of a block of wood, managed to bend the bars out from the window - sill to a width that would allow a man to pass through. We awaited the fall of darkness to make our exit. As dusk deepened into darkness at about nine thirty, the men in the barracks struck up a singing jamboree, complete with mouth - organ and accordion. This would serve a dual purpose, - to cover any sounds made in getting out the window, and to allay the guard's concerns (if he had any) for his charges. By ten we were ready to go. Roddy Mckenzie was the first to leave. He exited the window, down onto the fence and into the shadow of a small, dry ditch beside the road. His haversack was tossed to him from the window and, with a quick salute, he was off; hopefully to Russia and then home. Red McAfee was the second one out. As with Roddy, he followed the same routine, and reached the small ditch, where he waited for his haversack to be tossed down. I was in the

window, with one leg out, ready to step onto the top of the fence, when I heard Red give out o low "Hiss." I froze. A German soldier on a bicycle had stopped on the road to listen to the music. Red lay in the shallow ditch, only a few feet from the road. The slightest movement on his part would have revealed him to the soldier up on the road. From my perch in the window, I was hidden around the corner of the building. Any movement on my part would have also drawn some unwanted attention. The singers soon realized the problem, and closed down their musical act for the night. A couple of lights were extinguished, to further emphasize that the show was over. Out on the road, the soldier realized that his musical moment had passed. He mounted up his bike, and rode off into the darkness. We very quickly got on with the business at hand, and in a short time, Red and I too were lost to our compatriots by the darkness, as we vanished into the night. Our destination was Danzig on the north coast of Poland, where we hoped to board a freighter for Sweden. We began our journey with the high hopes that can only exist with youth.

In order to put as much distance between us and the barracks as possible, we ran steadily for a couple of hours along a forest road, keeping our direction by the polar star. Our immediate destination was the Polish city of Chestochowa that lay on a north - easterly direction from our camp. Daybreak found us deep in the forest, near a small stream. Burrowing into a clump of dense underbrush, we slept through most of the day. It was a conscious

decision on our part to travel primarily at night, in order to minimize the risk of being caught. It was when we deviated from that decision that our troubles began. Two days passed. We had been travelling by night and holing up in the forest during the daylight hours. We calculated that the immediate hue and cry over the escape would have diminished a little by that time, so decided to take a chance on meeting some Polish people with the object of procuring civilian clothing. Our Canadian uniforms would certainly attract notice in a daylight crowd.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

VIII

On The Run 19 May 1943

Emerging from the forest, we saw a group of houses along a dirt road. A middle aged man came into view and we headed toward him. From his appearance, he had been gathering bits of wood from the forest. With his arms full, he was making his way towards the houses. As we approached, we called a good morning to him, in German. We asked him if he was Polish, and he replied that he was. We told him who we were, and his eyes opened wide with what we mistook for amazement, but what could well have been fear. When we told him that we wanted to trade cigarettes and chocolate for some clothes, he then indicated that we should follow him to his home, and he headed off to one of the houses. The house into which he lead us was a one - story, two room structure, with the one room housing the cooking facillities, and the other room being a combination living, sleeping room. On entering the house, Red stayed near the door, while I picked a spot near the window, where a chest of drawers stood. I put one elbow on top of the dresser, noticing that the top drawer was opened slightly. I really didn't pay too much heed to that fact, - just noticed it while my eyes took in the whole of our surroundings.

The Pole spoke in his native tongue to the older boy, who was about ten. He immediately took off out the door, and the father told us that his wife was at a neighbour's house, where he had sent

the boy to fetch her. As he spoke, he was all the time moving gradually closer to the dresser where I was standing. My whole system seemed to be on the alert for something, and it was a good thing that I was suspicious. The Pole made a quick movement to the dresser, and was reaching into the drawer just as I slammed it shut on his hand. He pulled his hand back out, holding the fingers with the other hand. A look of terror came over him. Opening the drawer, I found a pistol, the obvious object of our "friendly " hosts lunge. Picking it up, I found that it was a Walther automatic, fully loaded. Our friend was no loyal Pole, but most probably a volksdeutcher, - one parent German and the other Polish. With him having a German pistol, he was most likely a reserve policeman as well.

Pointing the pistol at him, I told him to lie on the floor, which he did. There were still two kids in the room, and I motioned for them to get down by the father as well. With that, Red and I left the house. Once outside, we quickly took our bearings. The forest came up to the back of the houses on the east side of the village, and stretched off in that direction as far as the eye could see. We took off running as fast as we could go, into the forest and away from that village. A logging road ran eastward through the forest and we followed it for a good fifteen minutes or so before we left it and headed off across country. I still had the automatic, which bothered both of us. One of the rules of war states that if a soldier surrenders and becomes a prisoner of war,

if he is found to bear arms while a prisoner, he can be shot. That was a state that we both wanted to avoid, so I separated the clip from the gun, and threw it in one direction, and the body of the gun in another as we ran. Perhaps an hour had passed before we felt that we had put enough space between ourselves and our would be captor. We had reached a small brook with clear, cool water gurgling along. From the exertion of the running, we were sweating profusely, and were also near exhaustion, so a rest was in order. We had chosen a spot beside the stream that was fairly well covered with bushes and overhung with trees. There we stretched out on the ground and rested for a half hour or more. As we were freshening up at the water's edge, Red suddenly hissed, "Freeze". I froze. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught movement off to my right. Unnoticed by us, there was a path about fifty yards away, and along that path there rode a German forester, complete with his green, cocked hat, on a bicycle. Slung on the cross - bar of the bike, we could see the same style of gun that the forester from the working party used to carry, a triple - barrelled gun. Twin shot - guns with a rifle barrel. We held ourselves absolutely immobile, and he carried on, slowly riding on down the path. When he was out of sight, we once again harnessed our strengths and took off through the forest as fast as we could run.

The forest through which we travelled was unlike the forests that we know in Canada. The forests in Poland are cultivated, that is the virgin growth has long since been replaced with selective

replanting of pine trees. In many cases, the pine trees are tapped regularly for their sap, just as we tap our maples. The Poles, however, used the sap from the pine trees for turpentine, which was for commercial usage.

At sunset, we had stopped to rest at the edge of the forest. We were on a bit of a rise, looking down on a cluster of houses about two or three miles off. As we watched, we observed a man in a khaki uniform walking along the road that passed below us. It seemed like a forester's uniform, but was different from that worn by the Germans. We deduced that it must be that of the Polish forest service. At last, it would seem that we had found our Polish contact.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

IX

The Underground

With much greater caution than we had previously used, Red and I made our way along the edge of the forest, until we had positioned ourselves immediately behind the larger of the out - buildings, presumably a barn. From there we could see the house and the entire yard, so we waited for the man we had spotted earlier to emerge from the house. After about an hour, he came out of the house and headed for the barn. This was our cue, so out from our forest observation post we came, darting rather swiftly to the door of the barn, where we encountered a very surprised man.

With a combination of what little German we could muster and hand signs, we let him know that we were escaped prisoners of war, and that we wanted to get into Poland proper, where we hoped to obtain assistance from the underground. The man seemed to be most uncomfortable with us, and our first thought was that we had blown it a second time. He indicated to us that we should stay in the barn, and he would bring someone who spoke better German than he did, and who might be able to advise us as to our best course of action. He showed us to a smaller section of the barn where clean straw had been spread around and was partly set off from the main floor of the building. We watched him go off to the house, and in a few minutes come out, then walk away down the road. We didn't know where he was going, but felt that we had to take a leap of

faith at some point, so why not then.

Dusk was falling swiftly over the land when we heard low voices outside. Quickly, we roused ourselves and went out to investigate. The man had returned, bringing with him another man and a boy in his teens. The second man spoke to us, asking if we were 'Americaner.' When we replied that we were from Canada, he seemed a little puzzled, so we tried to explain about Dieppe. I don't think that they had heard about that episode, so it really didn't register that we had been taken prisoner there only ten months before. The second man understood German a little more than the first, and the boy had learned a little English in school, so we were able to tell them what we were planning on doing. They went into a lengthy discussion between themselves in Polish. The boy had become their spokesman, and he told us that we would have to hide out in the barn again for the next day, until it got dark the following evening. He and the second man, who seemed to be his father, would come with another boy, and they would take us across country and into the city of Chenstachowa, where we stood a better chance of connecting up with the underground. There were patrols on all the roads into the city, so we had to be cautious lest we run into them. They left us, and we returned to the warmth of the barn, where we soon settled into the straw and slept.

The crowing of roosters alerted us to the new day, and we scrambled to come awake. Our rations were still holding out, and we were preparing to breakfast on crackers and cheese, when the wife

appeared at the door of the barn with a tray of bread, cottage cheese, and a pitcher of milk. This was like manna from the Gods to us and what was more important, reassured us that we were at last among friendly folks.

After eating, we held a meeting and decided that it would be foolhardy to stay in that barn all day, so we cleaned up all trace of occupation and returned to the forest. During the day we took turns on watch, with one resting while the other stood guard. The day passed without incident, and as dusk came on, we returned to the barn to await the arrival of our guides. They arrived around nine, as dusk began to deepen into night. As promised, there were the three of them, the older man and two boys in their late teens. The plan was for the two boys to scout on ahead, and the man would accompany Red and I as we followed along in single file. Silence had to be maintained, and any command from forward had to be acted on swiftly, without comment. The trip was going to be about three or four hours, so we had to pace ourselves accordingly.

The trip went well, and midnight found us approaching a main road. We hunkered down beside it for a brief conference. About a mile along the road, we were told, there was a German road block. The plan was for us to cross the road at the point where we were, and proceed diagonally across the next group of fields, until we came to a hayfield. The hay was already a couple of feet or more in height, and that field we would cross in a crouched position, known to the military as the Cossack crawl. In that position, one

hunkers down as if he is about to do the dance of the Cossacks. Only the head is above the surrounding growth, cutting down on any outline against the night sky, which would be automatically visible to an observation point. It was a tricky manoeuvre, but a necessary one in our situation. We would have stood out against the night sky, - ready targets for the German outpost, only a few hundred meters up the road. At the far side of the field, before emerging onto the road that paralleled the field, we went to ground and waited while one of the escort crept forward to see if the way was clear to cross the road. The Germans apparently patrolled all perimeter roads around the city. After what seemed to be an eternity, he returned. A four - man patrol had passed along the road as our escort watched from the roadside, so it would be safe to cross if we went immediately. We ran across one at a time, and took shelter against a hedge row, with the hedge between us and the road. After a brief rest to regain our wind, we set off once more across country. This time we were heading for a house on the outskirts of the city, which was still a few miles ahead of us. Finally we arrived at a group of buildings that were visible to us behind a high wooden fence. At the gate, the senior man of our escort pulled on a rope that protruded through, and the faint sound of a small bell could be heard. The crunching sound of footsteps on gravel could be heard next, and the gate opened. The older man of our group embraced the gateman with a bear - hug, and they spoke rapidly in Polish. We were ushered into the yard, and on to the

house. In the house we received a warm welcome from the man who had opened the gate, his wife, and another. A table had been set with some breads, cheese and cold meats. We were urged to sit and eat. The three men of our escort shook hands all around and said their good - byes. We thanked them for their help, and they were away. They had to get back home again before dawn, and it had already passed midnight. The return trip would go swifter without two strangers to hold them back.

There were some questions by the second man, who appeared to have some position of authority. Questions about our capture, where we were stationed in Germany, the working party that we had escaped from. After an hour or so, we realized how exhausted we were from the activities of the night. Our host took us to a large bedroom at the back of the house, and showed us where we could sleep. Only a few short minutes passed before the two of us were beneath the heavy blankets, luxuriating in the comfort of a real bed. Sleep came swiftly and deep to both of us. We knew that the morrow would bring a new phase to operation escape, but for the rest of that night, no thought could be spared for it. The night had been given over to sleep.

I awoke to the sound of voices. German voices. Commands were being barked out, as if to troops on a parade ground. Going to the window, I moved the curtain aside enough to see out, and what I saw caused my heart to do a couple of flip - flops. There was a field outside of the house, and it was full of German soldiers. They were

alternatively crawling on the ground, running at top speed toward some mythical point, wheeling about, and running back to their starting place. Some were apparently attacking their comrades in hand - to hand combat, while others seemed to be wrestling. It was as though we had landed in the middle of a German training ground, a disturbing fact, to say the least.

Pulling on some clothes, I went looking for someone who could explain our predicament to me, and more, what were we going to do about it. The man who had greeted us the previous evening was in the kitchen, watching the scene outside. He told me that the garrison regiment that was doing the patrols often held training sessions in the field, and that so far they hadn't bothered their house. They usually took the morning for their exercises and were gone by noon. He suggested that we should stay in our room, remain quiet, and stay away from the windows, purely as a precaution. As it sounded like good advice, we retired to our room and kept quiet. Right on schedule, the Germans formed up in marching order just before noon and were off.

As we sat at table for lunch, the younger man who had been at the house when we arrived, returned. He told us that two men would come to the house in the middle of the afternoon, with bicycles. We would ride with them, and they would take us to a house in the heart of the city, where we would be staying for a while, while the underground did a check with England on our credentials. It sounded O.K. to me. but Red looked as if he had just received a death

sentence. When lunch was over, and we were alone in our room, he confided in me. He had never learned to ride a bicycle.

vegetables and bread, with an evening meal of cold meats, usually a type of Polish sausage with bread and tea. We had given our hosts some of the English tea that we had brought with us, which was greatly prized. We also left them enough for us to share, as well. There was a table in our room, and they carried the food into us, and took away the dishes when we had finished. To ward off boredom, there was a chess set which Red and I used extensively. Neither of us could be classed as masters, still we managed a few very good games.

May 23 or 24

On the evening of the third day at our new address, we had visitors. Three men, all in their mid to late thirties, and a very attractive woman, who was probably also in her thirties, came to call. They had a whole barrage of questions for us, some about our homes in America, (North America, that is) others about our military service. They were appalled to learn that I was only nineteen, while Red had just turned eighteen. We talked of our plan to reach Danzig, and then to cross the Baltic Sea to Sweden, as stowaways if necessary. They didn't think such a plan had any chance of success, and suggested that we might think about staying in Poland with the underground until some plan could be worked out to get us back to England. They told us that there were also eight British airmen, also escapees, who were at that same time in Poland, under the protection of the underground. They told us also that they had forwarded the information of our escape to England by radio, and were waiting for England to confirm our identities

before proceeding with the procurement of civilian I.D. papers for us. They seemed to think that within the week we should hear something back from England. We were duly impressed that such a communication was in operation.

As we talked, the man of the house and his wife had been busy joining a couple of tables together. Then we noticed that they were bringing in breads, cold meats and cheese, and setting the table with plates. They also brought in a couple of bottles of a white liquid, which I later discovered was vodka. We all seated ourselves at the table, - the three visitors, our hosts, and Red and I. Such treatment hadn't been envisaged at all, - we felt like visiting dignitaries. The party continued until well after midnight, and we all became a bit tipsy. After all, we had been totally abstinent of alcohol for almost nine months, so we did react to the consumption of the vodka. At the end of the evening, the Poles sang the old Polish Anthem, which was currently interdict, while we countered with a stirring rendition of " Oh, Canada," and " The Star - spangled Banner." Red, you see, was an American volunteer in the Canadian Army.

During the next week we were pretty much left on our own. One event brought home the precariousness of our situation. During the month of May of 1943, the Germans had stepped up their activity against the Jewish people of Chenstochowa, who had numbered about thirty thousand, pre - war. They were taking groups of them to an area outside of the city, forcing them to dig a trench, then

before proceeding with the procurement of civilian I.D. papers for us. They seemed to think that within the week we should hear something back from England. We were duly impressed that such a communication was in operation.

As we talked, the man of the house and his wife had been busy joining a couple of tables together. Then we noticed that they were bringing in breads, cold meats and cheese, and setting the table with plates. They also brought in a couple of bottles of a white liquid, which I later discovered was vodka. We all seated ourselves at the table, - the three visitors, our hosts, and Red and I. Such treatment hadn't been envisaged at all, - we felt like visiting dignitaries. The party continued until well after midnight, and we all became a bit tipsy. After all, we had been totally abstinent of alcohol for almost nine months, so we did react to the consumption of the vodka. At the end of the evening, the Poles sang the old Polish Anthem, which was currently interdict, while we countered with a stirring rendition of " Oh, Canada," and " The Star - spangled Banner." Red, you see, was an American volunteer in the Canadian Army.

During the next week we were pretty much left on our own. One event brought home the precariousness of our situation. During the month of May of 1943, the Germans had stepped up their activity against the Jewish people of Chenstochowa, who had numbered about thirty thousand, pre - war. They were taking groups of them to an area outside of the city, forcing them to dig a trench, then

machine - gunning them into the trench. The fact of this was well known to the Poles, but they were very aware of their own situation vis - a - vis the Germans, so opted for a form of neutrality toward the massacres. They were powerless, in any case, to stop it.

The event I spoke of happened during the middle of the night, a couple of days after our party. I awoke to the sounds of shouting in German, whistles blowing, and the cries of " God have mercy, God have mercy," in Polish. This was followed by a series of shots, and then silence. All of this drama seemed to be taking place in the alley behind the apartment where we were. That night passed with a slowness that comes with great apprehension, as was our state. With the arrival of dawn, we were able to ascertain that the Germans had been chasing a Jewish man, and had "arrested" him in the alley behind the apartment. There was a chance that the Germans might think that there were more Jews hiding in the area, and come to search the buildings. We had to be ready to go to the attic and hide there, in the event that word came of a search.

Sure enough, about one o'clock in the afternoon the man of the house came and told us that the Germans were making a spot - search of houses on the street, and that we should go to the attic. With that, he led us up two flights of stairs and to the back of the building where a third flight led into the attic. We were advised to move carefully over the rafters, so as not to come through the ceiling, to a spot in the farthest corner away from the entrance, and to lie prone and stay very still. As the 'all clear' became

evident, the man assured us that he would return. During the next two hours, we heard nothing. At the same time, the greatly feared opening of the attic door, or the sniffing of dogs, never materialized. Although our positions were cramped, our memory of the terrorized Jewish man was so vivid that we dared not complain.

In mid afternoon we heard the door open, and the voice of our host reached us, calling "Come." Carefully, we picked our way back over the rafters to the door where he waited for us. In his broken German, he told us that his home had been passed by, and the Germans had now left the street. Their search had been of selected buildings, not every one, and he had been lucky. Back in our room, we resolved to stay alert, in case a snap inspection should nab us. For us, such an eventuality would mean that we would be returned to the prison camp, but the Poles would be shot. We shuddered to think of that scenario.

We had our pictures taken, and on the eighth day one of the three men who had asked us all the questions returned with a Kencarte, (identification card) for each of us. I was a deaf mute locksmith, while Red was a deaf mute baker. The documents bore all the proper Nazi stamps and signatures, and appeared quite genuine. The thought did cross my mind that it might be a bit difficult for us to act out the role of deaf mutes, with never having known one. We never had to use them and I ditched mine sometime later when I found myself in a very dangerous situation. On the tenth day, it was time to be moving on, and once more we had a pair of guides

sent for us, and we moved to an apartment a mile or so toward the eastern end of the city.

The new place was a one bedroom apartment, and to this day I don't know who the place belonged to. All the food staples were there,- bread, butter, eggs and milk. With these, we prepared our own breakfast, and at noon a tray of food was left outside the door. Someone knocked on the door at noon, we answered the knock and there was the food. We saw no one bring it. One of the two men who had brought us to the apartment would come in at night and take away the dirty dishes and bring us fresh bread. During the day, we just read, and waited for the underground to make the next move.

The thought crossed our minds that perhaps we should extricate ourselves from the protection of the underground, but we both agreed to wait a bit longer and see where all their planning was leading. The most recent safe house was only used for three days, when the man whom we had come to refer to as the 'Director' arrived. He told us that it was too risky for the two of us to remain together, therefore they were moving Red to one place, and me to a separate place. Had we refused to allow this break - up, both Red and myself would have travelled a far different path through life than we subsequently did. Each of us lacked the maturity of vision to foresee very far into the future, so we fell victim to the whims and plans of the Poles, a fact that did not auger well for either of us, as things turned out. The next morning, we said our good - byes, little realising that we would

Only a few minutes seemed to have passed, but all of those life - forces ceased to exist. The executioners were all young men, the same age as those whom they killed. In other times, they might have shared class rooms, played sports together and been friends. The problem was that the killers were Germans, their victims all Jews. What I had just witnessed was but a microcosm of the world according to Hitler. The reality of life in Poland had just been shown to me and I found its harshness frightening. That evening, at my urging, I was moved across the city to a new location.

After a few days at the new place, I received a visitor. He was a real live Scot, complete with brogue. He identified himself to me as being with British Military Intelligence. According to him, he had been in Poland since the first world war. Having married a Polish girl, he had settled down in a village in the eastern part of the country. With the outbreak of war, and the defeat of Poland, he had gone with the underground, renewing his ties with Britain. It was in his capacity of Intelligence agent that he was visiting me. Apparently, word had been received from Britain that I was to go to the forest with the Partisans. There I was to remain until such time as I could be air - lifted out to England, or the war ended. It all sounded plausible to my naive ears, so I agreed, not giving a second thought to what should have been the obvious. With the Partisans I would be armed. The Geneva Convention, under whose laws I was registered as a prisoner of war, forbade the carrying of arms by those so registered. In the event

of recapture, armed, the soldier could be executed summarily. One would think that I should have been a little more prudent, but no. The moment dictated bravado, and I was in my nineteenth year. Youth was immortal.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

XI

A Change

On or about the first of July, a month and a half after escaping, arrangements were completed for me to join the Partisans. Up to this point, I never doubted that Red would be coming with me to the forest. When I put the question to the underground director who was in charge of the arrangements, I was shocked to learn that Red had been retaken. The story given to me was that Red had been staying with a widow and her young daughter. Their street had been barricaded off by the Germans, and a search was undertaken to round up Jews. Apparently, Red was resolved not to be found on the premises of the widow, for obvious reasons. He borrowed a jacket that had belonged to the lady's husband, picked up a brief case, donned a fedora, and stepped out onto the street. I was told that he walked boldly up to the barricade, lifted his arm in a Nazi salute to the soldier manning the post. The soldier snappily returned the salute and stepped aside, allowing Red to pass.

The Director had his information from his own observers. Also, through the underground, he had heard that Red was being held in Litzmanstadt, a city about forty miles north of Chenstochowa. They couldn't tell him anything regarding how he had been caught. On my return to Canada at the end of the war, Red confirmed the story about the Nazi salute and filled in the missing pieces. He had gone to the rail yard, thinking he could get a freight train heading

north, and reach Danzig. He selected a car that seemed to be on a north - bound line, and climbed aboard. He fell asleep in the railcar, and when the train crossed from Poland back into Germany, the cars were searched. He was taken into custody, and transported to a camp near Litzmanstadt. There he was severely beaten by the Gestapo, who wanted my whereabouts, as well as information about those who had provided him with papers and civilian clothing. He had passed out from the whipping, done with a cat - o'nine - tails, a particularly odious implement. In 1945, his back was still horribly scarred from the ordeal. After failing to elicit the information they wanted, the Gestapo threw Red into a Russian prison camp. After a month in what he described to me as a "Hell hole," he was returned to the main prison camp at Lamsdorf.

Thus I was on my own. I decided to go with the plan and see where Fate would lead. Accordingly, a young Pole of about fifteen was introduced to me one afternoon. He would be my guide to the village in the country, where we would meet with someone who would take us to the partisans. There was about twenty miles to cover, and we would be leaving about ten o'clock that night. The young fellow who was to accompany me was in trouble with the Germans for distributing anti- German literature, so he had to go into hiding away from the city.

Around nine o'clock we left the house where I had been staying, in the company of two other underground members. There was a good walk ahead of us, before we got to the eastern outskirts of the city.