X

A Polish Welcome

Outfitted with caps and well - worn suit jackets, we set out with the two Poles who were to accompany us to another safe - house. They had brought two bikes, unaware that Red couldn't ride one. After a bit of a struggle with language, they spoke only a little German, we manage to convey our predicament. It was decided that Red would push the bike and walk along as though there was a problem with it, and the rest of us would drive slowly along beside him. Thus we set out, in mid afternoon, to our new location.

It took about an hour for us to finish our journey from the outskirts to the duplex that we finally arrived at, right in the centre of the city. The people with whom we were to stay lived in the upper duplex. It was a large apartment, with three bedrooms, a large living room, separate dining room and a large kitchen. We were assigned a bedroom at the very back of the apartment, and also were warned not to leave it for any purpose whatsoever, unless advised to do so by our hosts. There was a small room accessed from the bedroom, with a sink and toilet for our convenience. Our meals, we were advised, would be brought into the room for us. For two days we saw no one except our hosts, either the man, or his wife, and then only when they brought us food. We received coffee, bread and cheese for breakfast, a substantial meal at noon of meat,

not meet again until July of 1945. Our meeting place would be a far piece from the City of the Black Madonna, and across the Atlantic away, from much troubled Europe. We met again in Detroit, Michigan, at the home of Red's parents, but that part of the story must get in line, for there were powerful events yet to take place, before the luxury of Detroit could be savoured.

Late June 1943 In the ensuing three weeks, I was moved to four different safe houses, the longest stay at any of them being two weeks spent at the home of the former ambassador to Switzerland. He and his wife made me most welcome, and after the war, I was able to send them one parcel of goodies, from which I received a reply from the wife, who was then living in Warsaw. All letters after that were never answered, so their fate remains unknown. At one of the houses where I was staying, there was a nice quiet study, with a window overlooking a park. One morning as I sat reading beside the window. I noticed that there were about a dozen young men, all in their late teens or early twenties, some sitting on benches, others standing around, talking amongst themselves. As I watched, several military trucks pulled into the park, surrounding the young men. Soldiers piled out of the trucks, took up firing positions and began firing into the group. The shooting continued until they were all down, and then a larger truck pulled into the area. The bodies were thrown into the truck like sacks of garbage for disposal. From my window, I saw the soldiers leap back into their vehicles and speed away.

We reached some very dark back streets, along which we walked until we were at the edge of a field, looking out over an expanse of open country. As we crouched by the side of a building, we watched a search-light play across the field in front of us. As the light on our left played to the right, another on the right played back to the left. We were going to have to gage the timing of the two lights, and work our way across the open area to a point beyond the reach of the lights. It was there we would find the road that led away from the city, and off to our projected rendezvous. The lights were being directed from guard towers, where the guards also had machine guns. The latter were used to discourage random hikes in the country, precisely such as the one that we were undertaking. They also served to make us doubly cautious in our movements.

When the two lights crossed in the centre of our field of view, we set off running at top speed over the field. As we saw the lights begin to swing back, we went to ground, and prayed more fervently than ever we had prayed before. The Gods were on our side that night as the lights never faltered in their traverse, but passed over us. On the first pass, we had made it to the centre of the field, and on our second run, it brought us just beyond the reach of the lights. A short distance on, we found the road, a dirt track leading away from the city. Setting a brisk pace, we began our trek into the unknown.

During the next seven or eight hours, we kept up a fairly good pace, although towards dawn, we found ourselves tiring, which forced

us to rest more often. Incidently, I learned that the family of my new guide had published a newspaper before the German occupation. His father had been taken by the Germans, and together with a sister and some friends, they had been putting out a flyer which contained information gleaned from clandestine radios. Some of the flyers had fallen into German hands, thus the necessity for his sudden decision to visit the partisans. As the day grew brighter, we sought out a wooded area, and feeling relatively safe, lay down and slept. It was late in the afternoon before we set out again. Our destination was the house of a forest ranger, who would take us into the forest to meet the Commandant of the Partisan group. Along about six o'clock we reached our primary destination, a group of houses stretching along a dirt road at the edge of the forest. The young Pole sought directions from the first house that we came to, and was advised that the person he sought lived in the last house along the road.

The man who greeted us was a rugged fellow of about forty years. He wore the complexion of the outdoorsman, tanned and weather-worn. There was a quiet confidence about him, undoubtedly a mark of his closeness with the elements. After a meal of breads, salami sausage, and mint tea, we set off with the forester for our rendez - vous with the Partisan leader. The forest was unlike any Canadian forest that I had been in. The trees had all been planted in rows, and were well cared for. Little or no undergrowth was evident to us as we travelled along the tree-shrouded trail. The forested area was vast. I was told that it stretched all across central Poland, virtually

to the border of Russia. The part that we found ourselves in was as dense as it was extensive. We travelled along the main road for nearly an hour, and then branched off on to a bisecting road. As we walked briskly along, there was an aura of separation, as though the only world left was that one in which we travelled under the arched boughs of the giant pine trees. Suddenly the challenge, "Who goes there ?" rang out in Polish, and the click of a rifle bolt being rammed into place reached us. Our identity was clarified by the forester, - we had arrived at the camp of the partisans. The sentry who had intercepted us gave a low, trilling sound with his mouth, and after a few minutes, several figures emerged from the darkness of the trees onto the road. I was introduced to the commandant Piotr, after whom the group was named. He was a regular army officer who had seen service against the Germans during the invasion. After the occupation, many of the regular army had taken to the forest and laid low for the first couple of years. This was necessary as the Germans were too powerful militarily for any serious opposition to assemble. As the Germans spread their resources thinner in the continuing occupation of more lands, regional opposition grew in countries like Czeckoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland.

The group that I was taken to was a part of the political party PZP, one of the pre - war parties that made up the government of Poland. As I understood things, all of the partisan groups had such an affiliation, and it had happened in the past that a band of partisans from one political persuasion would actually attack another

group. At any rate, as I was introduced to the handful of soldiers of the Piotr (pronounced peeoatra) group, I felt much like a pilgrim meeting the Army of the Crusaders setting out to do battle with the Saracens. The big difference here was that our army consisted of eight young fellows between fifteen and eighteen years of age, a couple of soldiers of the pre - war army, and the Commandant. Some carried the old long barrelled rifles of the first world war, others carried German Mausers. A couple of men had pistols stuck in their belts. This was the nucleus of a larger force that would eventually gather, and take up the sword against the German foe. As their anthem states, 'what has been taken by the sword, will be won back by the sword.' The presence of most of the young men there at that time had more to do with survival than training for the uprising. Many had escaped to the forest in order not to be taken for forced labour in Germany. When introductions had been completed, the word was given for each of us to separate and, with the commandant leading, we made our way deeper into the forest. After about a half an hour, we were challenged by a sentry, - we had reached the encampment. The camp was nothing more than a flat area on the bank of a small stream with a couple of tarpaulins spread out on the ground. A few army blankets were piled up on one end of the tarp, but that was it. No tents, no fire, no mattresses, and no kitchen. God's tent was our home, with the sky for a roof, the ground for a floor, and the tall pine trees our only shelter against the elements. Silently, I asked myself a belated question, " Why did I ever leave home ?" The day had been a long one

for myself and my friendly guide, and from what I observed, the men who had been waiting for us had also found the time long in passing. At any rate, each of us found a place on the tarp, pulled a blanket over for warmth, and settled in for the night. A second tarp was pulled over us to keep the dew away and soon the strangeness of the situation melted into sleep. Only the two men who stood watch were left awake to await the morning sun.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

XII

Ambush

With the arrival of morning there also came a new reality, - that life as a Partisan was not going to be easy. Firstly, the morning ablutions were at the side of the creek. A cold - water wash - up and shave, carrying a large metal pail of water back to the camp, where a small fire was lit to boil water for morning coffee, all of these things were basic indicators of how very different life had become. Besides new surroundings, there were different foods to get used to. That first morning for breakfast, the Commandant distributed large rounds of bread cut from the biggest loaf of rye bread that I had ever seen. Before cutting the slice from the loaf, he spread it with a creamy, white spread. The Poles called this, "swoinina," - rendered pork drippings, flavoured with onion. It was quite tasty. The coffee, though was still the coffee - ersatz, made from burnt wheat. What it lacked in flavour was compensated for by being hot and being there. My new colleagues were a diverse group of people. There was the Commandant Piotra and a girl named Fedorah. There was one aspect of life in the forest I should clarify. Without exception, everyone who joined the Partisans immediately became a declared enemy of the German State and was, in the event of capture by the Germans, automatically under a death sentence. Conscious of this, each person gave up his or her true identity and used a pseudonym. Also, no one kept

personal objects such as pictures or letters, lest they fall into enemy hands and be the cause of internment or death for their families. The Sergeant's name was Skatoosky, while his young brother was named Sokol. The boy who came to the forest with me was simply called Jerzy, while the one who was charged with showing me the basics of life in the forest was called Zambeek. Witolk and Yandrush were two more of the group, Witolk was a farm boy, while Yandrush had been in the Polish Army. Both were in their early twenties. Yandrush had escaped from a Russian camp close to Katyn, the site of the massacre of fifteen thousand Polish officers and NCO's by the Russians. Zbeek and Tadik were also members of the group, Zbeek having been a soldier with the Polish Army and Tadik was very young, fourteen or fifteen. His family were wiped out during the war, so the Commandant had taken him in. With the Commandant, we were eleven souls, otherwise known as Partisan group Piotra, with a total firepower of eight rifles, a couple of pistols, and a handful of ammunition; truly a force to be reckoned with. The group was constantly growing however. Each week the numbers increased by two or three as new members trickled in, some escaping German labour camps, others anxious to get on with the business of freeing their homeland. By mid August our numbers had grown to about thirty, and we had accumulated a team of horses, and a wagon. Also, we got a new recruit about the same time as the wagon appeared, in the form of a former army quartermaster. He was of medium height, about five feet eight inches, with a girth of

nearly five feet. To top it all off, he was one of those people who believed that every word they spoke carried the power of the Lord with it, so right off, he and I were at odds. I was never a big believer in Divine Rule. He was known as The Sergeant, although I distinctly recall other names being directed at him from time to time.

Up to this point, we had not had any direct contact with the Germans, although we had, on two separate occasions, received word from our network of informers spread through the country - side, that shipments of food were assembled and were ready for trans-shipment into Germany. On those occasions, we had gone to the assembly points during the night and made off with the foods. Some we kept for ourselves, but the most of it was distributed through-out the neighbouring villages. It was on one of those food assemblages that gave us our first fatality at the hands of the Germans. The priest from the village had came out to our forest location with the intelligence that the Germans had collected a large quantity of food and raw wool. This was all being held in a couple of barns in the village, and would be shipped out to Germany the following day. The Commandant and Skatoosky discussed the idea and as similar snatches had gone without a hitch, they agreed to go in. The patrol that was picked to accompany the Commandant and Skatoosky consisted of Zambeek and Jerzy, Yandrush and Sokol, Zbeek, and two newcomers, Ivan and Tomas. The quartermaster was to take the wagon part way, and there await word that all was well

before bringing it in for loading. As dusk approached, they set off with the good wishes of the rest of us going with them.

The camp was about five kilometres from the village. Around ten o'clock we heard gunfire from the direction of the village. The firing grew in intensity, accompanied by the explosion of grenades, so we knew then that something had gone wrong. There was nothing that we could do except scatter out from the camp in guard positions, in case we came under attack as well. After a half an hour there was silence, and then we began the long vigil of waiting for someone to return with word of what had happened. About one o'clock in the morning, we heard the muffled sound of the wagon approaching along the road. Seven of the patrol were walking along beside it, with Yandrush and the quartermaster on the wagon. Zambeek wasn't with them.

As the patrol had approached the outskirts of the village, Zambeek and Yandrush had gone ahead to recce the area. Zambeek reached the area where the two barns were, and was about to take up a position by a large tree when the Germans, in positions beside one of the barns, opened fire. Zambeek, who only carried a Luger automatic with him, grabbed a grenade from his belt. He stepped out to throw it and at that moment was hit. The grenade exploded in his hand, killing him instantly. Yandrush was wounded in the leg, but not too seriously as he was able to crawl out of range. He was then able to make his way back to the rest of the patrol. They had then hit for the forest where they set up a defensive position against

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possible pursuit.There was none. The Germans didn't often venture far from their safe havens at night. After midnight, it was considered safe enough to move, so they returned to camp. That was not the end of the night however. There was always the possibility that we had been "shopped," so that a further stay in our present position was decidedly too dangerous. All our accoutrements were piled onto the wagon and before an hour had passed, we were on the march to new quarters somewhere in the great forest.

Travel was swift and constant, with only a couple of short breaks. Finally, as dawn was creeping up on the horizon, we came to a cross-road deep in the forest. Here we made a halt. Lookouts were posted forward and also back in the direction from where we had come. The Commandant and two others disappeared into the forest, while the rest of us waited with the wagon. About an hour passed, when the Commandant returned with the Okay to move out. Our new campsite had been found and judged suitable. The new site was reached after a lengthy trek through the forest. It was a sizeable clearing on the edge of a fairly fast - flowing stream. As the wagon made its way along the trail into the site, men were assigned to follow behind with pine branches. Thus the wagon tracks were obliterated, leaving no obvious trace of our passage. Being a fairly remote position, we were destined to stay put for several days, - long enough for any hue and cry to settle.

It was at this site that we were joined by several new people, one of them being an English airman. The only name I ever remember

him revealing was a first name, Alfred. This proved to be impossible for the Poles to pronounce, so he abbreviated the name to Fred, and that became his pseudonym. The group also received four young people, - a girl and three young men. Two of the men were second Lieutenants from the pre- war military academy, and the girl was the sister of one of them. The third man who came to us at that time, became a close friend during the rest of my time in the forest. He was my age, and though he only spoke very little German, he was able to teach me enough Polish that we were able to communicate quite well. His pseudonym was Liss, and he had been though a pretty traumatic experience for his young years. It seems that the Germans had came to his village and rounded up all the young men, taking them into Germany as farm labourers. He had been placed on the farm of a particularly brutal fellow who used a whip on anyone who was the least bit slow carrying out his orders. Liss had put up with his brutality for a month or more, when he finally could take it no longer. The German had severely beaten one of Liss' fellow countrymen and he turned on Liss, who had said something to him.

According to Liss, as the German came at him, he sidestepped and grabbed the whip, twisting it from the farmers' grasp. He threw the whip away and picked up a heavy piece of timber, with which he creamed the German in the head, knocking him down. Liss said he clubbed the fellow to death, and then hit out to find his way back to Poland. That was why he was with the Partisans, and would be

with them until the war ended, or he was killed. As for the other three, the girl's name was Anna, her brother was Womian, and his friend's name was Yashek. These were all pseudonyms, and were the only names that people were known by. Anna too became a good friend, and the two of us often took rides over the adjacent fields on a couple of the horses that the group had acquired. Anna spoke very good German, as well as a little English, so we were able to converse at length on many topics. Her story, and that of her brother, has been troublesome to me over the years. I must admit that I still haven't fully resolved the implications of it. This will be dealt with at a later point in the narrative.

XIII

Some Highs, Some Lows

One bright morning while everyone in the camp seemed to be preoccupied with things of individual importance, Liss came to me and asked if I wanted to go for a walk with him. I quickly agreed and the two of us set off on a path that led along the creek, following the flow of the water. After about a half an hour of brisk walking, Liss stopped dead on the track and held a finger to his lips in the age - old sign of caution. As far as I was concerned, I heard nothing, but followed Liss' lead in treading as quietly as possible. Passing on further along the trail, we came to a slight clearing that led across a pasture-like field and down to the creek. We crossed the field, dropped down a slight embankment and found that the creek had narrowed considerably, showing a few large stones above the shallow, fast - flowing water. At this point we crossed to the far bank and entered the forest on that bank. From there we made our way cautiously back upstream. In a short while we heard voices. My friend Liss seemed to have a mischievous smirk on his face, which puzzled me somewhat. The forest closed back towards the stream, and as we came closer, we could see two men on the edge of the stream with some sort of a cooking apparatus. Liss called out something in Polish, and one of the men dove for a tree where a rifle had been leaning. Then his mate spoke sharply and they both came toward us in a friendly greeting. Liss

knew one of the men and also what they were doing, - making moonshine.

We spent a couple of hours with them, sampling the warm "Bimber" as their product was called. Towards noon we took a small bottle of the stuff and headed back towards the camp. Instead of retracing our steps, we headed off across country, a direction that Liss said would bring us back more swiftly. As we approached a hill, we heard the long, mournful sound of a train whistle, and could hear the laboured sound of a heavily loaded train in the distance. Breaking over the hill, our eyes were met by a cruel, chilling sight. A very long train was passing along the valley below us and through the slats of the cattle cars that made up the train one could see that their cargo was people. Liss told me that they were all Jews being taken to Auschwitz (Oswiecim south of Katowice) Concentration camp. I had heard of the camps, but the scene that I had just witnessed was horrifying. The magnitude of German brutality had again been opened to me, and I found it most difficult to deal with.

The train disappeared, and we continued on our way back to camp. A fury remained with me but there was absolutely nothing that we could do to alter that which was taking place. Our only course of action was to bear witness of the atrocity and look to the future for justice.

On returning to camp, Fred and I were called by the Commandant. He asked us if we would like to go to a wedding celebration with him. The fact that we knew neither the bride nor the groom

made no difference we were told. The day had already produced a potpourri of highs and lows; an invitation to a wedding then seemed quite in line. We washed up, shaved, and tried to look as dashing as possible under the circumstances, and off we went with the Commandant, Anna, her brother and his friend. The village was only a short distance from the camp, so we walked there, arriving just as dusk was settling. We were ushered into the house where a long table had been set up in the larger of the ground floor rooms. At every plate was a bottle of vodka, and the table literally groaned under its weight of food. Several different kinds of breads and cakes were laid out, as were cold meats of several kinds. Apparently most of the others had already partaken of food, and the table had been reset for us. We were joined by others of the wedding party however. While the Poles all seemed to know one another and talked freely back and forth, Fred and I busied ourselves with the spectacular bounty before us.

The celebration went on for hours, with a couple of fiddlers providing music for dancing. Fred and I hardly understood a word that was spoken all evening, although from time to time a Pole would playfully pat a shoulder, smile and say "Inglese," and move on. It was as though they got some kind of reassurance about the war, having a couple of Allies in their midst. At any rate, we truly felt the warmth of their friendship and enjoyed the brief respite from the ugliness of the situation that we had been thrust into. It was well after midnight that we said our thank yous and

our good-byes, and made our way back to the forest encampment. Whether it was the vodka that we had drunk, or the good food that we had eaten, or just the bonhomie of the company around us for that brief spell, but the groundsheet and blanket felt softer and warmer that night. Perhaps, too, the thought of the ordeal that awaited the people on the train, from earlier in the day, added to the appreciation of my own humble existance.

XIV

Halt! Who Went There?

end of August

During the two weeks that we spent at that camp, talks had been going on between our Commandant and the leaders of several other groups concerning amalgamation. Apparently, there was some flak coming from the government in exile, in England, over the number of groups operating independently throughout the country. In order to reduce the numbers, an agreement had been reached to unite the three main groups, each representing one of the pre-war political parties, i.e. socialists, liberals and conservatives. The three who were operating in our region were to unite under the leadership of our Commandant, who would then function in the leadership role in cooperation with the combined officer corps of the three groups. The meeting was set, the place where it was to take place was selected. The appointed time was to be on the weekend coming up, so we packed the wagon, gathered all our belongings together, and when Friday night arrived, we marched out.

For the most part, we kept to the forest tracks, but there was a fairly long period when we travelled through open country. The surprising thing about all of this was the singing. One would think that a group of Partisans would be a bit cautious and tend toward silence while travelling through occupied territory. Not the Poles. They took the attitude that it was their country and if they chose to march and sing, that was their privilege. So for a while, the

marching songs of the Polish Army rang out as a new Polish Army rose like the Phoenix from the ashes of defeat, in defiance of the German occupation.

We travelled all night, and as morning cracked through the night sky, we found ourselves moving through a heavily forested area. The wagon was leading the way with the quartermaster's bulk sleepily occupying the wagon-seat. The remainder of the troop had spread out on both sides of the track, and were following the wagon at a bit of a distance. Suddenly, someone shouted out the order to halt from the darkness ahead of the wagon. The quartermaster, who had been dozing, shouted out," Germans, Germans," as the halt order came out of the darkness. With that, he whipped the horses into a gallop, and went speeding off down the forest track. Whoever had challenged, opened fire on the disappearing wagon. With that, we all went to ground by the tree that happened to be nearest, and returned the fire. Within a matter of minutes we had a full scale war being waged, although I doubt if even one bullet found a human mark. Somebody shouted into the night, " Cease Fire, Cease Fire," in Polish. It then that doubt as to the quartermaster's 'enemy identification' began to enter our minds. Our Commandant called out for a recognition signal to be given by the warring opposites. It came back in Polish. We had arrived at our destination, and the groups that we were to meet, were there ahead of us. We had been challenged by one of their outposts, and our QM had reacted badly. Fortunately for all of us, there were no casualties,- only a few

scared deer and some bark knocked off of the trees. Of course, the QM had a lot of difficulty living down the time that he nearly got us all shot up.

It was at this site that we were joined by the one man who created more mischief for us than a regiment of Germans. His pseudonym was Kominchitz, and he had apparently been at Officer training school with Anna's brother and his friend Yaschek. Time and again he demonstrated a totally brutalized personality, so much so that many of us wondered if perhaps he was a plant, sent to us by the Gestapo. Apparently he had been studying medicine when the war broke out. Since then he had supposedly been with a Partisan group in the Carpathians, the mountain chain between Poland and Checkoslovakia. By joining our group, he brought us nothing but trouble. Our Commandant went so far as to name him second - in - command of the group, which enraged Womian and Yaschek, both of whom were officers of the same rank as Kominchitz.

The following week after we had joined with the other groups, Skatooski and his brother left to make a visit to their parents. Skatooski's wife and baby were also living with his parents in a farm - house on the edge of the forest. On the second day after they left, they returned to camp, both in a terrible state. It seems that they had no sooner arrived at the farmhouse, when they spotted German soldiers making for the forest area behind the house. They both ran from the house as quickly as possible, and made for the woods. The Germans opened fire on them, and Sokol was

wounded in the shoulder but they both managed to get away. At some point they had received help from a friend, but there was a cruel sequel to the whole episode. When the Germans had failed to apprehend the two Partisans, they had blocked everybody in the house and burned it to the ground. The entire family perished. It was a most bitter pill for them to swallow, but the big unanswered question remained, - who had tipped off the Germans that they were going to be home, and how.

A few days after the attack on Skatooski's family, a Polish man was brought into the camp. A kangaroo court was set up to hear the charges against the man. It was made up of a couple of the new officers from our recently acquired allies, Kominski and a couple of fellows who had recently attached themselves to Kominski. He was accused of having dealt with the Germans, and also of having given them information against his countrymen. They found him guilty, and sentenced him to death. Within the hour of having found the man guilty, he was blindfolded, had his hands and feet bound, stood up against a tree, and executed by Kominski. With one shot from his pistol, Kominski shot the man in the head. After, he showed no more emotion than he would have if he had crushed a mosquito. It was at that point that the Englishman, Alfred, (called Fred) came to me, suggesting that we leave the group. There was another group operating about five miles away, whose commandant had been over to our camp to visit. Alfred figured that there was a better life to be had with him, and he wasn't happy about the events that had been

happening within our group. As our position would be equally precarious at the other group, coupled with the fact that I had been instructed to go with the Piotra group by the British representative, I managed to persuade Alfred to postpone any changes for the time being. We did agree, however, to keep a sharp eye on the situation with Kominski. We also agreed that he was one man who was not to be trusted.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

XV

Dr. Franks

The Partisan group relied on the general public for a great deal of support and intelligence about the Germans and their dealings with the people. At the time of my participation in the group, there was a German who had been appointed to head the so - called "General Government Of Poland." It was he who was the architect of such programs as the movement to transfer all of the Jews of Poland to centration camps, the philosophy of collective responsibility, and enforcement of the laws on sending forced labour into Germany. He was a brutal individual, and all Poles longed for the day when word of his obituary would be announced.

Word came to us that Dr. Franks (Hans Frank) would be returning to Warsaw from Cracow along a certain route, which happened to be right through our area. A plan was hatched whereby we would deploy a force to a position along the route with the purpose of once and for all ridding Poland of the presence of the infamous Doctor. We received the exact time regarding his departure from Cracow, as well as information concerning his body guard. All facets of the plan were weighed and it was considered workable by our officers. A force of twenty, that included Anna, was picked. Kominchitz was

appointed to lead the attack, with Skatooski, Womian and Yaschek all in charge of selective units. My role was just as another soldier on the mission. On the appointed day, we set out at daybreak in order that we be in position by noon, the estimated time of arrival of the German convoy at the site chosen for the ambush. According to our intelligence, the governor would be travelling with a motorcycle escort of six advance riders, followed by a canvas - covered troop carrying truck. Dr. Franks would be riding in an open touring car.There would be a driver and an aide in the front seat, with Dr. Franks and an assistant in the back.

The site chosen was quite impressive. There was a large wooded area on the East side of the road that stretched away to the eastward for miles. On the west side, there was a clearing along the road, with the forest set back about two hundred feet. There was a section of the road that passed through a slight embankment on the west side. This was chosen as the spot for two men with grenades to occupy. The drill was to allow the advance guard of motorcycles and the truck to pass the embankment. At the edge of the forest on the west side of the road, we had stationed two heavy machine guns whose job was to cut down the motorcyclists, and spray the truck. The rest of us, who were armed with rifles, were to pour enfilade fire into the truck, thus preventing the soldiers inside from playing any meaningful role in protecting their charge.

The sound of an approaching motorcade was distinctly heard. Everyone was in position, and a hot September sun beat down on the

hidden assassins. The motorcade seemed to be travelling at about forty miles per hour when they came through the embankment. On plan, the machine gunners opened up on the leading units, with the rifle fire taking on the truck. As the touring car came through the embankment, the grenades were tossed at the car. One of them landed in the front seat, wounding the driver, and possibly killing the passenger. The second grenade missed the car altogether. The big surprise though was that there were two touring cars, with Dr. Franks riding in the second one. As the attack became apparent, his driver tramped on the gas and sped out of the area at high speed, taking Dr. Franks to freedom. On the plus side, our efforts bagged a few German soldiers and a couple of Frank's aides. Offsetting that was the reality that we had set ourselves up for a whole lot of special attention from the occupation forces.

After the battle, we assumed that the motorcade would have radioed to someone that they were under attack. With that thought uppermost in our minds, we force - marched our way out of the area. There was no let up until we had put at least an hour between us and the scene of the attack, at which point it was deemed safe enough for us to rest a bit. It was during the rest period that carping began about the failure of the mission, with some finger - pointing by Kominchitz at Womian and Yaschek. He rationalized that they should have directed fire on the second car as soon as it was realized that we had been given wrong information. To me, this sounded like someone trying to pass the buck for a faux pas that

was beyond our responsibility. Who could have foreseen that a second car would be brought into the equation, when only one was supposed to have been there. The grumbling went on for the remainder of our trip back to camp. A charge of incompetence was levelled at the two junior officers by Kominchitz at a debriefing held by the Commandant to assess the merits and demerits of the attack. He was inclined to believe everything Kominchitz said, which left the other two officers in a very awkward position. After much discussion between the two friends and Anna, Womian and Yaschek decided that they would leave the group and return to Chenstochowa, where they would work with the Underground.

Subsequently, a couple of days passed while the two men finalized their plans to leave. As darkness fell they were on their way. They had been gone for a couple of hours, when Skatooski and Kominchitz were seen riding out of camp. It seemed unusual at the time, but as favourites of the Commandant, one never questioned their movements. The next morning, a Polish farmer came into the camp and told us that he had found two young men who had been killed, execution style, with a bullet to the back of the head. Some men were despatched with him to bury the remains. When they returned, it was confirmed that the two unfortunate souls were Womian and Yaschek. A conspiracy of silence fell over the group, particularly when either of the two names was mentioned, but no one would come right out and accuse Kominchitz of the deed. Curiously, Yasheck's sister Anna and Kominchitz seemed to grow closer

together. A few more days went by and there was another death in the group. Skatooski had gone out at night to see some friends with whom he had previously visited, and never returned. His young brother went searching for him as daylight came, and found him at the side of the road, dead. He had been killed with a bullet to the back of the head, as had the other two.

No explanation was ever proffered by the commandant about the three deaths, although the topic was discussed generally by everyone. The one possible cause for the deaths was the security of the group, although we were hard pressed to believe that any of the three men could have been a threat. The more likely scenario was that each of the three men posed a threat to the credibility of Kominchitz, and for that they were eliminated. What continued to puzzle everyone was the silence of the Commandant about the whole affair, especially as he must surely have heard the rumblings within the group. Life went on, amid all the treachery and violence. Poland at that time was a violent country, and no one was ever more than the wink of an eye or the turn of a head away from death or betrayal. Survival was the name of the game. How was rarely an issue.

XVI

PARA-DROP

Weapons, or the lack thereof, were ever a problem. Many of the weapons available to the partisans had been secreted away at the time of the capitulation in 1939. Many weapons had been carefully covered in grease, stashed in boxes and then buried at sites all over the country. The problem was that many of the people who had buried them were themselves in prison, forced labour in Germany, or had fled the country. Thus a lot of weapons lay buried that would never surface. We managed to pick up a few such weapons through intelligence sources, but not enough to arm all of the people who wanted to take part in the partisan movement.

Some weapons came into the group through action against the Germans, and some also found their way into the partisans by direct purchase from the Germans. Like all military forces, the Germans were made up of a mixture of types. Among them existed the type that would sell his grandmother for booze or gambling money. It was this type that some of the partisans had surreptitiously contacted, and bought stolen weapons from.

The Allies had a program where they dropped weapons and ammunition into groups such as ours, and our turn for such a drop came about mid September, 1943. Information about the drop was relayed to the partisans through the BBC nine p.m. news broadcast from London. A pre-arranged code had been developed between the

Government - in- exile in London and the people in the field regarding all things military, and para - drops fell into that category. There were special units that dealt with such things, and after deciphering the coded messages, relayed the information by courier to the field units. We received our instructions as to time and place about mid September, the place being several miles away from our current location which sent us once more on the march. It took us a couple of nights travelling, but we did it without incident. My recollection is that we were somewhere north - east of Cracow, in a relatively open section of the country, with very few villages around. Somehow the Commandant had procured a couple of small barrels of pitch. Rags had been soaked with the pitch, and distributed to members of the group, who lined a long, open field. At an appointed time of the night, a plane would arrive, and would pass over the lighted field, dropping its load of weapons between the rows of lights that marked the extremities of the field.

From a position at the top end of the field where Alfred and I, along with some of the officers waited, we heard the plane coming in and watched as it seemed to drop lower in the sky, but we never actually saw the drop. It did happen though, as two containers were recovered by the crew who were manning the torches. Some of the stuff that was dropped was meant for a neighbouring group, but our gang got most of it. We received two Bren guns along with two thousand rounds of ammunition for them. This proved to be a gross error on somebody's part. Due to the rapid rate of fire of

the Bren gun, the two thousand rounds were fired off at the first encounter we had with the Germans. It being rimmed cartridges, the German ammo wouldn't extract so could not be used as a substitute, rendering the two guns useless. The Sten guns sent in to us were a big success, though. Along with the guns, we received some plastic explosives and detonators and detonating cord. This we also put to good use within the month.

There was some concern that the Germans might have picked up on the plane's presence and that patrols might be sent out to comb the area in hopes of scaring up something. In view of this concern, it was decided to change locations. The nights were getting pretty chilly for sleeping in a tent, or on the ground. So, with that move, we took over a small village of a half dozen houses or so, along with some outbuildings. Our food supplies were getting low, and the village also had barely sufficient rations for its own people. As the food collection party was preparing to leave, word came from our network that there were five British seamen in the underground protection system, and that they were going to be joining our group. Therefore, besides the collection of food, the ration party was given the added responsibility of bringing the British sailors back to our camp.

They left at dusk. The rest of us went about our individual interests, some cleaning and oiling weapons, others just sitting around talking. Sentries were posted as usual, and those of us not having duty turned in. About midnight I was wakened by Liss who had

been too restless to sleep and had stayed up talking with some of the boys who had guard duty. There had been the sound of gunfire in the distance. From the extent of the firing, there must have been quite a battle as it seemed to go on for some time before it tailed off. By the time that I was awakened quiet reigned once more. Nonetheless, great concern was abroad for the safety of our patrol.

At about 4 o'clock the patrol limped into the village. They had run into a German patrol and a fire-fight had ensued. One of the patrol had been killed, one had a minor wound in the arm, and one man, the former Warsaw newspaperman, had been severely wounded in the chest. He had been brought back in the wagon and was quickly taken into care by the village women. He never recovered consciousness but died later that day. As for the British seamen, they were never picked up.

In view of the severity of the encounter with the Germans, the commandant took extraordinary measures of security. He placed the two heavy machine guns that we had in positions guarding the two entrances to the village. He also doubled the guard at all of the outposts. As dawn began to show on the horizon, those of us not on duty returned to our billets to once again try to get some sleep.

At day - break all hell broke loose. The house in which I was billeted stood at the juncture of the road that turned into the forest, and a village road. All of us in the house were jolted awake by bullets thudding into the wooden side of the house. We literally dove out the window opposite the source of gunfire,

grabbing our weapons as we went, and without a second thought, ran to the support of the outpost stationed on the road that led into the village through the forest. We cut into the area on an angle to the firing, positioning ourselves at intervals across the area in a line with the sentry position. The Germans also had taken positions behind trees and were delivering a blistering enfilade against the sentries. With our firepower added to the sentries, the tide turned, and the Germans started to pull back. Our second heavy machine-gun came into action, and this was too much for the Germans. They beat a hasty retreat out of there, with a couple of them holding a rearguard long enough for the rest to get out, at which point the rearguard high-tailed it too. We kept up an advance into the forest until we were sure that the route was complete, then we returned to the village, where the officers were getting ready for our exit to quieter quarters. The action with the Germans was to set the stage for several such skirmishes in the next few months as they gradually increased the pressure on the partisans, on all fronts.

XVII

THE OTHER BANDITS

The Germans had become desperate to put a stop to Partisan activity, and to that end had recruited several thousand Ukrainian volunteers into their occupation force to assist in rounding up what had become a troublesome element. Immediately after our latest skirmish, we had force - marched our group for two days, arriving at what we thought was a safe village. On the first night there our outposts challenged a German patrol, shots were exchanged, and once more we had to evacuate the area quickly. Finally, after about three attempts to find a place that was relatively safe, we located a village situated on a creek, with forest on three sides. There we laid low for a couple of weeks, nursing our wounded back to health, and recuperating from the exhausting marches we had been forced to endure.

There was a constant requirement to provide enough food for the group. To meet that need, we often waited for word of a German assembly of food that was about to be transported back to Germany. Those assemblies tended not to be too well guarded, so were easy prey for a lightly armed patrol. Although we had been caught once before in an ambush, our intelligence as to the status of enemy strength around the food depots was fairly reliable. Thus it was that after a week of rest, a patrol was sent out to collect the food assembled at a point about ten kilometres from our village.

With the patrol was Anna and five of the men. They took one wagon drawn by a team of horses. They had been gone several hours when we heard the sound of gun - fire in the distance. It came from the general direction of the assembly point, so we feared that our patrol may have walked into another ambush. A couple of men on horseback were sent to investigate. Nothing more was heard until about dawn, when the horse patrol returned, with Anna riding double on one of the horses.

The patrol had indeed been ambushed, but not by the Germans. They had been ambushed after they had picked up the food consignment and started back to camp. Apparently, a group of about thirty bandits challenged them on the road, ordering them to turn over the wagon and contents to them. Our patrol refused, and shots were fired, at which point Anna received a flesh wound in the arm. When she got hit, the rest of the patrol sensed that they couldn't put off a force as big as the one that confronted them, so they gave them the wagon. The robbers took off with their loot, leaving our people to trudge along as best they could. That was the state that the horse patrol found them in. They had picked up Anna, and left the others to come along at their own pace. They arrived an hour or so after the patrol, tired, sore and really mad that some unmitigated thieves would dare to steal their stolen goods. There was just no honour among thieves anymore.

When the whole story was pieced together, it was concluded that we had been robbed by a group of independents operating a

partisan band under the communist banner. They were made up of a few escaped Russian soldiers, some Polish communists, and some Poles who just didn't trust any of the old - line parties. Their reason for existing was purely survival, not to engage the Germans or liberate the country. They took what they wanted, when they wanted it, and from whoever had possession, with force when needed. They were bandits, pure and simple. The Commandant decided to go after the renegades, but first he had to find out where they were holed up. A patrol was sent out to canvas the local population to determine whether there was intelligence on the whereabouts of the bandit group. They were gone for the better part of the day, returning in early evening. Our quarry were holed up in a small village about twelve miles from where we were camped. The decision was taken to send out an armed patrol at daybreak to instruct the recalcitrant group in the proper code of the forest.

There were about forty of us, myself and Alfred the Englishman included, in the patrol. We took one of the sulky - mounted machine guns with us to supplement our regular weapons of rifles and machine guns, setting off at a fast pace at first light. It was shortly after mid-day when we came onto the village. We put some men between the houses and the forest, to force the bandits to cross open land in order to escape. The officer in charge of our force called for them to surrender and received a hail of rifle fire for his trouble. The firing came from the farthest house and a barn. There were only four houses, each with one larger barn,

some with smaller sheds adjacent. The bandit force seemed to be all gathered in those two buildings. We returned their fire, concentrating the machine gun on the barn. As intended, when they broke from the cover of the buildings, they spread out and ran across the open field, to try and get to cover in another treed area on the far side of the field. We had stationed a dozen or so men in the trees on that side of the field as well, so we were actually driving them into another ambush there. As they crossed the open field, it would have been like shooting lame ducks, which neither Alfred nor myself could bring ourselves to do. There were about seventy-five men in the group, all fleeing for their lives before us. They were all caught up by the same enemy that we were pledged to fight, which made the scenario facing us that much more incongruous. There was absolutely no attempt by our leaders to contact their officers to try for a mutually acceptable understanding; there had been a call for surrender, and then the war was on.

In their flight across the field, there were about thirty of them killed. When they reached the forest edge and met our force, seven of them surrendered, and the rest made a dash for the safety of the trees. At that point, another six were killed and the rest made good their escape. Of the twenty - five or so who got away, a goodly number of them had to have been wounded. The dead were all left where they had fallen, and the captured men all marched ahead of us to a village a few kilometres back along the way that

we had travelled earlier in the day. The officers and NCO's held a conference, in which neither Alfred nor myself took part. When it was over, they announced that it had been decided to hang all of the prisoners. In short order, the prisoners were taken into the woods one at a time and mounted onto a horse. They had their hands and feet tied. A length of rope was slung over a tree limb, tied around their neck, and the horse led out from under the condemned man. This was repeated until all seven of the prisoners swung silently from the trees. Never before or since have I been so completely surrounded by brutality. While many individual acts had been perpetrated during the few months of my stay with the partisans, I never expected such a massive display of inhumanity. On reflection, though, the whole country was subjected to the brutality of the Germans. Death was never far away, wherever one was in Poland in those days.

We stayed that night in the village, bedding down in the straw in the barns. Due to all of the gun - fire that had taken place during the day, guards were posted at all of the entrances to the area. I had been given a two hour stint, from ten to midnight. The post that I was assigned was at the junction of two forest roads, behind the sector where the seven dead men swung from the trees. I relieved my colleague and settled down to what I thought would be a quiet couple of hours. It was a clear October night, with just a touch of chill in the air. The forest seemed to have gone to sleep, with only the occasional rustle of leaves where a bird might have

stirred on his perch, or a slight breeze twittered a leaf. A fairly peaceful night after the terrors of the day.

My watch was half over and everything was going along smoothly. Suddenly someone, or something crashed through the underbrush ahead of me. I called out, in Polish," Halt. Who goes there ?" Dead silence fell over the area. I peered intently into the night, but saw nothing. Then the noise began again, moving back in the opposite direction from where it had came from before. Again I called out my demand for recognition, and again there was silence. Then, I saw in the light from the moon, the reflection of two large eyes and I fired my rifle, two quick shots at the object. All hell seemed to break loose, as whatever, or whoever it was tried to crash away through the under brush. Meanwhile, the gunfire brought the whole group charging out to help me do battle with the demons of the night. A short distance away they found a small deer, in his last throes of life. The thought crossed my mind, had they kept any of that rope? Would I join that assembly for having disrupted the sleep of the entire group?

No, that was not to be my fate, but neither was I to get any sleep that night. With my outburst coming on top of all the other fighting of the day, it was deemed too dangerous for us to bide there any longer. We very quickly assembled and marched out. At dawn we reached the encampment of the group, where I took a lot of hazing for my actions. Some of it was even good - natured.

XVIII

HOPES DASHED

During the remaining days of October our activities were minimal. There were some feeble attempts at military training, but neither the equipment nor the circumstances were equal to the task. We required firing ranges and surplus ammunition in order to bring the accuracy of shooting into acceptable standards. Our soldier complement was made up of farm boys with little or no education, and city boys with little or no imagination as to what a soldier was all about. In the entire group of approximately two hundred men, we had about twenty officers and NCO's who had seen active military service, and about six or eight officer cadets from the pre - war universities in Poland. The best that could be hoped for was that when an order was given, that it was sufficiently explicit as to leave no doubt about the manner of its execution. Up to the month of October 1943 it seemed to be working although as the conversations grew more and more bellicose about a general uprising, the lack of training, scarcity of supplies and poor discipline gave me cause to doubt that an uprising could ever be possible. Still, if that hope didn't exist, how would any of the people of the forest survive?

Towards the end of the month, the entire group moved to a location near Cracow. The Englishman Alfred and myself, together with some of the most senior officers, made up a party of fifteen

in all who were invited to a large chateau on the outskirts of the city. To this day I have no idea who owned the place, but they had an elegant banquet laid out in the main dining room. With the food, each place - setting had its own bottle of vodka. Such a sight had long slipped from my memory, totally unexpected in war - torn Poland.

Both Alfred and I hoped that our presence at such an august affair might have something to do with our being sent back to England. When we had been assigned to the Partisan group, we both were told that we would be returned to England at the first possible opportunity. As it turned out, we were regarded as tokens of broader allied support for the cause of Polish liberation. As such, our presence in Poland was more desirable to those around us that night than any thoughts of repatriation. In fact, the rest of our table companions that night were the leaders of the other major Partisan bands from the region. The gathering was really a strategy session, to which we had been invited more as exhibits A and B rather than anything else. As we returned to camp after the gathering, both of us were toying with thoughts of moving on, trying to get back to Blighty on our own. On the second night at that camp, the whole group was called on to support a very important mission. Alfred and I found ourselves lining a makeshift airfield with torches in our hands as a small plane flew in, picked up three people and flew out again, virtually non - stop. We soothed our disappointment with the thought that they were probably

more important to the war effort than either Alfred or myself.

Shortly after the Cracow affair, the Commandant received word that a shipment of pure, grain - alcohol was to be sent to Germany for the production of medicines. It was coming out of a distillery in our area, and would consist of six five hundred litre drums. Each drum would be carried on a horse - drawn wagon, with an armed escort riding with the driver on each wagon, and an escorting guard of six armed soldiers. Our intelligence sources also included date of shipment and estimated time of departure, as well as the route of travel. A decision was taken to apprehend the shipment. A recce party was sent out to check out the route so that a suitable site could be selected for the attack.

There were about thirty of us in the attack group. Another fifteen or twenty men were dispatched to a holding area. When the shipment would be finally 'liberated,'it would be taken to the holding area where some of our support people would work with our patrol to hide the goods until a way was found to safely dispose of it for a profit. On the given day, we set out at dawn, to be in position at ten when the convoy was scheduled to pass the selected ambush site. The chosen site was in a lightly forested area where the road passed through a slight defile. The plan was to hit the accompanying guards all at once, as soon as the entire six wagons had entered the defile. That way, there would be no chance for the drivers to turn out and escape. Surrender would be their only option.

Everything went according to plan. As soon as we opened fire, the drivers jumped from their wagons and took refuge among the trees. The Germans riding shot - gun were too exposed to put up any resistance, and the few who accompanied the wagons on foot were too surprised to offer any kind of resistance, It was all over in a few minutes. One German was dead and there were two seriously wounded. We had three prisoners not wounded. The remainder had high -tailed it for less dangerous parts, leaving their buddies to fend for themselves. All weapons were taken from the prisoners as well as their boots. The badly wounded were bandaged with what little we had with us, and then all prisoners were set free to find their way home as best they could. There were no provisions among the partisans for prisoners, the only other option would have been to shoot them all, something no one wanted to do.

In the melee, one of the tanks had been punctured by bullets. The liquid was gushing out onto the ground from the series of little fountains. A few of the men had brought water bottles with them, which they quickly filled with alky before leaving. The area had to be cleared quickly, as reprisal could come at any time, even from the air. One of the puzzling aspects of life with the partisans was that in all the time that I had been with them, we had never been subjected to aerial search or attack. It seemed as though the Germans were reluctant to assign air surveillance away from the more traditional battle sectors, which was really okay by us. It was still something that we had to be constantly aware of

though. The possibility existed that we had been detected at the village from which the raid on the alcohol shipment had been launched. In that event, the Commandant had ordered a move to a more distant village and while our patrol had been carrying out our assignment, those left behind had packed up and moved to the new location. It was to the new encampment that we returned, a much longer march than that of the morning. While on the march, I noticed several of my colleagues taking a drink from their water bottles, of which I had none. Unnoticed by me, they were rinsing their mouth with the liquid and spitting it out. I asked for a drink from one of the men, and he handed me his water bottle. I immediately took a long pull on the bottle and swallowed what I had taken. My breath left me and I felt as though I would die there on that spot. Fortunately my stomach was wiser than my head and it rejected what I had given it, violently. Thus I learned that pure grain alcohol was never meant for drinking, a lesson that I can still vividly recall having been taught.

The alcohol was all given in control of the Underground Network. They oversaw the burying of it, in which state it stayed until the hue and cry over its hijacking faded. At that time it was dug up and converted to Vodka, a good part of which was sold to German troops on the black market. The money gleaned from the sale was used to buy ammunition and even some rifles from German quartermaster stores.

Alfred and I were getting more disenchanted with our role in

the group, Alfred a bit more than I. When the group held a conference at our encampment of all the Commandants and other senior officers, Alfred made contact with a leader of one of the neighbouring bands, a fellow code - named Zbeek. His group operated to the north of us and were quite a bit smaller. He and Alfred seemed to hit it off, so he agreed to the change. When Alfred left us, I never saw him again. Word did reach us later that he had been wounded in a fire - fight with the Germans, with a later word coming in that he had died from his wounds. Still. at the end of the war, a British airman answering to Alfred's description, was best man at a wedding in Chenstochowa of one of the men from my Regiment. On that matter the truth will probably never be known. The decision was a difficult one for me, but I decided to stay where I was for a while longer.

XIX

THE RAILROAD CAPER

Mid November brought us more direct confrontation with the Germans. Perhaps the conference at the chateau in Cracow had set the stage, but throughout the entire country the partisan groups seemed to be concentrating their attention on rail - shipping passing through Poland bound for the Eastern front. For a couple of weeks we had been hearing of this or that group hitting the rail lines. Thus, when the Commandant informed us that we were going after a shipment of heavy guns and trucks bound for the Russian front, we were not too surprised.

In the placing of the explosives, I had a slight role to play. During our training in England, we had been introduced to plastic explosives and how they could be used to cut steel rail tracks. As no one else had used this explosive, it fell to me to show the NCO in charge how to place it, and also how to rig the detonator. They were using wires and an exploder, rather than instant fuse. The place of attack was isolated, with the track emerging from several miles of travel through thick forest. We chose to hit it at the point of emergence, with the forest cover dropping back to approximately fifty meters from the track on one side and perhaps a hundred meters on the other. The explosives team were in a small defile ahead and to the right of the track, with about fifty feet of wire connecting to the Exploder. The headlamp

of the train was visible for quite a way down the track, so as it came into view the tension mounted. It was travelling quite fast, and as it emerged from the forest, the NCO pushed the plunger. The Demon's of war were with us, - the charges blew. There was a high squeal of locked wheels on steel as the Engineer tried to stop, but there was no room, the engine, coal car, and forward car all veered to the right, coming to a halt off the track. We took cover among the trees, as quickly as we could, rejoining the rest of our force. Besides the engine, there were six cars, - three carrying heavy field guns,two loaded with trucks. There was a closed boxcar that housed the guard relief for the sentries who rode on each of the flat-cars. A sentry post stood in an elevated position at the head of each of the flat cars, and there was an armed sentry on duty in each one as we derailed the train. There must have been about ten guards altogether with the train, five on duty and five resting. My recollection now is that all the sentries who manned the boxes were killed, while those in the box-car all surrendered. Their weapons were taken, and they were freed, to find their way as best they could. None of the Polish train crew were injured.

The gun - barrels were all blown apart with explosives, while the vehicles had the wires ripped out and then set on fire. We beat a fast retreat from the area, taking only the weapons from the sentries, and some medical supplies that were found in the guard's car. By this act, we achieved two things. We had assisted the Russians, and we had also brought the full wrath of the Germans

down on us. The hunt for our scalps was on. It would have no end until we were dead or disbanded. The latter was not far off.

During the remainder of November we managed to keep one step ahead of the Germans. Towards the end of the month, we went on a trek that lasted for three days straight, ending up in the far eastern section of Poland near a place called Alexandrov. In a village there we were able to remain for at least ten days, getting our equipment in order, and resting up with no sign of German pursuit. We returned to a village that was one days journey from Chenstochova, situated on the edge of the forest. There were about six houses and a few barns in which we distributed ourselves, We posted sentries at strategic positions, posts that were manned around the clock. It was approaching mid December, and the temperature hovered around twenty to thirty degrees below zero at night, rising to between ten and fifteen below during the day. There was an abundance of snow on the ground, which made our movement difficult. Winter tracks were easy to follow.

Around about the end of October, a Jewish doctor and his wife had joined our group. Perhaps 'joined 'is not the correct word here as they actually were brought forcibly to the group. The word was that they had escaped from one of the trains carrying Jews to Auschwitz, and sought refuge with a Polish farm family. The family took them in, but feared for their own life should the fact become known to the Germans. They contacted our network, who in turn passed the knowledge on to our Commandant. They were a couple in

their mid thirties. The wife was a beautiful girl, which was not to her advantage in the Partisans. The idea of bringing them to the forest was so that the doctor could look after our men, particularly in case of wounds. With the wife, that was another story. It wasn't long before she would be escorted to the officers quarters during the evening, only returning either very late at night, or at dawn. When it first happened, the husband took issue with the officer that came for her, only to be beaten severely with a riding whip. It was useless for him to complain, and impossible for the wife to refuse. As far as the rest of us were concerned, we were powerless to alter any decisions made by the officers. The group had already lost three very good men, killed for disagreeing with an officer.

Perhaps there were greater powers concerned with our Destiny. One morning at around five o'clock, we were awakened by the sound of gun - fire. It was very close. Everyone grabbed their weapons, shoes and coats and ran for the outdoors. Once outside, we learned that we were under attack by the Germans, who had been momentarily halted by fierce fire from our sentries. Wagons were quickly loaded with whatever supplies that lay at hand and everyone made it into the forest. We travelled into the forest for about an hour, when we came to a large clearing. Here we stopped and the officers held a meeting. From the clearing, we could see the Germans sending up flares to identify their flanks, as they moved in a line forward through the forest. Their progress was quite slow as the snow was

fairly deep.

A courier was mounted on one of the fastest horses, and dispatched, with a message, to another group that was located a few miles to the rear of where we were being attacked. We retreated to another clearing still deeper into the forest, where we took up defensive positions and waited. The day passed ever so slowly, and when midday came, it seemed as though we had been a lifetime in that clearing. The Germans had continued to search in their extended line, firing their flares at intervals to keep the flanks in line, so that we couldn't double back and pass through them. Not long after noon - day, we heard the sound of heavy trucks. They seemed to stop for a while, and then they faded in the distance. We then noticed that the search line had become narrower, that there seemed to be less men on the line. Still, we stayed put in our positions, waiting. Shortly after four in the afternoon, it began to get darker and again we heard the sound of trucks. The Germans abandoned the attack, and left the area. We manned our positions for another hour after the flares ceased, to reassure ourselves that the attackers had indeed left. Then we got under way, leaving the area as quickly as our resources would allow.

We travelled until about eight that night, finally stopping in a village about five miles to the rear of the one from which we had been routed out of. At that point, we got the news of what had happened. Apparently, our courier had got through to the other group and informed them that we were under attack. The headquarters

of the German force that attacked us was only a few kilometres from where that group were located. Judging the situation rightly, that only a skeleton force would be left to protect their HQ while the main force of Germans and Ukrainians went after us, they mounted a dozen men on horseback, equipped with machine guns, and rode into the Headquarters and shot it up. They did quite a job, enough for Headquarters to radio for help from the main body. That split the German forces, as they withdrew men to go after the mounted attackers. In so doing, they shortened their search line, saving our hides in the process.

The day had been a long and stressful one, but there was still a chore to be taken care of. Two of our men were unaccounted for, and it was thought that they had been taken by the Germans. In that case, they would have been summarily executed. To determine their fate, six of us were chosen to ride back to the village. The snow damped the sound of the horses hooves, and we made good time on the deserted forest roads. Approaching the village, we stopped, while one of the officers went on ahead to talk to the villagers. On his return, we found out that the two men had been brought into the woods across from the village. All the villagers were assembled and made to watch as the two men were stripped to their bare hide, forced to kneel, and then shot through the forehead. Their bodies were left lying in the snow. The village people were afraid to go near to bury them lest they too become victims.

We went on to the spot where they lay. We had brought shovels

with us, but the ground was frozen too hard to dig a proper grave. A shallow depression was cut out of the snow for each of them, and with a quiet prayer we laid their bodies in, covering them over with snow. It was only a token burial, and the villagers would have to see to a proper one once the ground was workable, but it was the best we could do for our dead colleagues. The ride back to our encampment was a quiet one, each man with his own deep thoughts. But for the warning earlier in the day from the two who now lay locked in their eternal sleep, we too might be lying, naked and dead, where they lay. The respect for life was at a low ebb in the Poland of 1943. The people were locked in a desperate struggle for survival. Anything, or anyone posing a real or suspected threat to that survival was regarded as an enemy, and suffered the consequences.

XX

FAREWELL TO THE FOREST

On the morning after our brush with the Germans, the Commandant informed me that as of that day, our group was disbanded for the remainder of the winter. When spring came, and people could once again live in the outdoors, then they would gather in the forest to continue the fight. In the meantime he wanted me to go with a group of five others who were returning to Chenstochowa that night. That day was a Friday, and on Saturday all the farmers took their market goods into the city. Thus it would be quite a simple task for us to slip into the city with one of the farmers. It was to a village on the outskirts that we would be going, and two of us could go into the city as farm helpers when the farmer went to market. The others could use the wagon that we would be taking, to themselves pose as farmers going to market.

The day was spent in saying good - bye to the men with whom I had shared so much during those past six months. It was doubtful that any of us would ever meet again, a reality that certainly carried many regrets on my part for I had established a few real friendships in the group. There was a finality to the partings like none I have experienced since, as one dared not exchange addresses, nor could any true names be exchanged. There was always a fear that capture by the enemy would lead to betrayal, whereas if no true names were known, betrayal then was not possible. So we made our

farewells, with all wishes for health and survival. As soon as darkness fell, the five of us climbed onto the wagon, the team was nudged into a trot, and we headed back to Chenstochowa. A new phase was beginning in my life. It seemed that Destiny was playing out the game of 'MY Life' and I no longer controlled the play. My vow for change might be coming too late to make a difference, a fact that I would have to wait a little longer to ascertain the truth of.

We arrived at our destination about five in the morning. The farmer had not yet risen, but he came to the door and let us in. The young fellow who was to go with me into the city had came from a farm but was going to spend the winter in the city with relatives. There he could be anonymous, whereas on a farm everyone had known of his partisan life, and any one of them might have reason to tell the Germans. One just did not take chances. The farmer loaded his wagon with potatoes, turnips and a cage with a couple of chickens. The two of us climbed on the seat beside the farmer, pulling heavy robe around our legs and feet. It looked like, and probably was, a horse blanket that had known better days, but it served a purpose then. By seven o'clock we had caught up to a string of wagons, all heading into the city for market.

When we approached the check point, my mind flashed back to the night that we had made our dramatic dash though the searchlight in order to escape this very city. However, the bored attitude of the stodgy soldiers who watched our progress past their check point

that morning gave no hint of a vengeful occupation force enforcing a reign of terror. Once in the city, my companion asked directions to an address that the Commandant had given him on my behalf. Before noon, I recognized the area where we found ourselves. The house that we went to was one that I had stayed at briefly when I first was separated from my escape buddy, Red. The occupants were a widow and her son. The son had been the purser on the Polish passenger liner Batory before the war. He spoke fairly good English, so I had no difficulty filling him in on the present circumstances in which I found myself. He had received a lengthy debriefing too from my travelling companion, who then said his good - byes and set off on his own personal odyssey. Stefan, the name by which I had known the son, was appalled by my appearance. I was filthy, my clothes were not only filthy but they were both lice and flea ridden. Under no circumstances was I a fit guest for anyone to welcome into their home. Their house had a back shed attached that was used for storage and it was into there that I was ushered. Stefan cut my hair to a brush cut, and I washed in a basin as thorough as I could. Next, he gave me some oily stuff to rub into my head. I stripped to the hide and left all the clothes in the shed. With a towel covering me, I was taken upstairs to the bathroom, where a hot tub of water awaited me. After a thorough scrubbing with a type of carbolic soap, I was given a cream to rub all over me. Pyjamas were provided and I was given a real bed, the first one I had seen since I had joined the Partisans. My exhaus-

tion was such that I fell asleep almost instantly, awaking many hours later to find that night had fallen. Whether it was the soap or the cream that had worked the miracle, I never found out, but there was no trace of the lice or the fleas that had plagued my stay in the forest. Stefan had somehow scrounged some clothes while I slept. Underclothes, shirt and pants,- all seemed to fit fairly well, and they were clean. His mother had food ready for me, and I sat at table and ate off of real china, not the mess tins that I had grown accustomed to.

During the next few days I was visited by members of the underground. They had came up with an idea to get me into Switzerland. I would be put into the care of the leader of a group located in Upper Silesia, a fellow named Bielski. He and his group would get me into a foreign workers' group, who would then travel to a work project near the Swiss border. From there I would make contact with another group who would help me the rest of the way into Switzerland. It all sounded quite possible, and I began to believe that at last I would get out of Germany. To help out the situation, I was given nearly a thousand Reichmarks, and five thousand zwoltys to assist me on the trip. In addition, they gave me a leather suitcase, shirts, sox, underclothes, a hat and a topcoat. A really nice pair of boots and riding-type breaches were added, making me a well-turned out specimen. The day before Christmas I was taken to the home of Yashek who had been killed in the forest with Anna's brother, Womian. The mother lived alone in

an apartment building. Her apartment had only one bedroom, so I slept on a day-bed in the living room. She was still upset over the death of Yashek. Anna had returned from the forest and had talked to her about her son's death, but that was of little consolation. She told me that she also had another son in the air-force in England. She told me that she was happy to have me spend Christmas with her. That way, she was not alone and she was sure that her son in England would have some place to go to where he would not be alone as well.

The apartment building also housed many Germans, a fact that caused me some moments of angst. The individual apartments were not equipped with bath facilities. These were provided separately in one bathroom per floor, that was located at the end of a long hall. Each apartment was equipped with a washroom, in which there was a toilet and a sink. That was fine for a light wash, but for the heavy duty stuff, one needed a bathtub. After a couple of days of light washing, I felt the need for a full scale bath. So, off to the bathroom I went one evening. The luxury was exquisite, and I took a little longer perhaps than necessary to get the full enjoyment of it. Suddenly there was a knock on the door, and a German voice called out, " Bis du lange da?"(Will you be long there?) I hadn't yet tried my German on a German, only on Poles, but I was stuck. I answered, " Nein, sofort." (No, soon). To my relief, he said, "Schon Gut," (that's good), and went away. I quickly ended my bath and returned to the apartment.

Christmas day was very quiet. Anna came over for a visit and we talked about many events that happened in the forest. The wound which had forced her to leave the forest was fully healed, with no complications. She was sorry to hear of the two deaths, but understood that such things were forever present during life in the forest. We also talked about my impending trip into Germany, of which she had also heard. She seemed to think that it was a great opportunity, of which I should be happy with. On parting, we both expressed our hopes for the future, and I have neither heard from, nor a word about Anna since.

On the Sunday following Christmas, the leader of the Underground arrived with another man. This was Bielski, the leader of the Underground in Upper Silesia, whom I was to accompany into Germany. During the course of the conversation that followed our introduction, it came out that a week prior to Christmas, a senior member of the Underground had been captured by the Gestapo. There had been a firefight and he had been wounded. They took him to the main hospital in Chenstochowa where they posted a guard over him, while he recovered. Apparently, he was scheduled to be released into Gestapo custody a couple of days before Christmas when shortly before the Gestapo came for him, a couple of men in Gestapo uniforms arrived and he was released to them. They were members of the underground, who came to claim their own.

Bielski and I left that afternoon, with the other underground man accompanying us. We travelled on foot back to the house on the

edge of town, to which Red and I had been brought to on our first entry into the city. The fellow who had accompanied us left, and Bielski and I settled in to await the darkness of evening. It seemed that, for some reason or other, we had to get out of the city and board the train at the first stop outside. Apparently that was how we would avoid an extra security check. Shortly after dark, we set out. We crossed the main road on which the border guards patrolled without any difficulty. We followed along an intersecting road for a couple of kilometres and then headed across to the main highway that led out of the city. It took us about a half an hour of walking along the main road before we came to the village where we would board the train. When we reached the station, there was a rather attractive blond girl waiting for Bielski. There was also a young fellow about my own age with her. Bielski introduced him as one of the members of his group, who had came along to accompany me, and also to speak for me to the Germans, as I was supposed to be deaf and dumb. The train arrived about eight, and the four of us boarded together, the young Pole sitting with me while Bielski sat with the blond. Our next stop would be the village in Upper Silesia, where I was to wait for further word on the plans to go to Switzerland.

XXI

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE

The village was one of those places that seemed to have grown up along the main thoroughfare. From the railroad station, we walked, stopping at a two story, wood - framed house a short distance from the station. It was close to mid - night when we got there. A knock on the door brought a middle - aged man in answer. He seemed to have been waiting for us. Our greeting was brief, and I was taken to a small upstairs room that was to be my home for the next three weeks. All the others were assigned their place of rest for the night, and a very long, tiring day came to a close.

The lady of the house was not too receptive to my attempts to be friendly. She brought all my meals up to the room, thus I had no chance to investigate the rest of the house. As far as I knew, there were only the three of us living there at that time. The man had already told me that it would not be wise to be seen by anyone in the village, so I spent my days reading whatever German literature that I could get my hands on. In the evenings, I was visited by my host. He was employed as a guard somewhere but he was pretty vague on that subject. He professed a keen interest in the partisans and my life in the forest. Inasmuch as I had been passed over to the Silesian organization for care, I saw nothing unusual in his being interested, and told him freely about the life I had been living. During that first week I was also visited by a couple

of men who seemed to be more officious than any that I had seen previously, but they assured me that they were working on the problem of getting me into a working party. In the period of three weeks that I was there, I believe that I told the man of the house the entire story of our escape, our progress into Poland, and my life later on with the partisans. There didn't appear to be any reason not to.

Into the second week at the house in Silesia, I came down with a high fever, and chills - the worst case of the flu that I had experienced in years. Without medication, it settled in my chest. My hosts kept bringing me hot wine with lemon juice and aspirin, but nothing seemed to be taking the fever away. It took about a week for the fever to break, leaving me with a violent cough. By the middle of January, I was starting to feel well again. It was then that Bielski again put in an appearance. He was there for two days, and told me that everything had been arranged, that I would be travelling by train to another village thirty kilometres away where I would spend a few days with a forester. He would then arrange for me to join a forest work party that was being assembled to go into the forest near the Swiss border. Bielski left after telling me that on the eighteenth of January he was sending the young Pole who had accompanied me from Chenstochowa to once again see that I got to the new destination safely.

January 1944

On the afternoon of the eighteenth my escort arrived. All my belongings had been packed into my suitcase in anticipation of the

trip. We left around six, shortly after dark, and walked the short distance to the railway station. The Pole bought our tickets and after a brief wait, the train arrived. Our destination was only about the third stop down the line, so we kept my suitcase by the seat. There were only a few soldiers in the car, all presumably either going on or returning from leave. At last the conductor called out our station. The train came to a full halt, and we exited to enter the station. Inside the station, one passed through a turnstile when entering from the platform. As I came through the turnstile, Bielski was standing in the centre of the main rotunda. He saw me coming through and immediately removed his hands from his overcoat pocket, turned away and strode through one of the doors in the side wall of the station. At the moment that he turned away, Gestapo agents stormed into the room from every door and opening in the station, with their guns all pointing at me. I nearly died right then from the shock of it. One of them spoke to me in English and told me not to do anything foolish, that I was under arrest. They hustled me out of the station, and into one of the cars parked at the front of the station. There was a driver and the man who seemed to be heading the detachment that had arrested me. The Gestapo officer sat in the back with me and we travelled in silence for about an hour. The car stopped in front of a grim- looking, red brick building with high walls extending out along the back of it. This was the Gestapo gaol in the city of Oppeln. I had been betrayed by Bielski and company to the Gestapo. The question that

came to mind was, " How deep was the betrayal. Was it centred on Bielski, or was it centred deep within the Underground?" These questions were all academic, - the answers couldn't help anybody, myself particularly. In the months that were to follow, this question would haunt me without resolution. In fact, to this very day I do not know the answer.

On the first morning of my imprisonment, the Oberwachmeister, (head guard) came to my cell. He brought a notice board with him, which he hung on the wall. On it was written, John Coyle, (my father's name) and the reason for my imprisonment - An Enemy Act against the German State. This was proof that during my stay at the house in Silesia, I was even then a de facto prisoner of the Gestapo. I remembered that I had told the man of the house, in one of our conversations, that my father's name was John. On registry at the prison, I had given my full name. The appearance of the name of John could only have come from some other source, and that was the house in Silesia. As for the charge, I never ceased to be an enemy of Germany, from the day of my enlistment in the Canadian Army. After hanging the noticeboard, I was advised that when a guard entered my cell, I was to stand at attention and announce my name and my charge. I told him then that the name on the board wasn't mine, at which point he became very confused. He then told me that he didn't think that I was a Canadian soldier, but that, in his opinion, I was probably a Pole, masquerading as a Canadian. He told me that I should go with him, and there would be proof that I

was not who I said I was.

He took me along the corridor to a cell. He unlocked the door, and pushed me in ahead of him. In the cell there were five British soldiers. As soon as I realized who they were, I knew that a huge opportunity had just been given to me, albeit unintentionally. I quickly identified myself to them, stressing the point that I was being held incommunicado, and that they should get in touch with Canadian authorities as soon as they got back to camp. In the event of that not being possible, then the Red Cross should be notified that I was being held in the prison in Oppeln. They told me that they were in for escaping, but would be going out in a week. They assured me that they would carry the message to the camp authorities. The Guard had just stood there with a look of amazement on his face as I rattled off my message to the Brits. He realized that he had goofed, as the Gestapo had specifically requested that I have no contact with other prisoners. This I had heard myself, when they brought me in. At any rate he needed have no fear of me telling anyone about his little experiment, - it couldn't have been more timely.

XXII

IMPRISONMENT

The cell was roughly eight feet wide, by twelve feet long. One window overlooked the exercise yard, but to see out of it, one had to climb up onto the bunk. Such a thing was not allowed, as I discovered to my chagrin. The bed folded up against the wall, secured by a hook that held it firmly during the daytime hours. It could only be lowered after the evening meal, which usually came around five in the afternoon. A few days after my arrival, I dropped the bed and stood on the end of it during the morning exercise period. The five English prisoners were in the yard, doing a walk-about around the compound. They were alone in the yard, although I was pretty sure that a guard was watching them from the warmth of the inside. The idea occurred to me that I might get another message to them by throwing it from my window. If it was timed right, they would see me toss it and scoop it up under the guise of tying a shoe, or simply tripping. As I reached my momentous decision, the guard opened the door. He had been watching me through the peep-hole in the door. His actions were like those of a mad-man. Lifting the rubber truncheon that he carried on his belt, he grabbed me by the arm, and pulled me from the bed. All the while he screamed that " looking out the window was forbidden." He slammed me a couple of times across the back with the truncheon and ordered the bed to be replaced against the wall. That first encounter with the truncheon was only an introduction; we were

destined to eventually get to know one another quite well. A day or so later, I was able to inscribe my name, P.O.W. number and regiment on a small bar of soap and toss it from the window to one of the Englishmen in the exercise yard. Luckily, he spotted it and was able to scoop it up undetected. I firmly believe that with that one act word went out that would alert the Red Cross of my whereabouts, and eventually lead to my transfer back to the main prison camp. Most people who had anything to do with the partisans, were summarily executed.

At the end of the first week, the moment that I knew was inevitable, arrived. The interrogation. I was taken to Gestapo HQ by the same officer who had led the arrest team. The office that I was taken to was that of the Regional Bureau Chief, Irwin Mueller. At the time his name meant nothing to me. Since then, however, I have discovered that he was a very much feared individual. So much so that after the war he was cited as a war criminal. It was several years before he was apprehended as he managed to disappear for a quite a while, eventually surfacing as a police officer in a small town in Germany under another name. He was convicted of war crimes and served several years in jail. At the time that I met him he was quite business - like, with a fairly open manner.

For my interrogation, he had brought in an interpreter, a German of American origin. Apparently he had been interned in the U.S. at a camp in Texas, but managed to escape into Mexico. From there he was able to arrange passage back into Germany where he

joined the Gestapo. He told me that his wife and child were at that time still in Washington. When I asked him what he figured on doing when the war ended, he replied that he had enough funds salted away in Spain to look after them for life.

The impending interrogation had been uppermost in my thoughts from the moment of my capture. There could be no doubt about the fact that I had actually been a prisoner of the Gestapo from the moment that I had left Chenstochowa, at least. My mind refused to accept the possibility that it could have gone even deeper. If it started with Bielski, then I had to accept the fact that everything that I had told him and the other people who had been brought to the house in Silesia was now in the Gestapo report. In order now to contain the damage that might be caused from information gleaned from me, I had to try and remember all that we had talked about, and make sure that no new information was added to what they already knew. Every morning for the next ten days I was picked up and brought to Gestapo Headquarters. It was always to the same room, and Mueller always handled the questioning. The sessions were always quite calm and very orderly. There were no threats or acts of violence whatsoever. It could well have been taking place at a local police station in North America if one overlooked the fortress - like appearance of the building. Each room was totally soundproof. Access into and from the building was completely electronically controlled. One had the feeling that all control passed into the hands of the Gestapo, as the doors clicked shut

behind one on entering the building. This was most probably true with many who were brought here, as the harshness of the Gestapo's tactics was legendary. Personally though, I was not subjected to that type of treatment.

On the way back to the prison on the last day of my interrogation, the Gestapo agent asked if I had written home since my recapture. On hearing that I had not, he said that he would see that I was brought paper and a pen immediately on returning to the prison that I might correct this situation. Further, he would return in the morning and pick the letter up for mailing. I was highly suspicious that this was a ploy to see if I would say something in a letter that I had not told them, so I was very guarded in what I said. Too, I had strong doubts as to whether such a letter would ever reach my parents. The letter was written, and true to his word, the agent returned the following morning and picked it up for posting. When I returned home, a year and a quarter later, I found that the letter had indeed been posted, from Switzerland. The mounties came to my parent's home to retrieve the letter, but my mother would only give them the envelope. She never received it back. No one ever told her why the mounties were interested in the letter either, so that is another minor mystery in this story.

Prison life closed around me and one day seemed to be the same as the other. For a while the head guard had me working. In the morning after a brief exercise period in the yard, a trustee would

bring in a bag of feathers, a pail, and an empty bag. My job was to strip the down from the stem of the feathers. The stems went into the pail, while the down was put into the empty sack. It took a couple of hours to strip off a bag of feathers, which I really didn't mind doing as it passed the time away. Once a week I was allowed to get one book from the prison library. They were all in German, so I took advantage of the opportunity and read as many as I could get. By so doing, I was able to enhance my knowledge of German.

In mid July I found out from one of the new, younger guards who had been invalided home from the Russian front, that the Allies had landed in Normandy. While this was great news, my health was already on a very rapid decline. Starvation and the poor living conditions had been slowly taking their toll, and by September I started to think of some way that I could put an end to my misery. A deep depression seemed to take hold and I couldn't shake it off. One night towards the end of the month, I went to my bed in an extremely bad state of mind, praying most fervently to whatever heavenly powers controlled our destinies to end my plight. A trance-like sleep came over me and the image of my maternal grandmother was there. She reassured me that everything would be fine with me and that on November 3rd I would be released from prison. She urged me to be patient for just a while longer, and then she was gone. When I awoke, the dream was as clear in my mind as though she had sat on my bunk and held my hand. My grandmother

had died at the age of ninety four years before.

It was about this time that another Englishman appeared on the scene. He was put in the cell next to me and shared the same exercise period. We were able to communicate briefly, going to and coming in from the exercise yard, however, longer conversation was not possible. We began to tap out morse code on the brick wall separating the two cells, and it worked fairly well. Thus I was able to determine that he had escaped into Yugoslavia where he was recaptured. His name was Bill Philo, and he came from Sheerness, Kent. We made a pledge that should either of us get out, that one would contact the family of the other. While we were busy tapping out our message one evening, the guard was watching through the peep-hole in the door. In retrospect, the tapping must have been like a woodpecker hammering on a hollow log, and resounded through the entire building. At any rate, he tore open my door, and started hitting me with his truncheon. He gave me several whacks, shoved me against the wall and stormed out and into the cell next door. He swung at Bill but he being new to the prison was still in pretty good physical condition, so he grabbed the truncheon and socked the guard. Not a good idea at all. The guard blew his whistle and four or five more guards came rushing in. They took Bill to a cell somewhere in the basement and really worked him over. As for me, I was given a lecture on the necessity of following the rules as they were set down.

I did visit Bill's parents in Kent, England when I got out. As

for Bill, I only saw him once after the war, - the day before my wedding in May of 1951. He was in Canada, working as a field hand in the construction of power lines for Ontario Hydro. He came to Ottawa, and attended our wedding, but left to return to Toronto immediately afterward. Later I had a letter from him from Johannesburg, South Africa. I never heard from him again.

On the morning of the third of November, the Gestapo agent who had led the team at my arrest and who had been my escort back and forth to the interrogations, arrived at the prison. He took me down to the stores, where we retrieved the overcoat that I had worn the night of my arrest. He then took me to the train station where we boarded the train for Lamsdorf, the site of the main prison camp from where I had left for the work party so long ago. We arrived at the camp late in the afternoon, and he took me directly to the camp detention barracks. There he turned me over to the tender care of Scarface, the NCO in charge, with the express instructions that I be held incommunicado pending the convening of a military courtm-artial. It had been eighteen months since our escape. The future had an ominous look about it, but at least I was free of the Gestapo. That night I would give over to the joy of being back where I could have contact with some of my own people. The morrow would have its own imprint to make.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

XXIII

IT'S ALL OVER

The following morning, Scarface took me to the shower/delouser building. To my great surprise and joy, the attendant in charge of the shower/delouser was none other than a fellow by the name of Harold Sullivan, not only from my regiment but from my hometown of Amherstburg. He was known to all and sundry as Barney but at that moment he was as an angel from heaven. As I stripped off for the shower, Barney looked on my six foot two frame and its well distributed hundred and ten pounds and said, " You stay right where you are, I'll be right back." In about five minutes he was back with the Chief of the German Medical Staff, and two stretcher bearers with a stretcher. The Doctor asked Scarface why he hadn't brought me to the hospital. When he was told that the Gestapo had ordered me held incommunicado for courtmartial, the doctor literally blew his stack. He reminded Scarface that he owed his allegiance to the Werhmacht, not to the Gestapo. With that, I was loaded onto the stretcher and carried across the compound to the hospital. There I was examined by a British doctor who went into a conference with the German doctor who had brought me into the hospital. The British Doctor then informed me that I would be removed to the main hospital that was located some distance from the main camp. Barney Sullivan arrived with a complete change of uniform and new boots. That afternoon I was transferred by

ambulance to the main hospital, once more in battledress and free of the lice and flees that had been my constant curse for the past ten months. I was given a real bed, with springs and a mattress. The army blankets that covered it were clean and there were ten other people in the room with me, all allied soldiers who spoke my language, with the majority being Canadian airmen. At that moment of my life I felt that surely heaven couldn't offer so very much more to a tired and war-worn soul such as I.

During the weeks that followed, the Gestapo put in regular appearances, seeking my release for a courtmartial proceeding. They continually received the same story, - that I was physically unfit to stand trial. As winter moved on through February, the sounds of the war grew ever closer to the camp. One morning in mid February we awoke to find that there were no German guards in the guard towers. The machine guns were left pivoting on their mounts, and the towers were all empty. The administration sent some men into the towers to bring the guns down. As an additional safe-guard against our camp being over-run by civilians, we posted a guard on the gates. Our guard was armed only with a smile, with a prayer as a backup. They were never really tested. From the direction of the main camp, we could see smoke billowing to the heavens. We later got word that the men in the main camp had entered the record office, dumped all the records of prisoners into the middle of the floor and then set fire to the whole thing. With a little bit of luck, my courtmarial charges also went up in smoke with their

little bonfire.

For two weeks our camp was left in a pocket between the Russians and the German Armies. The Red Cross finally prevailed on the Germans to send in a train and remove the hospital patients from the zone of fighting. At the same time they assembled the remaining men in the camp and started them all marching towards western Germany, away from the front. We were removed by train to a Stalag north West of Munich, Stalag 7A, at Moosburg. Towards the end of March, a Medical team came to the camp from Switzerland. They examined many of the prisoners, designating those who would be making up the next prisoner exchange, which was slated for June of '45. While my physical condition had improved somewhat, I was still grossly undernourished and in a pretty weakened state. They examined me and proclaimed that I had a heart condition, thus I too was assigned to the repatriation group. Our entire group was separated from the main body of prisoners and put into tents located in a small sand pit outside the main camp. It was there that we first saw the tanks of the 14th Armoured Brigade prowling along the edge of the forest, directly behind us on April 29th, 1945. Later, their Jeeps and tanks took over the entire camp and 50,000 men from every nation in Europe and most of Asia went nuts in the euphoria of Freedom. Two weeks later, flying into Liege, Belgium, we heard Winston CHurchill's speech telling the world that the thousand year Reich had surrendered, and that Hitler was dead. They were the most beautiful words that I had ever heard.

On the ninth of May, 1945 I returned to England in the belly of a Lancaster bomber. We were taken to a camp near Redhill and given a cursory examination by the medical staff. Having determined that we were still breathing and were able to walk to the mess hall for chow, we were all pronounced fit. The first order of the day was to get us all clothed in a manner that would identify us as Canadian soldiers. For the most part, we were wearing part British battledress uniforms, and part American,- all in all a very hybrid appearance. For the most of the next two months I spent my time either on leave or A.W.O.L., busily dodging drafts that would take me home to Canada. Finally, about the end of the first week in July the provost nailed me, along with a whole barrack full of likeminded individuals and shipped us all home on the Louis Pasteur. We arrived in Halifax around July 12, 1945.

The main concern that bothered me on my return to Canada was whether the Peace that I was entering into would treat me any better than the War that I was returning from. The other thought that crossed my mind was whether I was any better equipped to tackle the peace than I was for the war. Serious doubts existed in my mind, all of which there was plenty of time in which to deal with them. For the present, it was back to Ontario and home.

IN PURSUIT OF DESTINY

Epilogue

In August of 1945 the Polish Underground began their long awaited uprising. The Russians had advanced to the eastern banks of the River Vistula, which passes through the eastern outskirts of the city of Warsaw. General Bor - Komorowski led his army of Partisans against the German occupation forces in a furious assault. From what I have heard, the fighting was vicious, but the Partisans carried the day, driving the Germans out of the city.

They then invited the Russians to cross the river and join them in the newly freed city of Warsaw. The Russians ignored them, waiting on the eastern bank. Eventually the Germans regrouped and counter - attacked. By this time the Poles were short of guns and ammunition, as well as food and medical supplies. They persuaded the Allies in western Europe of their plight, and they sent aircraft over the city to drop supplies by parachute. The wind carried the 'chutes over the Russian occupied territory, but the Russians ignored the pleas of the Poles for co-operation. Eventually the Poles were forced to sue for peace with the Germans, whereby many of their soldiers were allowed to join Allied prisoners of war in the prison camps.

Shortly after the surrender by the Poles, the Russians crossed the Vistula and took Warsaw. With the defeat of the Partisans by

the Germans, the Russians got rid of a large segment of the Polish Intelligentsia thus ensuring that Communism would be the dominant politic in the country after the war.

There were many of the Poles from Warsaw in the camp where I was, prior to our move westward at the approach of the Russians. They greatly feared liberation by the Russians and what might happen to them in a post-war Poland. As there had been a repatriation of sick and wounded from our camp in January, I rounded up as many extra British uniforms that I could find. I enlisted a couple of other Canadians to help me, and we managed to outfit quite a few Poles, not only with uniforms, but in some cases, even British ID disks. Thus, many Poles would be taken into the west automatically after the liberation, away from the Russians, where many would find their way to England.