

# **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

**War Memoirs**

**By**

**Zygmunt Skarbek-Kruszewski**

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This book was written in Polish by my father at the end of the war. It was translated by my mother, Marushka (Maria) during the 1960s. She spent months in writing after working long hours and then cooking, cleaning and finally starting the translation. I recall that she always had a big dictionary beside her and often would ask her friends about the appropriate use of a word. Eventually this book was typed up on a manual typewriter. I have electronically scanned in the book and corrected typing errors but have not changed any words.

George (Jurek) Zygmunt Skarbek, Zyg's elder son.  
September 2001

Attached to this book is a CD which contains photographs relating to Zyg's and Maria's life and George and Roman's families, to September 2001.



Zygmunt Skarbek-Kruszewski - Circa 1935

# BELLUM VOBISCUM

## Preface

*To you, Marushka, I dedicate these memoirs as you were not only my wife but also my friend and faithful companion during our homeless war wanderings.*

It was a beautiful September morning and the fifth anniversary of the war. My wife and I were sitting on an earthen bench in front of a small hut in Kosewo, speaking of this war and the years gone by. We came to this little village from burning Warsaw.

We recollected people and things which happened in the past and it was here that I decided to write down what I saw, heard and felt during this big, murderous war.

Events, developments and conflicts created the war. People whom I had met were clear in outline and the tracks I had travelled were set by fate. What was left for me to do? A job of an honest chronicler. Honest, I mean, as there will be no fictitious events or persons, nor a pink halo for my native country.

I wanted to write these recollections for my sons and their generation so that when they grew up they could read it and understand what war is to people and people to war; so that they might understand the categorical absurdity, the destructive power and the criminal war psychosis.

If they understand - my memoirs will achieve their aim.

Zygmunt Skarbek-Kruszewski  
Author

Kosewo

1st September 1944.

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# Letter

Warsaw, 31.8.1939.

*My darling Marushka,*

*You certainly will be astonished to receive this letter from Warsaw, as less than a week ago in Wilno you said good-bye to me - the called-up soldier.*

*I went east to my formation and now I am in Warsaw as a civilian. Here is what happened in this short time: after arrival at my regiment I presented my call-up card and, after completion of formalities, I was sent to the supply stores. Rushing from one corner of the barracks to another I received all my equipment consisting of wearing apparel and also utensils for eating as well as killing, such as mess tin, cutlery, rifle and bayonet, haversack and hand grenades.*

*In the afternoon I was detailed to my company which was bivouacked in the forest near the railway ramp. There was great activity in checking lists, etc. Liaison officers were running forwards and backwards, the field telephone situated under an old pear tree was chattering busily.*

*Before I had time to get acquainted with all my companions and commanders, the field telephone summoned me to the headquarters of the regiment. With my heart in my mouth, I ran to the barracks. What could have happened? In my mind I ticked off all I had done during my short military service. I was certain that during these few hours I had done nothing to warrant the attention of my superiors. I arrived out of breath at the threshold of the regimental adjutant.*

*"Lieutenant Kruszewski?" - a voice called out from behind the desk. "Yes, sir..." - I stopped and it sounded odd and stupid. In addition, I made a move something between taking off my military cap and saluting. At this moment I did not know two main things - firstly, the military rank of the bald gentleman who was sitting deeply in an easy chair behind a high desk and, secondly, if standing on the threshold of the room, does one take off the cap and stand to attention or should one salute?*

*The adjutant gave me an indulgent smile and said; "You are demobilised, return clothing and weapons 'to the store, get back your civilian clothing. You will receive your travel order back home. Understand?"*

*Seeing me agape and staring, he added, "You were drafted by mistake. You don't belong to the first mobilisation. Your call-up card should have been blue and not white."*

*I felt disappointed and humiliated, as if I was publicly degraded, as if the stripes of a national hero had been stripped. Can you understand me, Marushka, the ambitious male? In this moment I understood the might of the war psychosis - after all, I am basically a pacifist.*

*Only when I wore my grey, slightly crumpled suit and soft hat did I feel my spirits rise and my mood became cheerful. I passed the barracks gate and started my way homewards, me –Ha! Ha! - the one-day soldier in active service.*

*I immediately sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advising them about my demobilisation and received from them a cable with instructions to start work in Head Office.*

*I left for Warsaw on 28th August and for the last two days have been working in the archives of the Ministry. I have already met quite a few friends - they arrived mainly from Germany. We are all working sorting documents. Most of them have to be burnt in huge burners in the basement. Diving in and out from huge crates with documents, we all look like chickens covered in feathers. Paper was everywhere, in the main hall of the Ministry, in passages, on desks, chairs and floors, even over windows. Office messengers are constantly carrying big bundles away. Truly paper work.*

*My God, why did the gentlemen from the Diplomatic Service have to write on so many tons of paper to achieve such an uncomplicated result as the possibility of a second world war? But to be truthful I must admit that the majority of the documents do not concern the intellectual effort of peaceful coexistence between neighbourly nations. Mainly there are bills from embassies, consulates, legations, etc. for champagne, liqueurs, wines, vodka, sardines, chocolates, extra-special cigarettes and cigars, biscuits, etc. - anyway they were for food items of first necessity to sustain a friendly atmosphere, candid exchange of thought and cordial neighbourly relationships.*

*The food consumption of our diplomats was really outstanding, although I must admit that I can't visualise any conference for peace by the four powers being conducted with salted herring and rye bread. On the whole, my darling, the atmosphere at M.S.Z. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) is rather feverish. Politics are also heatedly discussed in the streets. We are*

*counting on a firm stand from our western allies. The spirits are rather high. We feel like the placards say strong, united and ready.*

*As to myself - I have a large room, received my wages in advance, so we will have enough to live on. There is no danger of an immediate war. This situation may last for months according to people in the know. Some even assure us that, under the pressure of the big powers, Hitler will never start a war but will try to negotiate and look for a political compromise. Therefore, darling, take only a few frocks, some linen and some of my personal belongings and come to Warsaw - the rest could be sent later.*

*I am waiting with many kisses,*

*Yours,*

*Zygmunt.*

*Warsaw. 31st August, 1939.*

Next morning at dawn the Second World War started

.



# September Days

"Attention! Attention! Enemy planes approaching" .... The even voice of the speaker announced a new German air raid on Warsaw.

I switched off the radio and kettle. I didn't feel like breakfast any more. I lived on the fifth floor in Sniadecka Street. One could hear the grim wail of the alarm siren - at first the one farther away not so loud, more subdued, then the nearer ones louder and more piercing and, lastly, the nearest one which shook the house with its piercing sound of maddening fright. The house was teeming like an anthill disturbed by a kick. On the staircases people were running with bundles and suitcases, women with children were carefully descending to the basement. Banging doors, fragments of unfinished sentences, calling and yelling.

The first hollow sounds of the anti-aircraft artillery sped up the stragglers and the door of the basement was closed.

The capital started its second day of war.

The house I lived in, like thousands of other tenement houses, had no modern shelter. There was only the ordinary basement - long, dark and narrow passages packed full with people and their belongings. How common a sight for people in bombed cities. Whispered prayers, a loud sigh after a powerful detonation which made the wall tremble, crying children, quarrels between people trampling each other. A few men near the slightly open door observing the sky, commenting about the enemy planes and the dropped bombs. Again a larger detonation close by. Somebody calls "Shut the door." "What the hell," calls another voice. "Should we all risk our lives for the stupid curiosity of some?"

"For God's sake stop quarrelling," a new female voice full of pathos intervened, "don't you realise how grave the situation is? Any moment we might share a common tomb under the walls of this house."

"The old hag cracks again.," muttered a sleepy, deep voice from the dark corner of the basement. Suddenly we could hear a muted sound from a siren far away. Everyone became quiet. Intense, collective listening. Sighs of relief. Yes, it was the 'All Clear' sound.

The yard, the stairs were again full of milling people, children, bundles and cases, returning to their flats.

Crowds again in the streets, cars and trams started moving - the town became alive again. I took the No. 17 tram, hurrying to work. Trams and cars moved slowly, disorganised, noisy tooting and ringing, trying to get out of the traffic jam. We were peering, looking for damage, but this morning the main street, Marszalkowska, had not suffered.

When the tram came to the crossing of Novogrodzka Street we saw crowds running towards an alley and further away we could see clouds of smoke. There was also a peculiar, unspecified smell. In the front of the tram somebody called out "GAS". It is hard to believe that such a short word could provoke such an unheard-of shock in the human mass. A word so short and sharp like a flint, or rather like a splash in the water from a flint. A word yelled out without intonation, just thrown between the masses - "GAS!" A word fired into the collective human brain, it was like a charge of dynamite. Travellers started to jump out through the windows, hurting their hands and feet, falling on the street they tried to protect their faces with hats and handkerchiefs - some lucky ones had gas masks. Within seconds the tram was empty. People rushed towards doorways and gates looking for some deeper hiding place. The explanation came fairly soon. During the air raid, in Novogrodzka Street, a German bomber was shot down, the petrol exploded and the plane was covered in flames. The burning fuel and aluminium accounted for the peculiar smell which inspired one of the tram passengers to call "GAS!"

As I had another short alarm near Królewska Street, I was two hours late for work.

In the M.S.Z. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), there was great activity. At the main entrance many dark limousines, spotlessly polished, were driving away or arriving. Some gentlemen with bulging attaché cases were rushing in and out of the building. There was a lot of movement in the beautiful, large hall. Between groups of consular employees, mainly arrivals from Germany, were also high dignitaries from accredited countries. All the bombastic etiquette was missing. Nobody was there to meet the excellencies from foreign countries. Disorientated messengers, couriers, gold-braided valets tried to hide in dark corners and cloakrooms. They were unsure as to how to greet the arriving visitors - no top hats or white gloves to show their status, and faces didn't convey anything. It seemed better to disappear than maybe give a deep bow to an unknown book-keeper from one of the consulates. The Hall of the Ministry reminded me of a stock exchange. Different groups were bidding and declaring the latest news of the day, discussing Britain and America. One group started to increase considerably, someone there had really important news. He saw the

British Ambassador arriving and now a conference was in progress between the Ambassador and Mr Beck.

The conveyor of the sensational news continued, "This talk between them is of far-reaching importance. I am sure that Britain will give us all the military help according to the signed treaty." He adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses and, being sure of his authoritative position in the group of listeners, he continued, "I know from a competent source that Hitler is afraid of an attack from the West and therefore he had moved part of his army to the Siegfried Line."

"Alright," said someone from the group, "but how can we expect positive help from Britain if she did not even want to give us enough help with armaments?"

"That is a matter of money, my dear sir," interrupted the man with the horn-rimmed glasses and, full of his own importance, moved on to another group giving them "vital information from a competent source."

In the meantime, we, the personnel, were issued with gas masks and asked to go back to work. Before me were heaps of documents in coloured covers, of navy, golden and orange. I learned to work mechanically, opening a file anywhere in the middle and reading '70 tins of Portuguese sardines in olive...' and the complete file went on the heap for burning. The pile of other documents grew very slowly and I tried to read more and to gather more information about our neighbours. There were different briefings and reports - political, social welfare, administration, economy, reports on foreign commerce and trade, exchanges in ports, agrarian and social relationships with foreign powers.

About one o'clock when we were ready for a break, the sirens started their loud wailing. Our department head rushed in. "Ladies and gentlemen, enemy bombers over Warsaw. Please go down to the shelters, the entrance is to the right from the main hall."

In a few minutes the whole building became empty. It was the first time that I was in this shelter. I was amazed to see well lit passages connecting spacious rooms. The ceilings were low, the walls were covered with marble plates and supported by many columns. Comfortable chairs, soft couches, a well-stocked buffet and good electric ventilation made the stay a pleasant one.

Very well-fitted thick doors provided good isolation from outside noise. Although a battle was being fought over the town, it was quiet here. It is understandable that the atmosphere in this shelter was nearly peaceful. Some were resting in comfortable deep chairs drinking coffee, some walked around

discussing the situation. One heard talk about war and politics, but also about horse races, new jokes and current society gossip.

I walked around, looked, and listened. I didn't know many as I had only been a short while at headquarters. It seemed to me that I was looking through a kaleidoscope. Some minor employees were standing near the walls; they seemed rather uncomfortable with the big bosses. Many were shy and timid - they had spent most of their lives behind desks in accounts or the archives, or in supplies and stores. Pale people, seldom outdoors, people in clean but old, shiny suits with dark protective cuffs pulled over their sleeves - they were the proletariat of the Ministry.

The elite department heads, branch head, councillors, gentlemen from the diplomatic corps, with perfect manners and wearing spotless, unruffled suits, were drinking coffee and sitting comfortably chatting with their secretaries and typists. Here and there were foreign correspondents - Japanese with slantly eyes, dark-haired Romanians, Hungarians, Americans, Frenchmen and Englishmen.

In one of the rooms was a group of young people, most of them recently graduated in foreign affairs, economics or law. They talked mainly about call-up cards and mobilisation. In this room I suddenly spotted a familiar face - Lesman. We were together at the University and I had not seen him for a few years. A shortish, blond fellow with glasses and a tendency to become fat in later years. He had a big nose and a nervous habit of constantly adjusting his glasses on his nose. During the University years we belonged to opposite groups. He called me a ballroom communist and I called him a monarchist. Once, during some heated academic debate where one group was denouncing the "crumbling capitalistic world," Lesman jumped on the podium and, adjusting his glasses nervously, called out: "Fellow students - the time of the cads and roughnecks is coming. A real gentleman should have no discussions with them, he must hit them in the snout. Down with the barbarian, stop him behaving like a bull in a china shop, stop him destroying our culture and our beautiful churches."

That was Lesman - a true adherent to the ideas of the Wilno monarchistic newspaper "Slowo".

I came up behind him and put my hand on his shoulder. He turned. "Zygmunt, what are you doing here, where did you come from?"

"I worked in our Consulate in Stettin and you may congratulate me on my political astuteness!" I answered with a smile. "Two weeks ago my annual leave was due and I came home. Have you been working here long?"

"Only a few months. I had a lengthy apprenticeship in foreign affairs in America."

"In America?" I called out. "What bad luck to be recalled to Europe now."

"Can't be helped. Our country needs us." he replied very piously and quickly went after his boss as the all-clear was sounded.

During the war we met once again, but in quite different surroundings.

Next day, work at the Ministry was constantly interrupted by alarms and we spent most of the time in the shelter.

I left the Ministry late in the afternoon. There was a lot of traffic in the streets. Shops were packed full as everyone was trying to stock up. Pillars, walls of houses and trams were covered with placards.

"Poland will prevail with wings"

"The Chief Commander calls us"

"Strong, united and ready".. etc. etc.

Some posters showed a blue sky covered with thousands of Polish airplanes, tight formations of soldiers in steel helmets, whilst above them streamed the victorious banner and the Chief Commander with a sword in his hand hovering near the clouds like the providential Holy Ghost on sacred pictures.

On other posters, soldiers with bayonets were depicted killing an eight-headed hydra, giving her the death thrust on the centre of her 'Hakenkreuz', painted on a shimmering belly.

SIGNUM TEMPORIS, I thought, looking at all the posters. War propaganda seemed so much shameless boasting. Would opponents arriving to fight a duel carry placards caricaturising each other in the lowest terms imaginable? Etiquette would frown on such behaviour, yet in a duel between nations it is acceptable. Even exaggerated propaganda is permitted to stimulate the national spirit of resistance.

When I turned into Jeruzalimska Street I heard the paperboy's, "Extra! Extra!... Britain and France declare war against Germany!" The boys were running through the streets, the trams and cafes. Within seconds they were

surrounded and the edition was hurriedly grabbed. Everyone wanted to read with his own eyes the news that had been awaited with impatience.

A short, extraordinary text issued by 'Kurjer Warszawski' announced in big, bold letters the declaration of war by Britain and France against Germany. In fulfilment of their alliance with Poland and, following the act of German aggression, these powers took the decision to help Poland with all their strength at sea, on land and. in the air.

A new spirit, full of hope, came over Warsaw and all Poland. Although it had been expected, the accomplished fact had a tremendously uplifting power. All Warsaw spoke about it. Everyone was cheering everyone else, even scoffing at the German danger.

As I was hungry, I went into a pub, 'Pod Satyrem'. All the tables were taken, so I joined a group of men discussing the news at the bar.

"Hallo, Karol, to Britain's health," called someone, lifting his glass.

"Yes, sure, Britain is a power, sir, the Queen of the Seas. When she takes this business in hand, she will make mincemeat of them. Did you read the last edition? With all their strength at sea, on land and by air, they will hit Germany."

"Karol, I am dead sure that if we push solidly from the East and, in addition France helps, we old ones would not have to go into the army."

"I think so too" said someone, licking his fingers after eating a herring sandwich.

"This war will not last long. Britain will prevent the German fleet entering the Atlantic."

"Surely not long but, as we are already drinking to Britain, it's my shout now." He turned and called, "Hey, waiter, fill them up, please." Glasses clinked.

The barman in his white jacket listened intently.

"Gentlemen," said the barman, "more than 500 aeroplanes are already on the way to Poland. I have heard from reliable sources that they will bomb Germany and land on our airfields."

"How are things at the Front, Karol? Have you heard something? The papers don't give any details."

Someone, still chewing his sandwich, hurriedly replied, "The Front is holding well. I heard that near Poznan our array crossed over into Germany. The Germans can't break through Pomerania. If not for those damned air raids, we wouldn't have felt the war in Warsaw. But you just wait - let the British squadrons come."

The pub was becoming very noisy. It was crowded and full of smoke. People were coming in from the street for a drink and to discuss the recent news. Hardly anyone talked about the Front. There were comments about landing parties in Gdynia and Gdansk. I could not distinguish what the first group was talking about as near me a heated argument started on how long the war would last. The more cautious calculated it to last for up to one year; others were ready to bet that within three months the war would be over. I finished my goulash and went home.

That night the sky was clear and silent

.



# Evacuation

I leapt out of bed like a madman. From a deep sleep I had been woken suddenly by a loud crash and an explosion. For a second I could not quite understand what had happened. I was surrounded by a white cloud smelling of slaked lime. Aghast, I looked about. There was a big hole in the ceiling near the window, bits of plaster were falling to the ground and on the floor near the bed was a large piece of bent metal. It was a bit of anti-aircraft flak. "Another air raid," I thought, and this was immediately confirmed by a burst of gunfire above the roofs; high time to scam. My room on the top floor of a five-storey building was certainly not an attractive shelter against bombs. I dressed hurriedly and ran down the empty stairs. Some men were peering out through the half-open basement door. They were shouting excitedly and pointing to something in the sky. I looked up. Above our part of the city an air battle was in progress. The pale sky of a September dawn was lightened by the sun just rising. The planes in the sky were like a disturbed flock of crows, flying haphazardly above the city, turning, zig-zagging. Some were high up, others with a shrill noise barely cleared the rooftops. The whole sky was covered with tiny clouds, some were pursuing the planes as if trying to catch them, others erupted suddenly in front of planes which then dived instantly.

Someone shouted "Look, look, there to the left - it is falling."

Everyone tried to see, craning their necks the plane was approaching the ground very fast. It almost touched the roofs and then, with an unexpected growl of the motors, the plane started to rise.

The onlookers were disappointed. "What a shame - I thought we had him. Our gunners are shooting poorly. There is a whole flock of them. One could shoot them like ducks."

"Not poorly, gentlemen, but too thinly," said the janitor. "They only make holes in the sky. It should be like buckshot from a double-barrelled gun!"

Close to us, near Marszalkowska Street, automatic guns began firing. Looking up, we saw above our heads an aircraft giving a shake with its tail; for a moment it seemed he might regain his balance, but then in a twisted, corkscrew motion, he dived to the ground, leaving in the sky a dark line marking his descent.

"Got him" people cried.

"Bravo! Bravo!" called some young girls, clapping their hands.

The 'All Clear' sounded.

A fantastic spectacle. General enthusiasm.

The charred, bodies of two young fliers under the debris of the plane gave off an odour of burnt, singed flesh. The crowd surged towards their killers. In seconds, a small armoured car was besieged. Nobody doubted that these were the victors. From a nearby florist, ladies brought flowers and started throwing them over the young officer who was standing in the car saluting to all sides. His eyes were shining excitedly and he was very proud. He was the hero of the day. On his chest was a cross of valour and on his conscience were two more human lives.

I had difficulty pushing through the crowd. Only at the central station could I get a tram. The tram was full of people and luggage. They looked as if they were all leaving. Tired and pale faces, women with small children in their arms - some with bandaged hands and faces. I started to talk to one woman.

"We are from Ciechanowo, sir. The Front is there already. My sister," pointing to a young woman with her head bandaged, "and I were barely able to run away," she said.

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes, a piece of shrapnel hit me in the head when I ran over the street to my sister. We escaped with only the clothes we stood in. Everything was in flames."

A thought struck me. That must mean that the Front was very close as Ciechanowo was barely 100 km away and here we knew nothing about it.

At the next stop a group of refugees from Modlin boarded the tram, claiming that it was impossible to stay in Modlin any longer as the Germans were bombarding the neighbourhood with shells.

I left the tram when it stopped at Marszal Square in order to buy a newspaper, hoping for news of the last twenty-four hours. The leading article on page one, written in large block letters, affirmed that prompt assistance was on the way from our allies. They were mobilising all their strength to help Poland who was bravely resisting the invasion, etc... I looked through the following pages for news from the Front, but in vain. Page two was devoted to strained relationships between Japan and America. A long and uninteresting article filled the whole page, leaving space only for a small verse about the "steel wings of victory".

On page three the King of Siam assured Great Britain of their common interests, the deep friendship of two nations who value peace, etc... The following pages covered criminal offences, advertisements, theatre and cinema programmes and various small announcements. That was all.

In the afternoon, the Ministry ordered the packing of documents. A large group, including myself, was directed to the right wing of M.S.Z., the archives. In a large hall stood stacks of metal cabinets reaching to the ceiling with only a narrow walking space between them. There we set to work.

Around midnight, tired and hungry, we sat down for a short rest. Some gentlemen from the Minister's office arrived and told us that we would have to be prepared to work through the night. Then he divided our labours so that the men's energies were spent carrying packed cases outside while the women continued packing, but now only from special cabinets marked T. T. (secret). One o'clock, two o'clock. Passages, halls and the yard were being filled with large, wooden crates. We walked wearily and were very sleepy. At three o'clock somebody came with a list and read a few names, including mine, and told us to go home immediately, pack bare essentials and be ready to travel.

"One suitcase only," we were told by the elderly, clean-shaven gentleman with a monocle.

"Gentlemen, you have to be here at the Ministry at half-past four in the morning. The Government has ordered the evacuation of all public head offices. Our Ministry will be evacuated this morning. You, gentlemen, have to supervise the transport of the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The destination will be given later."

It has happened, I thought. The refugees in the tram were telling the truth. Warsaw is directly endangered; therefore the sudden evacuation.

I intended to hurry home but there were no trams and I had a fair distance to cover. The city was in complete darkness, looking like a block of marble. The streets were deserted. From Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street came the dull, monotonous sound of wheels and the stamping of horses' hoofs.

I turned into the street in the direction of Copernicus statue. A field artillery battery was on the move. Around the statue of Copernicus a company of C.K.M. (heavy machine guns) had halted. The horses, heads down, were standing motionless in their harness; the soldiers crowded the steps of the Holy Cross Church. Coat collars turned up, they huddled on stairs and against the walls. Some were sitting on kerbs along the street. Faces were indistinguishable

and only their stooping shapes clearly showed their tiredness. I looked up. On top of the church stairs loomed the bent figure of Christ with the stone cross on his back. In this attitude, He was giving people peace on earth. The soldiers had hand grenades in their belts and guns on their backs. Cannons were being moved along the street. Dozing soldiers slumped on horses moving with tired steps. This night Christ reviewed the parade of a sleepy army. He, General Christ, the chief commander of loving peace and people of good will. Where are the people of loving peace? Where are the people of good will?

Those who with holy water, making the sign of the Cross, blessing the factories of bombs, poisonous gases, tanks, battleships, bombers and cannons - are they the Priests of Peace?

The uniformed Youth of Pioneers, Hitlerjugend, Falangist, Komsomols marching in step to military drums with their wooden rifles - were they taught to 'love thy neighbour'?

Young girls throwing flowers over youths in uniforms, mothers farewelling their sons with the pathetic cry - "Go! The country is calling you!"

Could they teach brotherly love?

Maybe the law? edicts? codes? could. No ... they punish with prison for the refusal to take arms.

"Who is guilty? Where is the culprit?" one wants to ask. Hitler is blaming the allies, the allies are blaming Hitler.

The U.S.S.R. is blaming the capitalistic world, the capitalistic countries are blaming the Komintern. The fascists are pointing to communism, communism to fascists. A vicious circle looking for the guilty. All countries have their 'sacred rights' which they are ready to defend with lives. The blood was running from gored bellies and pierced heads and torn limbs. It was flowing through hamlets, villages and towns, illuminating the 'sacred rights' with fires of war.

Now is not the time to seek the culprit.

Guilty will be the one who loses the war.

Inside the houses that I was passing, hundreds of thousands of families were sleeping. Will they still be standing in the next few days when the enemy is trying to strangle the city? Where will their Fatherland be? Under which roof will they try to find shelter?

Galloping hoof beats cut through my gloomy thoughts. Sparks flew under the hoofs. A soldier, bent down over his horse, was tearing ahead into darkness. An echo reverberated through the empty streets.

Despite the early morning hours, the bustling activity on Station Fast was unbelievable. Our trucks, fully loaded with crates and honking loudly, could hardly move. Loaded vehicles from different offices were constantly arriving. Along the streets crowds were streaming like overflowing rivers. On the platforms piles of luggage were surrounded by women and children. Trams disgorged masses of jostling refugees, looking for some spare place to put down their belongings. Noise from diesel engines and moving freight trains increased the clamour.

While we were unloading the heavy crates to the ground, the alert sounded. Everyone started to run - general confusion. Being near the station terrified people. Part of the station had been demolished by previous raids and the charred stumps increased the scary feeling. Cabs, not even waiting for payment, turned back to the city. The crowd wavered. Heavy parcels retarded progress, small children could not run. Wives were desperately calling their husbands, yelling and crying in the human ant heap. The majority did not know where to go, where to seek shelter. No shelter was large enough to protect a crowd of many thousands. I could not see a shelter anywhere, but tried to reach some trenches at the end of the street. These at least offered some protection from shrapnel. The place in front of the station became empty of people, leaving only luggage and crates behind. The trench into which I jumped was proudly called SHELTER No. 1, the name printed on a yellow board attached to a stick. The floor of the trench was of course covered in shit left by the previous night's passers by.

It was only a short alert. The 'All Clear' sounded and people rushed to their luggage. The train for our Ministry had not arrived so, hoping to contact Marushka, I decided to telephone from a soda fountain kiosk. My sudden departure in an unknown direction would make it impossible for her to look for me.

My optimistic letter written to her the day before the war could have encouraged her to come to Warsaw, and this I could not have forgiven myself, especially as she was in neutral Lithuania. My optimism reflected only the general atmosphere at that time. Who would have thought that, within seven days, such disastrous changes would occur.

The queue to the telephone was long. Many were waiting to contact their nearest before going into the unknown. When I was only a couple of people away from the front of the queue, the alert sounded again. The lady from the kiosk locked her door and I ran to the trenches. A further alert again interrupted the queue. Each consecutive, harmless alarm frightened the people less and less. Some even stayed on the platforms whilst others went leisurely towards shelters, glancing at the sky.

Once again I was in the queue and had only to wait for a peroxidized blonde to finish her call. I was like a cat on hot bricks, being afraid of another alert, but she continued yakking away. People were getting restless and abusive and started to push and shove. I turned around ... and stood rooted to the spot, unable to believe my eyes. In the queue, right behind me, was my wife. She was standing with her hands in the pockets of her brown coat; from under her beret, masses of red-brown curls tumbled onto her collar. She saw me - and her eyes filled with tears.

We fell into each other's arms. Without speaking, Marushka started to cry soundlessly on my shoulder. Her wordless weeping told me more than the most elaborate phrases could have done. A chance of perhaps one in a million - a truly miraculous meeting.

**Had we missed each other, our fate would have been totally different for the rest of our lives.**

We would have lived separate lives. We did not need the telephone any more. We left, holding hands and, without words, knew that from then on we would not be separated. We sat on one of the crates. Looking at her pale face, I said "You must have had a lot of trouble coming. How long did you travel? What is happening at home?"

In her lilting, Lithuanian accent, she told me in short sentences that she had left Kaunas (the capital city of Lithuania, approximately 500 km away) the day war started. At the Polish Lithuanian border, her mother had reached her by telephone, begging her to return. But she refused, wanting to be with me, and had bought a ticket to Warsaw, although it was very difficult for civilians to obtain permission. The journey had lasted three days instead of the normal seven hours. In Malkinie, the train had been bombed and rails demolished so that passengers had to travel a few kilometres by foot, carrying their belongings. Tired and hungry, she had arrived in Warsaw on the day of the evacuation.

Finally we were advised that the train for the Ministry was waiting on one of the side platforms. With our belongings, we went to seek seats which we

found in a smoking compartment of a Pullman car. None of us knew the destination of our train.

Many military trains passed us without stopping. Near us stood an ambulance train. Through the car windows we saw for the first time wounded soldiers from the front. Wearing dirty, open army coats, some bandaged soldiers were standing, others lay on the floor. They were unshaven, grey-faced, and their dressings were soaked with blood.

How quickly human material is used up during war. It is only the seventh day of the war and how different these soldiers look from the shining ranks parading only three weeks ago. Then they parted before the stands where high dignitaries and beautifully clad ladies were sitting. Today, some were groaning and cursing, lying on the floors of freight trains - and those taking part in the parade, frightened and sweating, were dragging their luggage into evacuee trains.

We returned to our train as we heard a rumour that it would be moving soon. The crates containing all the documents were still in front of the station. The train, standing at a siding, had only one luggage carriage.

Time was running out and there was no-one to help cart our heavy burden. The Station Master in a red cap informed us that the train had to leave immediately as the track was required for another transport. He did not listen to the Ministry's councillors and gave the signal for departure. The train started moving and in the carriage were only two crates. Somebody later mentioned that these crates contained French wines belonging to a friendly embassy. The crates containing the secret documents were left near the platform. What happened to them I don't know I never heard about them again.

Our train travelled to the east, not stopping at any stations. There were eight people in our compartment. An elderly lady, elegantly dressed, with well-manicured hands, looked tenderly at her son who was sitting next to her. Her son was a moderately handsome twenty year old man, partly bald, with extremely long fingernails and nonchalant manners. A signet ring with a coat of arms completed the fashionable style of a young dandy. What he did in the Ministry I didn't know. Probably a protégé of a high dignitary. Further down were two gentlemen of medium age; one, with glasses and unruly hair, occasionally looking at the ceiling, was writing something in a notebook, with the other hand opened his suitcase containing nicely assorted sandwiches which he devoured whilst looking unseeing through the window. They were employees of M. S. Z. Next to us sat a young blonde with a snub-nose. She was

a stenographer. On her lap she nursed a fluffy poodle with a red bow. Her five-year-old daughter was sitting on Granny's knee. Granny was dressed like most grannies in a dark frock, dark overcoat, dark shoes. Her face was pleasant and kind and all her thoughtfulness was concentrated on her grandchild, as usually happens with grandmothers. We were the last two. Not all of us were to arrive at our destination.

We still did not know what our destination was to be. There was a rumour that we were going to Lublin, a city in south-east Poland. In the hope of preventing air attacks, the name of the place for evacuated Head Offices was kept secret.

After a few hours, we were approaching Czeremcha station when there was a loud boom, rumbling and crashing. The air shock was so strong that windows in our compartment shattered into small pieces, covering the floor. We all looked out, but were at first unable to see anything. Someone yelled, "Germans are bombing the station!" The train stopped, reversed noisily, and started to travel backwards, leaving the station.

Thanks to the presence of mind of the engine driver, we were saved for the time being. Something was burning - the train was covered with dust clouds. Through the windows, we could see airplanes with their black crosses. They were circling the lines like bloodthirsty crows. Suddenly the planes circling low opened fire with the loud noise of their machine guns. Bullets showered the train like hail and we all fell to the floor, trying to protect our heads with our hands. The train stopped on a high embankment.

Passengers ran to doors, pushing and trampling each other. Suitcases were thrown through windows and some women fell from the high steps and rolled down the embankment. I was very astonished to see our typist with her poodle pressed tightly to her, running away from the train. She left her daughter and mother to fend for themselves. The balding man with the signet ring from our compartment jumped through the window and others, including us, pushed through the doors.

Running down the embankment, we looked for some shelter. In front of us was a meadow, behind it a cemetery, to the right the burning station building. Some were trying to hide in holes caused by previous bombing; others, panic-stricken, were simply running. We found a potato cellar dug in the ground. We could only stand in the porch as the cellar was locked. Not a very good shelter, but it had to do.

The planes disappeared behind the forest. We waited. We city-dwellers were not used to bombing without previous warning by sirens. We did not watch the sky; others were doing it for us. We were used to wailing sirens warning us of the approaching danger. A short, interrupted sound told us 'All Clear' and we could continue, carefree, doing our work. Here, for the first time, we had our baptism of fire. We were left by ourselves. Now we understood that here, beyond the Front, the sky could hold deadly peril. We had to watch it, this clear September sky, but no longer with a calm smile.

Probably ten minutes passed - the meadow looked empty, no-one was on the train. The glow of the burning buildings and their crumbling walls only emphasised the past dangerous moments. We had started thinking about returning to the train when someone pointed towards the western sky. On the horizon appeared three small dots, then another three. They were flying in formation. Of course they were planes - but whose? Perhaps ours? We were not certain, still being very naive. Already we could hear them. Marushka put on her glasses, as otherwise her horizon was not more than 100 metres, but it was impossible to distinguish the markings.

"You know, Marushka, I think we should run. We are certainly too close to the station."

We left our cellar and, hurriedly, went towards the cemetery and the forest behind it. Together with a group of others, we reached the cemetery. Abruptly a whizzing sound and, a second later, a terrible blast of an exploding bomb nearby. We fell to the ground between the tombs with buzzing in our ears. We were lying between two tombs, pressed into the ground. A few seconds of silence and then again the piercing and whizzing sound. Now we knew what to expect. This sound of falling bombs haunted us and brought to memory the unpleasant feeling of prickling between the shoulder-blades and in the pit of the stomach. It seemed that the bomb would drop right into the centre of the back. When we heard the first, second and then the fourth explosion, we gave a sigh of relief - they were not hitting us. The earth was shaking and clouds of dark dust hid the sky. Next to us, a hatless woman with tousled hair was holding two small children. The children, holding tightly to their mother, were crying. The mother was praying loudly, looking at the cross on the nearest tomb. Other people were laying between tombs, pressing against tombstones as if looking here for shelter. The living were trying to be near the dead in the face of mortal fear. No more explosions - a deathly silence, only the bending branches of old birches rustled slightly.

When the planes departed, people in the old cemetery came alive; from behind the moss-covered tombs 'resurrected' people began to emerge. The cemetery sheltered us, gave us rest but, luckily, not the eternal one. What to do now? We were not ready to go back to the train as we had no assurance that at this was the last bombing. We decided to look for shelter in the nearby forest. On the way, we met women without hats or handbags, and with lacerated hands and feet. In their blind panic, they had injured themselves on barbed wires, and some had even lost their shoes. In the forest, we came upon a machine gun company. The soldiers began to curse us, saying that by running through the meadow, we might have brought a new air raid upon them. They showed us how to take cover behind trees and under their shade so that the pilots would be unable to see us. Some of the passengers were frightened on seeing soldiers, thinking it might be the Front, and ran deeper into the forest. The planes did not return. Probably an hour passed, then people started to come out of their hiding places.

We returned to the train which had been shelled. The windows were gone, but it was otherwise undamaged. A loud whistle announced its departure and soon we were again under way. Passing the station, we saw many craters on both sides of the rails. Only one bomb damaged the side track. We passed Czeremcha (a small town near Warsaw) and our train rushed towards Kowel. Slowly the people quietened down. The blonde with the snub nose was combing her poodle who had used his freedom to roll in the grass. One of the employees again started to chew his sandwiches which he had left behind during the raid. The other one talked to the grandmother, cursing the Germans to high heaven, full of indignation towards bombing and shooting at a train full of civilians.

He started, full of resentment, "They were flying quite low, they saw that this transport consisted of civilians only. This is beastly, it is barbarous to shoot at defenceless, unarmed people. These raids are terrorist and there must be consequences. This train is part of the Corps Diplomatique; one must write a firm protest to the League....' He wanted to add .." of Nations," but stopped in time and continued "to the Head Office of the International Red Cross in Geneva."

"But will they listen?" asked grandmother, full of doubt. "It is war you know."

"Yes, I agree, but everything has its limits. We are living in the twentieth century and not in the time of Huns when children and women were murdered without mercy. Germany is considered to be a cultured nation. Armies fight

armies; this I understand - this is war - but there must exist some humanitarian war." He probably liked this expression as he repeated once again "a humanitarian war with a moral code in respect of the civilian population which has no part in the war." He stopped and, with a shaky hand, lit a cigarette.

The passengers stopped talking. The train was travelling fairly fast. The elderly lady sitting at the window said she thought she could hear approaching planes. We all tried to look through the window at the sky. From other compartments, people were leaning out too. The previous experience had already taught us a lesson. Our watchfulness increased. At the same instant, we all spotted the planes coming from, the west.

"One, two, three," someone started counting. The whole train was already alert. A few seconds later there was a squeal of brakes and the train stopped in an open field. Without waiting for orders, we all filed quickly from the train. In front of us was a small, wet forest with some puny trees, further on a meadow, and only farther away was the outline of a real forest, but no buildings. Jumping over the signal wires, the travellers started to disperse amongst the scanty growth.

From somewhere, a man with a white armband bearing the letters O.P.L. (Defence against air raids) appeared and, in a loud voice, advised us all to go to the left side of the rails.

We noticed many people carrying their luggage, hurrying nervously away. We reached some shrubs and Marushka's foot got stuck in a swampy pool. We walked slower, looking for drier ground. Finding a track, we at last arrived at a dry clearing. We sat down and, lighting a cigarette, began scanning the sky. The planes were flying slightly to the side and fairly high. Every once in a while, singly and in groups, people slipped out of the scrub to hurry into deeper bush.

Half an hour passed. The planes had long since disappeared beyond the horizon. Travellers calmed down and were walking along the pass between the shrubs. We went to look for berries. Here, in the country, a raid seemed less menacing. After a further fifteen minutes, short whistles sounded from the train. It was our signal to return and also our local "All Clear" sound. We turned towards the rails.

We were astonished to see groups of people with luggage piled neatly beside them. They did not show any inclination to return to the train. Curiosity got the better of me and I started talking to a lady sitting on her suitcases.

"We have had enough of this travel under bombs. We will stay here. Sooner or later the train will get hit."

"Do you know someone here?"

"No-one at all. We will go to the first village and stay there. Perhaps, in the meantime, we might learn something about this war."

We returned to the train. Men with the white armbands asked us to hurry. A few additional short whistles and the train moved again, leaving a sizeable group behind. Luckily, we passed through some stations without incident. At some stations we saw transports from different government offices. This indicated the general direction of the government evacuation.

On one of the small stations (I have forgotten which), there was a funny incident. When the train stopped at the station, some people went onto the platform to stretch their legs. The station was surrounded by forests and near the rails were stacked wooden beams. A little further on there was a sawmill and stacks of wood. The scent of resin was quite strong. Suddenly a plane appeared above the forest, starting an indescribable panic. Elderly gentlemen in vests and soft slippers began climbing frantically over the stacked beams, as the entire platform was covered with wood. Although it was tragic, it was also extremely funny to watch this hurdle race. Feet were slipping on the smooth beams. They started to crawl on all fours, sticking out their fat behinds, and women lost their beautiful high heels between the beams. Those gentlemen, not long ago wearing black frock-coats and walking sedately through the Ministry, now really looked funny and quite without dignity. It was a tragic-comic situation as the single plane was not an enemy aircraft, but our own bi-plane with clear red/white markings on its wings. It was the only one we saw during all our travel. We had to wait a while for the gentlemen to return. Red-faced, they were greeted with friendly jokes by the passengers.

Late at night, our train arrived at Kiwerce Station where we stopped for the night. Marushka and I went straight to the first aid room - "two victims of war". Marushka had stomach-ache and looked like a blown-up balloon as we had not eaten anything hot, only sandwiches washed down with lemonade.

I had twisted my ankle when jumping from the train. My foot was badly swollen and, thanks to this, we were able to spend the night in comparative comfort on wooden benches in the waiting room.

In the morning, our travels continued. Ahead of us stretched the fertile fields of Wolyn (Eastern Poland, bordering on the U.S.S.R.) We were far from the

Front. German bombers ceased worrying us. Everything looked peaceful and normal in the quiet hamlets. We could look freely at the scenery as it was unnecessary to peer at the sky. White farmhouses, surrounded by trees and bushes, nestled amongst the gently sloping hills of Wolyn. Here and there, lazy yoked oxen turned over furrows of dark earth and herds of mottled cows grazed among rusty rye stubbles. It seemed that conflict could not reach this land. It was quiet and tranquil.

The sun was setting behind a forest when we passed Rowno, a Polish town in East Poland. Only the last rays of the sunset were reflected in our windows.

Late at night we arrived in Krzemienice, the capital of Wolyn and an ancient Polish fortress.

This was our destination.



# Krzemienice

The M.S.Z. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) was located in a college building. We found accommodation in a white, single-storey building belonging to the Director of the college, Stefan Czarnoski. The Czarnoski family were our relations and, therefore, we had gone to them upon arrival. After the unpleasant, two-day journey, we had a good night's sleep between clean sheets in comfortable beds.

Next morning I went to report to the Ministry. Among several long, white buildings I found our offices. The imposing thick walls, the deep window niches and long passages with arched ceilings breathed of the Middle Ages. On the left side were many empty halls and auditoria. Typewriters were placed on school benches. Tired messengers, shuffling along, looked uncomfortable in these different surroundings. Occasionally some employees sauntered along with their hands full of documents.

I had trouble discovering what I was expected to do, or even if I was required. Stamping up and down stairs I at last found, in one of the classrooms, a rudimentary nucleus of a personnel office. It was the secretary of the Personnel Office, and her typewriter. A small, elderly lady with narrow, cold eyes and a dry, dispassionate voice. She was not only the rudiment of the Personnel Office, but rather its pillar. Other additions like the Director or Head of the Department were merely bureaucratic extras to her personality.

She greeted me coldly and, without waiting, said, "Today you have no work as your department is not yet organised. Please come tomorrow for instructions. You are free to relax after the tedious journey," she added with something of a smile.

I left with great pleasure. The weather was perfect and the town unknown to me. I called for Marushka and we plunged into the narrow, winding streets going towards the hill Queen Bona.

At the foot of the hill sprawled the beautiful small town. A narrow lane climbed a steep hill, formed like a large mound. On top of the mound stood the ruins of the old castle.

Standing high up between the ruins, it seemed we could embrace with our eyes all Wolyn and Ukrainia. Only somewhere far ahead beyond the blue horizon we lost the view of the boundless farm fields, meadows and pastures,

dotted with clumps of bush. The township occupied a limey and rocky hillside below the foot of "Bona" as if trying to climb upwards. The white college was like an old manor with its massive walls. It was surrounded by small white houses covered with vines, hiding between trees. Narrow, winding streets wriggled between irregularly-built houses on the cliff of the hill. A rapid stream hollowed a deep bed through the limey ground, undermining old alder wood and bent willows.

This was Krzemienice, town of old legends, rampart of Wolyn's culture.

Those quiet, grass covered streets were now swarming with strange people; visitors from the outside world.

This morning the local inhabitants were probably amazed when looking through their windows. On the streets passed luxury cars, Warsaw taxis and trucks from the city firms. Hooting, they drove hordes of pedestrians from the streets, people who were strangers to this town. Ladies in fancy hats and latest model frocks were walking carefully and awkwardly on cobblestones with men in beautifully tailored suits and smart hats.

An unusual bustle continued all day.

Embassies, legations and consulates were arriving from foreign countries. Pressmen and correspondents from foreign papers always followed the Corps Diplomatique, besides ministers, senators and other dignitaries and their families and friends.

At home we met new visitors: the Deputy Minister with his wife, their maid, chauffeur, and a little dog on long slim legs, plus a countless number of leather suitcases and trunks. There were also three directors from our department and a small, thin man with a very pleasant face who was the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Poniatoski. Because of the new arrivals, there was trouble with accommodation, especially as madam required a salon and at least two maids.

After tea our hostess, my cousin, asked us to help cover the windows with heavy drapes. As this happy town had so far not experienced an air raid, nobody had bothered.

In the salon, the Deputy Minister's wife was reclining on the couch, talking affectionately to the terrier who was dressed in a black coat. His collar had little bells, and his eyes were big and tearful. She kindly permitted us to cover the windows. She did not take much notice of our presence and tenderly whispered in French to her terrier. Standing on the windowsill, I glanced sidelong at her. She was a big woman of indeterminate age, tall, fat, with thin dark hair.

There was a discreet knock at the door.

"Enter," she called, without changing her position.

With a deep bow, a French correspondent entered. Indicating the couch, she asked him to sit down. She spoke to him in French, words which shattered us to the raw.

"Monsieur, I think the situation is more than critical. We are leaving Poland, going to Paris, via Rumania. I would advise you to do the same".

She stopped speaking as a few diplomats arrived. As she was glancing at us impatiently, we left without continuing our job.

Next day I again went to the Ministry but nothing had changed, nothing was organised, and my attendance was quite unnecessary. I went with Marushka to town to shop and to send a wire to her parents, advising them that we were in a quiet, small town and were all right. How naive we were, considering the next developments.

The shops were all open and there were crowds in the streets as it was a market day.

We were just crossing the street to go to the market when, suddenly, like lightning from a clear sky, German planes dived towards the market and the main street. The next few moments were so weird and uncanny that I am unable to recollect them clearly. The moment I saw the bombs there was already the thunder of exploding bombs. The houses and trees were trembling and the earth shook under our feet. Panic stricken horses with fragments of broken carts rushed straight at us. I jerked Marushka and we both dived under a tree. Boards, bricks and broken iron sheets were falling on the street. Lifting my head, I saw in front of me, above me, and all around me a cloud of dust and sand and whitish flakes fluttering in the air. I shook my head; something must be wrong with my eyes.

"Marushka, do you see it? Is it snow?"

"No, they are feathers!"

When the dust settled down a bit, the sight was unbelievable. There was a cloud of feathers all over the market. One bomb had fallen on a stall of goose feathers and the explosion had lifted them high in the air, covering the sky. Broken carts with the remains of human bodies and horses' bodies, carcasses lay everywhere. What a sticky, indescribable mess. Debris from broken buildings covered the footpath and the street. In the market place, human heads

lay scattered about between heads of cabbages. Milk, cream and blood flowed together, producing a rusty colour in the gutter. Near the dead owners were their dead horses, still in harness. Some, with their torn bellies and bleeding from their noses, were kicking helplessly. The wounded were calling for help and groaning men were lying on the ground. Between them were hens with their legs tied together, but still trying to fly. The moaning of people, neighing of horses, grunting of pigs, cackling of fowls were the cry of common pain and terror.

The bombers were already far away. Perhaps the pilots were already reporting the "successful bombing of enemy targets."

Near us sat an elderly woman in a linen shirt. She was not moving, only breathing heavily. A narrow thread of blood ran from the corner of her mouth. She was looking at us with wide open eyes, full of tears.

"Are you hurt?" I asked, as I could not see any injuries. She did not answer. I got up from under the tree and went to her. The sight which greeted me made me feel sick and my veins began pounding. All of her back, including her blouse, was torn by shrapnel. The flesh was hanging in strips, exposing broken ribs. I turned towards Marushka. She tried to get up but could not. I ran to her. It was only a dislocated swollen ankle. It must have happened when I jerked her under the tree.

From the nearby hospital, nursing staff started arriving with stretchers. We lifted the injured woman gently onto a stretcher. She was in shock. I helped Marushka to sit down on some steps, asking her to wait for me. Taking the stretcher, I helped carry the injured woman to the hospital. It was not easy to carry her up the steep, narrow steps without jolting. On the first floor, the entire hospital was located in one room.

Stretchers were arriving with injured. The few patients were looking on in horror. Shortly there were no beds left. The wounded were put on the floor, in the passages, and even in the hospital kitchen. The cement floor became slippery from coagulated blood. The wounded looked deathly pale. The jagged wounds were bleeding profusely.

One young peasant woman, thinking I was a doctor, grabbed my hands and, trying to kiss them, implored me to help her husband. A twenty-year-old man was lying on the passage floor - his legs were missing.

The sight before my eyes was terrible and shocking but what I saw in the next minute, in the dark end of the passage, was beyond any of my wildest

imaginings. At an ordinary kitchen sink stood an old Jew with a long, grey beard. In one hand he was holding his intestines which were falling out of his torn abdomen. The water from the tap flowed over the steaming entrails and, while rinsing off the blood, he was trying to push the slippery bowels back into his stomach. He was standing quietly, without a sound, his chest heaving and his face was covered with sweat.

I ran down and my shoes, wet from human blood, left ugly marks on the steps.

The whole town was in turmoil. It appeared that neither the college, nor any of the buildings occupied by the government or foreign powers, had been damaged. The tally for the enemy was the market square, shops on the main street, and some houses in mid-town. About forty people were killed on the spot and many more wounded. Most of those wounded were farmers who came to the market, Jews, whose shops were nearby and other civilians, including some evacuees who happened to be nearby. One bomb fell on a small drapery store. Nothing was left. The store, including the owners, his family and buyers were pushed through to the basement - all were killed. Amongst the rubble were left some coats, slacks and torn bales of fabrics. Under the door of the next house was an unexploded bomb. The dark, large oblong bomb with its shining brass detonator was lying undamaged, full of explosive material. People were looking with horror, shaking their heads and speaking about the strange trick of fate. This bomb could have destroyed the house and its people, who were looking out through the window, would have met their death. Somehow fate had saved them - and buried their neighbours.

Soon foreign correspondents arrived and members of the Diplomatic Corps, led by the Papal Nuncio. They came to see with their own eyes the outcome of the terror raid. They saw the market massacre. The press took photographs, the diplomats handed in a joint protest to the hands of the Nuncio to be delivered to ... The Pope. A diplomatic note calling for vengeance from Heaven through the intervention of competent authority.

The raid made a great impression on the people of this town and the neighbouring villages. The shops were closed, the windows and doors hammered up with boards and the same evening, in fear of future raids, the locals left their town, looking for shelter in villages.

A siren was installed and observers were posted on the mount "Bona". Even some anti-aircraft units consisting of a few youths were organised, equipped

with long, old-fashioned French rifles. An order was issued to dig trenches, and a strong reminder to secure blackouts. We became wise after the event.

At dawn the next morning when enemy planes were approaching, we were given warning by a hand-turned siren. Our memory of yesterday still being quite fresh, we all jumped out of bed pretty quickly. The first to come was the Minister with his wife. He was in a nightshirt and trousers with hanging braces and holding an attaché case. His wife wore a long dressing gown, slippers and her hair in rollers. She was pressing the terrier to her ample bosom. She was irritable and demanded insistently to be led to the nearest shelter, but such did not exist. The same evening she left the town taking with her the maid, the dog and masses of luggage. She went in the direction of the Rumanian border. She was one of the first rats to leave the sinking ship.

During the next few days we had many alerts, being forced to interrupt tea three times to hurry to the basement. Nothing new at the Ministry. I was still unemployed. Marushka was unable to walk because of her swollen ankle. I went to dig trenches in the college garden.

More and more evacuees, including our boss, arrived in Krzemienice. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Beck, was dressed in the uniform of a Colonel of the Polish Army.

There were rumours that he had been to Moscow, asking for help against the Germans.

News from the Front was hazy and contradictory. There were no papers from the capital city only a small, single page - a local newsletter giving general political news. A lot of talk about help from Britain and France, about their power, how they would soon attack Germany when their mobilisation was complete. Where was the Front in Poland? Nobody knew and, if they did know, they did not tell the community. We knew the situation could not be good, especially as we had so many raids. The Germans had full supremacy in the air. We had not seen the Polish Air Force.

On the 13th September we were called to the Ministry. We all expected to be employed, at last. To our astonishment, we received three months salary as though our employer were terminating our appointments.

Next morning when passing the Ministry I saw great activity. In front of the building were buses and cars, with employees hurrying, bringing their belongings. When I asked where the Ministry was moving, I was told tersely, "To Romania." Pushing through the crowds, I looked for the secretary of the

Personnel Office. She was still in the building, packing documents. She advised me that the evacuation was to be towards Tarnopol and from there to the Romanian border as the military situation was very grave.

"You are coming too," she told me. "The visas will be completed at the border. Get your belongings and report here where the buses are leaving."

The sheep instinct took hold of me too. Taking our luggage, Marushka and I joined the others. The first buses were just leaving. Many people were still waiting. In the crowd I spotted Lesman who was nervously rushing from group to group asking for the next transport.

"When did you arrive?" I asked him. "Probably at the same time as you," he replied. He was not eager to talk. He looked pale and distracted, adjusting his glasses nervously. But I did not give in.

"How come I have not seen you, either in the train or here?" I continued.

"I came later by car. I was working here in the Press section."

"You must be well informed. What is happening? Why this hurry with evacuation?"

"Nothing good," he replied tersely, without his usual elaboration. "The Germans have broken through our lines in many places and are now pushing towards Lwow. I understand there is now danger that they might cut us off from the Rumanian border; therefore the hurry."

"All right, but what can we expect in Rumania?"

"What to expect? In this critical moment we have to save as many people as possible, organise the government in exile and fight for Poland at the side of our allies, not here but abroad. Do you understand? We must insist on speedy assistance from them."

"Yes, but Poland is still fighting and all the people cannot go, with their suitcases, to Rumania."

"Oh, Zygmunt, even now, in this dramatic moment, you are unable to curb your caustic remarks. In this case I mean of course the elite, the ... Oh, my bus .." he interrupted, grabbed his case and, without even saying goodbye, ran to the bus. The doors to the bus were crowded. Everyone wanted to get in simultaneously. One man, standing on the steps of the bus and pushing others away with his elbow, was shouting. "Gentlemen, please, ladies first" and, allowing his wife aboard, he ducked into the bus. Lesman was the next to dive

in. Now everyone was trying even harder to push through. We also tried half-heartedly, but too late. The overcrowded bus left.

We were the only ones left. Torn bits of paper were flying around on the empty street. The building stood empty, doors open. We sat down on the steps. Once again fate had decided for us and we were resigned. To be honest - who knows, should another bus have arrived and we had been told to board, maybe we would have done so. We too would have left our country, just like the others. Were we any different? Probably not but deep down we had some qualms. Instinctively, we did not want to leave our country. Our actions were hampered, fate interfered. We stayed in Poland.

We started thinking - what should we do now? Stay here and await further developments or go home? Home was far away, but there were our parents to be considered. After some deliberation, we decided to go back to Wilno. This decision was made easier because, as far as we knew, the way home did not cross the front.

Delaying no longer, we went to the station. The streets were empty; only occasionally a car went by in the direction of Tarnopol. In one of these cars we saw a well-known minister and also speaker of the senate whom I knew from Wilno as a voivode (head of an administrative division). (Note: It was Mr. Racziewicz, who later in London became President of the Polish Government in exile). Most of our female students were in love with him as no-one could wear tails as well as he and his top hat sat perfectly on his well-shaped head. He was to the female students the ideal government representative who, with assured elegance, could even carry his mace beautifully.

The car carried him to an unknown future. Who could tell - perhaps to a new future of dignity and honour.

Late in the evening, the train left towards Rowno. We bought tickets through to Wilno, approximately 400 km away.

# On The River Trail

The train was not crowded, with only an occasional passenger in a compartment. Not many were keen to go in the direction of the Front. Everywhere there was darkness and deathly quiet. Lighting a match, we put our belongings away and sat close to each other. On the empty platform, the stationmaster's lamp appeared, moved up and down a few times, and we started to move away. The hilly outlines of Krzemienice were barely visible. The monotonous sound of the wheels made us sleepy and we began to doze. After about an hour, the train stopped at Kamienica. Yells, calls and banging doors indicated a large crowd on the platform.

The darkness was so complete that it was impossible to distinguish anything. On the platform, seeking information, I found that the crowd consisted only of soldiers. I went to the stationmaster who informed me that the train was not going any further, that we would have to change trains and our next train would come soon.

After a half-hour wait, the blue light of a diesel train appeared. It was a passenger train full of soldiers. When it stopped, the soldiers waiting on the platform rushed to the doors. We had great trouble pushing our way on board and trying to find room between the packed rucksacks of the soldiers. There was no hope of squeezing into a compartment. We found room in the passage near a window. The soldiers were tired and sleepy. They did not talk, but tried to find a comfortable position to rest.

After an hour, Marushka was very tired from standing. I made her floor-space along the wall, giving her the gas mask as a pillow. I sat down on our suitcase, putting my feet in such a way that I could protect her head from the feet of passers-by.

It was dawn when the train arrived at Zdalbunowo. As the train was going no further, we had to leave.

The stationmaster did not know if another train would be coming, but he told us to wait. It was impossible to enter the waiting room as it was packed with soldiers. Near the station buildings were a few wooden houses. On one was a sign "Station Restaurant," on the other "Grocer". The restaurant was also very crowded and full of smoke. At the tables, which were covered with grey paper, soldiers were drinking tea.

I thought it time to buy some food for our journey and went to the grocer shop which was also packed full. One could only buy shoelaces, washing powder and matches. The prices were fantastic - a box of matches was 50 grosh (twenty-five times more than the normal price). I went back without buying anything.

Suddenly there was a commotion. Soldiers were grabbing their belongings and running away from the station; the train gave one piercing whistle and backed out of the station. We understood - it was an air raid. Grabbing the suitcase, we ran with Marushka through the restaurant kitchen into the backyard, hiding between trees. There were no shelters, no trenches. In seconds we could hear the bomber planes above us. Three German bombers were making tight turns over the station. We fell to the ground. They dived, coming in quite low. There were seconds of waiting with pounding hearts and heavy breathing. A tremendous explosion ... and then again, and again and again. The earth was trembling. We felt a blast of air, and then all became quiet. We looked around. Plumes of smoke curled above the rails near the station. We waited, but the planes did not return, so we all went back to the station to survey the damage. The main railway track was badly damaged and there was no hope of further travel by train. As Rowno was less than 20 km. away, we decided to walk, hoping that at a bigger station we might be able to find a possibility of further transport in the direction of Wilno. I strapped the two suitcases together and, throwing them over my shoulder, we went in the direction of Rowno.

The highway went over a bridge where police were checking identification documents and asking where we were heading. One policeman, on hearing that we were going towards Wilno, became very friendly as he himself was from Wilno. He gave us the address of his family, asking us to tell them that, up until this time, he was alive and healthy. He also informed us that, walking along the highway, we would have to be very careful and watch the sky for enemy planes as the German planes were shooting with machine guns at anything that moved. He told us that on the highway to Warsaw there were many private cars, bullet-ridden, and near them quite often suitcases, clothing and sometimes even money. He advised us that, after spotting planes, to leave the highway immediately and look for shelter between trees or shrubs. If there were none near us, just fall to the ground and not move. Worriedly, we continued our travel. Marushka put on her glasses and walked in front, being the observer. I followed with the suitcases, as a supply column should.

After many hours, with sweat dripping into my eyes and my observer walking with head bent low and dragging her dusty feet, we came to the suburbs of Rowno.

The streets were crowded. There were evacuees everywhere with their suitcases and rucksacks. They were sitting on steps in front of shops, they were crowding the pubs, forming groups, asking each other for information. Mainly they were men of conscriptable age.

Here I heard for the first time that this age group had orders to retreat to the east, away from the approaching Front.

Here one could see miners' hats from Silesia, tram conductors from Warsaw and Krakow, many railway employees and postmen. The crowd was disorientated. Nobody knew for certain what to do with oneself. Tiredness and exasperation showed on every face.

"If only the army would take us, at least we would know what to do," was the bitter comment.

The streets were packed with military cars and trucks, as well as with groups of evacuees, children and belongings. There were signs of previous bombings. Many houses were in ruins - some were still burning. We rested a while on a fence and then continued towards the station.

Suddenly, in the street I saw my old University friend.

"George, how are you?" I called out, being very happy to see him and thinking that now we would have a friend for company on our journey. I introduced Marushka as they had not met before.

"Where have you come from?" I asked.

"From Warsaw, as an evacuee."

"Will you come with us, back to Wilno?"

"No, I cannot now."

"Why not?"

"My wife, who ..." but I interrupted "Nata is here too? That is splendid; we will all go together." His wife, whom I had known for a long time, was also a student with us in Wilno.

"We can't go now," he explained, "she is ill ... she will soon have a baby. We decided to stay here. I found a place in a village near Rowno. You stay with us

for a few weeks and we will go together later. I have even been planning a safe, cheap and comfortable route."

"Which way?"

"Floating down the Horyn, through all the Polesia. The Horyn passes not far from here. It is deep and one can paddle down as far as Dawigrodek."

"Not a bad idea, but we are in a hurry and can't wait. Anyway I already have train tickets to Wilno."

"I don't think you will be able to go by train," he told us in his characteristic, phlegmatic way. "There are many people waiting for the train for the last few days. But you should enquire."

"Will you go with us?"

"Sure I will."

We continued on our way to the station, talking about recent events. Suddenly we heard approaching aircraft. We spotted nine planes immediately. They were flying in formation towards Rowno. We rushed along, looking for some shelter or a house. The nearest, a two-storey, brick house had no shelter. I tried the door and it was not locked. The house was empty as everyone had left. I looked into the rooms and went through the kitchen to the back yard. They must have left only a short while ago as a meal was still cooking on the stove. The dull growl of the three-engine planes thundered gloomily above our heads. I ran back and we decided to await our fate here. In this by now common situation, we were seized with the feeling of utter helplessness. This small house offered no guarantee for survival. Before our eyes were the ruins of brick houses in Rowno. However there was nothing we could do, so we just closed the door and sat down on the steps to wait.

After the last raid in Krzemienice, Marushka was more nervous and frightened. She was feeling sick - the sight of the wounded and dead had been a shock. We waited for what seemed a very long time. Then we could hear the bombing; it had started again. Some bombs were close, others were further away. The house shook and glass from the windowpanes was breaking. Marushka was pressing towards me and I hugged her closely. Distressing seconds passed. Would the destruction reach us? We had the feeling of being in a closed box, not knowing what was happening nearby. Some bombs were falling in series of threes and fours. We could also hear machine guns not far away, probably ours, trying to shoot down a plane. At last the thunder subsided and the growl of the planes stopped.

We opened the door and looked out. No planes were visible, but around us were many columns of smoke. Slowly, people started, to emerge from their hiding places.

We continued towards the station. Alas, of the station only ruins, clouds of dust and smoke were left. On the platform were bits of furniture, ceiling and plenty of broken glass. Between the railway lines were big crates, twisted rails and torn portraits of our President and both Field Marshals.

This meant the finish to our train travel. Sad and depressed, we said goodbye to my friend and returned to town, seeking some accommodation. With great difficulty, we found a room with a single bed in a small hotel. Exhausted, both physically and mentally, we sat dawn on the bed, leaning against the wall, and started to think about our situation. It was not enviable. Home was 400 km. away. To walk with two suitcases was hopeless. To wait here for a couple of days, hoping that the railway lines would be repaired? Marushka was quite definite that she did not want to stay in Rowno. I found that one couldn't buy food for any money. Eventually we agreed to leave Rowno the next day at dawn. Of course we intended to walk, hoping for a lift and maybe finding a station where trains were still departing. Marushka hurried down the street to get some material to make a rucksack as walking for any length of time with suitcases was out of the question. She returned with some striped pieces of fabric, usually used for making mattresses. We made a bag resembling a rucksack with shoulder straps. Into it we crammed the most necessary things and the rest, including two leather suitcases, the hotel maid exchanged for a handful of salt.

We slept dead-to-the-world and, feeling rested, the next morning left Rowno at dawn. The morning was cold and misty. The streets were lined with black, smouldering cinders from the previous bombing. On some fences were placards and, although dirty with smoke, they still colourfully displayed scenes of thousands of planes flying to the West and huge tanks smashing German fortifications. I remembered the first days in Warsaw. Propaganda and Reality. What a deceptive picture they represented now. Where are our planes, our powerful tanks? Alas, only on posters.

After leaving Rowno, the highway led north. We had 400 km before us. Our destination, although very far, was quite definite. As it was not hot yet, we could walk fast. Upon reaching the main highway we started to see more evacuees, the majority of them also walking - some choosing small side tracks and some peasant carts drawn by tired, scraggy horses, laden to the top. It was not

possible to get a lift. The evacuees flowed down the highway, some singly, some in groups and even in columns. Some were fleeing the Front, others were returning home. Most were looking for a way out of this snare which the zig-zagging broken Front line had created.

It was impossible to get any kind of food. The villages and hamlets were stripped clean of food and their inhabitants irritated and tired by constant demands for food. Some even refused a drink of water.

In the afternoon, already fairly tired, we arrived in Aleksandria. We rested on the steps of a beer hall. We were covered with sweat and dirt and our eyes were sore. We felt rather pessimistic. We had made 20 km with another 380 to go.

I still had a few hundred zloty. Maybe we could hire a cart? Marushka went to look around. In the meantime I took out all my maps which I had acquired in Warsaw and began to study our route. I found Aleksandria and noted with astonishment that it was situated on the River Horyn. I glanced around, looking for the river. Only now did I notice the landscape. This partly burned, poor, eastern type little town lay on a gentle rise surrounded by meadows. Through the meadows wound a wavy line of trees and bushes, almost hiding with their green canopy the silvery waters of the Horyn River.

Near the town, along the river, was a very large park. Behind old oaks and chestnut trees I could see white walls of an old manor. I looked back to the map which I was holding between my legs. In the beginning the Horyn made a turn to the west but, after a few bends, flowed straight north and joined the Pripet River in the same direction as our route to Wilno. Maybe we could float down the Horyn? This possibility seemed very attractive; therefore I was not disappointed with the news Marushka brought. Nobody would give us a horse as the army was taking horses from the roads. Also nobody would leave their home as one did not know if once one departed, one would be able to return.

Somebody had been able to get a horse and cart the day before to go to Kostopol, 30 km away, and it had cost 1,000 zloty! In reply I showed Marushka the map and told her about the intended project, pointing out the advantages. Firstly, we would have our own cheap transport and, secondly, we would not use the overcrowded ways and therefore not be depleted of food by evacuees. Besides, going by boat is a very pleasant sport.

"Just think," I was saying, full of enthusiasm, "no dust, no highway, no bombs. Instead of bombers, cranes will be soaring above our heads - instead of submarines, trout will whisk past and a violet moon will shine on the flood. In

our hollowed out trunk we, hugging each other, will float on like lovers in a cheap romance."

Marushka accepted my project. I don't know if she was influenced by the vision of the cranes or the absence of submarines but she accepted it happily.

With the decision made, we felt a return of energy. I put my maps away and, holding hands, we went in search of a boat as without it our plans would fail. Near the park stood a hovel thrown together from charred boards, the roof made with old, rusted iron sheets. Through the wall stuck a metal pipe from which smoke was coming. We came nearer. A thin woman in a dirty blouse was cooking something in oil and the smell of fish was very strong. With her sleeves she constantly cleaned her eyes as they, were weeping from the smoke coming from the stove straight into her face. In the; corner of this room was a plank bed covered with straw and pillows. A small fir table completed the furnishing of this shanty. In front of the hut, small children were playing. Before the shanty stood a crate, turned upside down, and on it sat an old fisherman with a pipe in his mouth.

I turned to him and, without any preliminaries, asked "Mister, I was told that you have a boat for sale and would like to buy it."

He did not reply immediately but looked at his wife, then at me, gave a few puffs on his pipe, spat over his left shoulder, wiped his moustache with his sleeve, and asked me in a heavy Ukrainian dialect "Where would you be from?"

"From Warsaw."

"Why do you need a boat?"

I told him about our plans, explaining how hard it would be to continue our travels by foot.

"It will be hard-going with a canoe on the Horyn. She is a lazy river - there is hardly any current."

"Is she deep?"

"Deep she is, very deep. One can't reach the bottom."

Offering him a cigarette, I came to business.

"So what about this canoe?"

"She is not a real canoe but she can go on the Horyn. Yes, I do have one."

"Would you sell her?"

"First you should look at her. Maybe you won't like her."

"Where is she? Far?"

"There, under the bushes near the river."

"Could we have a look?"

"If you want to, we can go."

He got up heavily, filled his pipe, took a piece of coal from the fire which he put into the pipe, again gave a few puffs, spat, and turned towards the river. He pointed out to us the dugout canoe that was lying upside down in the bushes. I had a look. Her bottom looked old and showed damage, here and there patched with iron sheets. I turned her over. It was a hollowed-out log from some big tree, dark with age. Very primitive. She reminded one more of a trough, than a boat.

"Is she leaking?" I asked, looking with distrust at some rotten boards.

"Maybe she will let a few drops through. She dried out in the sun but, after some time in the water, she should hold."

"How much do you want?" I asked, kicking the bottom with my shoe. Instead of replying, he first gave a few more puffs, spat again and asked cautiously, "How much will you give?"

"I don't know" I replied honestly. "I have never bought a boat in my life."

He thought for a while, scratching his head.

"Say thirty zloty. Will that be too much?"

"All right," I agreed immediately, " but you should add oars."

He seemed quite happy. He was expecting to have to haggle about the price. Now he replied immediately.

"An oar is lying behind me but and I will even add a punting pole for pushing." The business was completed. Our project now became a reality. Going back to the house, I asked the fisherman to whom the park and manor belonged.

"Here lives the great lord, Prince Lubomirski. This is Aleksandria."

"Is it a great property?"

"He owns thousands of acres, many farms, spread through three counties. He is a great man. Even the senior constable greets him with a deep bow."

"You are neighbours?" I asked, smiling, as his shanty stood right behind the park fence.

He replied with bitterness, "It is not an easy life with such a neighbour. He is not much of a man - he is a bloody aristocrat."

"Was it your hut which burned down?" I asked, pointing to the charred remains of a nearby hut.

"Yes, all my homestead burnt down."

"Surely not now, during the war?"

Sitting down on the upturned wooden box, he started to tell his story. "It would be nearly a year ago when there was a great fire in Aleksandria. Most of the houses and huts were burned down. Only the palace of the Prince remained. It was a great disaster for us. I, my wife and seven children were left with only the clothes on our bodies and without a roof. We went to the Mayor for help. In the shire they gave all of us some money and people started to rebuild their homes. I also wanted to build a hut but the council would not give me a permit."

"Why not? I asked, astonished.

"The Prince had forbidden it. He wanted to extend his park and our hut was in the way. Then, when the hut burned down he used this opportunity and told the council not to give a permit for building."

I could not believe it. "How can he? It is your land, isn't it?"

"Mine and not mine. My grandfather lived here but they say that, according to the law, it is serf's land - it is ours but belongs to the Prince."

"But you have to live somewhere. They must give you land somewhere else."

He gave an ironic smile. "I went to many offices, even to the Voivode (title of the head of an administrative division). I wanted to fall on my knees before the Prince. And what? Nothing. The Voivode sent me to the council and, from there, they sent me to the Prince. The Prince did not speak to me.

"Who am I? Just a peasant - the Prince does not speak with such.

"In the kitchen of the palace they told me to go to the administrator. I went there. The administrator was polite - I can't say otherwise. He asked me to sit down, looked in the books and explained;

"How much land have you got?"

"Seven and a half acres," I told him.

"Then you will get ten, but not here," he told me. "You will leave this land, man, because the Prince needs it. We will give you another piece of land across the river near the rectory."

"I don't care," I said, "as long as the land is not worse than this one."

"This you will have to settle with the priest. He is a good man you know, the priest. I will give you a paper and the priest will allot the land. His land also belongs to the Prince, like yours. Everything will be alright."

I thanked him many times and went home to share the good news with my wife. Next morning was a Sunday and I went to the priest straight after Mass. I kissed his hand and gave him the paper from the administrator. He put his glasses on and started reading, and then he yelled "What - I have to give away the presbytery land? This land is under type administration of the diocesan chancery. I do the ploughing, and the sowing and now somebody comes and wants to take the land away. I will not give it," he screamed. "Never. I don't care about your paper. The boss of this land is the diocesan chancery. Go there, good man. The land is not mine," he continued, without screaming. "I am only the caretaker of the Church property." He gave me the paper and went back to the house.

"Again I went back to the administrator," the fisherman continued, "and repeated what the priest had told me and the administrator said, "That is not our business any more. You have the paper stating that the Prince will give you even more than you possessed before. If the priest does not give it to you, go to the office and ask them to help you."

"It made my blood boil. I threw the paper to the ground and left. We built this hut on our land and I am not going to move from here!"

He continued, his voice full of sadness and bitterness "Five of my sons are now fighting at the front and I don't even know if they are still alive. We were told to defend our home and Fatherland. And where is our native home? Whose home are my sons defending? The Prince's! This bloodsucker. There is no justice, sir, no justice on this earth. Where should I welcome my sons if they come home from the front? Here, in this hovel?"

This story of a simple fisherman touched us greatly. We were unable to give him advice. We only wished him a better future after the war and left, carrying

the boat and oars along a narrow path. According to the Constitution, this path was the boundary line between the property of two equal citizens - the Prince and the fisherman.

Whilst lowering the boat into the water we had our first unpleasant surprise. A passing peasant informed us that after the first bend there was a railway bridge, under which the army would not permit anyone to pass. I went to find out. It was true. Less than a kilometre away was a railway bridge, surrounded by barbed-wire, which extended into the river. The bridge was patrolled. We hired a cart and carried the boat beyond the bridge.

We had overcome the first obstacle but lost many hours. We covered the bottom of the boat with plenty of straw and I, as the oarsman, took the place in the back with Marushka as ballast, sitting on our rucksack in the middle. I pushed away from the bank and the boat turned lazily towards the centre of the river. I hoped that there a rapid current would carry her quickly. We knew that our boat could not be fast but we felt let down by the River Horyn. It was such a lazy river that sometimes we were unable to tell the direction in which it was floating. The so-called blessed current pushed us no more than a kilometre per hour. Marushka, always fond of calculations, informed me that, depending only on the current, we would reach the river mouth in one and a half months. To get a little more speed, Marushka moved to the back with the rucksack; the bow lifted and I started to row strongly. Luckily for us, I had been rowing a kayak fairly frequently. Our boat started to move a lot faster. The river in this place was not wide - not more than ten to fifteen metres from bank to bank. The great advantage was that the river was deep; the shallow banks gave way immediately to a much greater depth. Horyn gave the impression of being a channel rather than a river. Before we had time to be satisfied with the pleasure of boating, it began to get dark. As we were passing a bend where the river touches a road, we saw a man with his shirt off, rinsing his soapy face. He raised his hand and called to us, asking where we were going. He was very happy to hear that we were proceeding towards Wilno.

"I, too, am going to Wilno. I am from Wilno. Please take me with you. I will help rowing." I slowed down and looked at Marushka. This was a possibility we had not included in our plans.

"Do you have a lot of luggage?" I asked, hesitantly. "No, only this bag," pointing to a small bag lying in the grass. "You can see yourself that this boat is very small and an extra load may ground it."

"No, it will not go under" he said, very assured. "I am not heavy." He rinsed his face, dressed hurriedly, probably thinking that all had been settled. I had nothing against a try. On such a river one had to row constantly and an additional oarsman would be welcome. I could not count much on Marushka who was a much better pianist than an oarswoman.

We looked him over. He was fairly young, rather nondescript with a fat face, irregular features and dark hair combed back. I discovered later on that he was 27 years old.

"I am Adam Mickiewicz," shaking our hands vigorously he introduced himself. Adam Mickiewicz was the name of the greatest Polish poet. This name surprised us and I felt like calling out "Oh, bard come to our silent boat and we will float down together to Wilno, the town of your youthful dreams," because the famous poet spent his academic years in Wilno. Slowly and very carefully we sat down in the boat as we did not know how much she would hold. First came Marushka who, being the lightest, sat in the front, then our new companion and, lastly, myself. The boat sat rattier deep, barely a handbreadth above the water. Although more stable, she became much slower.

It became dark and we could hear some explosions away in the west. They began singly, then closer together and, after a while, a continuous thunder. We were in no doubt that we were hearing the Front as the sky in the west was clear, with nothing like a storm in sight. I changed places with our new companion. We had to pass each other in a very narrow place, holding onto the sides of the boat. Marushka watched carefully, trying to adjust the balance. The Bard, as we called him, being the guest climbed over me and, taking my place, started to row, full of energy and experience. I took my maps and tried to adjust them to our position. I wanted to know where the Front was. According to my reading, the thunder from the west was somewhere near Lick. Our Horyn was running quite a few kilometres away from it and then gave a sharp turn to the north-east. We decided to continue through the night, hoping to pass the Front before it came any nearer.

The evening dusk gave place to a dark night. On the western horizon flares from the exploding shells began to appear and then came the glow of fires. Our rowing became more vigorous and we changed places frequently. The sky from the east was covered with clouds, only a few stars being visible. On the bank the bulrushes and shrubs started to weave and bend and the wind was getting stronger. It became colder and heavy drops of rain were falling noisily into the river. A storm was about to start. The rain began to pelt down violently whilst

thunder and lightning came from all sides. Front and storm seemed to have united. The rumble of the artillery was overshadowed by the roar of the storm. The lightning cut through the clouds - even the light from the explosions looked paler. The lightning was cutting the darkness, the fires were illuminating the horizons and the heavy rain was screening all. We were wet to the bone. We were navigating by feel and touch. Our boat stopped suddenly, pressed against some thing. We had probably taken a blind arm of the Horyn.

We felt lost between the shrubs and reeds, trying to find the main current. The rain pelted in our faces and there was water above our ankles in the dug-out canoe. We retraced our route but, again, no current. Where the hell was the river proper? Was it a bewitched swamp? At last the canoe was free of weeds. The clean, clear water suggested that we were in the proper stream. But the next question was - in which direction should we go? Horyn was so slow that at night it was impossible to see the direction of the current. The Bard was tearing pieces off some letters and throwing them in the river and I lighting matches which were constantly going out, tried to find the direction of the current. The waves moving backwards and forwards made the bits of paper hover in the same place. We were quite disorientated. When one of the lightning flashes illuminated the nearby bank, we saw some huts through the curtain of rain. We decided to stop and look for shelter in the village. We managed to reach the bank, lifted the dug-out and, taking our belongings and the oars, set out to the village. It was near midnight. Everyone was asleep and the houses securely locked. The near Front made everyone even more cautious and frightened of gangs. The occupants of the first few huts we tried refused us permission to enter. At last someone took pity on us. It was one of the huts on the outside of the village. The peasant, without coming out, pointed to the barn. Wet and tired, we fell onto the straw. We could not change into anything dry, as nothing was dry. When we got warm, hugging each other, steam began to evaporate from our wet clothing. Thus finished our first day on the river trail.

Next morning we got completely dry in the hut of the owner and continued our journey. The morning was misty and wet but cleared to a sunny day. We were warm and dry and our spirits started to rise. At last the river turned to the north, the roars and explosions quietened down and we floated quickly along the beautiful river.

On the way we met another boating enthusiast. Compared to our dug-out, his was a liner - it even had a funnel. From far away this funny contraption looked like a miniature Noah's Ark. We pulled as strongly as we could to catch up and have a good look. This was not difficult as the ark moved very slowly

and majestically. It certainly was a unique navigational object. Two dugouts like ours were joined by a bridge made out of planks. At the back was a cabin with a window and a sheet-iron pipe from which, like a steamboat, clouds of steam poured. In the front the cabin was open. Near the opening stood an iron stove, then a stool and, deeper in, a plank bed made up and with pillows. On the first gangway sat a young woman, peeling potatoes – probably the wife of the ark owner. A few children played next to her. The captain of this Horyn yacht was a young suntanned fellow in a torn shirt. With his dishevelled hair and shapeless beard, he looked like a Robinson Crusoe. He was busy fixing baits to many fishing rods hanging around the deck. The long pole fixed to the back deck indicated the way of steering this odd raft. It was hard to overtake it as she took up all current space and our canoe could just squeeze through, touching the bank. We greeted each other with full marine courtesy. We started talking. He was also an evacuee going with all his family to relatives in Pinks, a city in north-east Poland. He went ahead and we stopped to have something to eat, finishing all our food supply. We were helped considerably by our bard who had only a piece of bread left. Our passenger was not talkative and a rather lazy companion. He was a Bachelor of Law and assured me that he knew me from Wilno University but I could not remember him, even with this exceptional name. He only came fully alive when eating and therefore all we learned about him was during meal times.

The Horyn was running through widespread meadows. Here the Horyn was straight as an arrow, going right into the large disc of the setting sun. It was beautiful. The large trees on both banks were like a canopy, almost touching each other. Huge misshapen willows like old hags with dishevelled hair were washing their branches in the stream and their twisted roots drinking the water. The whitish reeds, rustling slightly in the light breeze, had an overpowering smell. Frightened frogs jumped with a loud splash into the river and flocks of wild ducks flew over the meadow looking for a good resting spot for the night.

The war, our worries and the objective of our journey were forgotten as we simply floated towards the sun on golden, placid waters.

That night we dossed down in a small cottage situated on a hill which seemed to guard the fords of the river from the side of the vast plain.

Our host was a Czech who, through some quirk of fate, had settled down in marshy Polesia. He spoke in a dialect of his own making - Czech, Polish and Ukrainian. He had forgotten part of his own Czechoslovakian, had never

learned Polish properly and had to use the Ukrainian language. His wife was from Georgia, U.S.S.R.

We were very hungry so Marushka offered her nice multi-coloured scarf in exchange for milk, eggs and boiled potatoes. We had already learned that the peasants here were reluctant to accept money and most business transactions were on the basis of barter. We had all eaten our fill and, what was still left was devoured by our bard. That night we slept in the barn on soft hay. Early next morning I bought from the Czech a fly and hook attached to a line a few metres long. After teaching her how to cast and hold the line, the serious duty of angler was given to Marushka. We were quite excited and constantly asking her if she could feel the pull of a fish, if she had caught something, but to no avail.

In the meantime the boat took on more and more water and we somehow had to put our things higher. We could not find any specific hole; the old boat was simply leaking. We had to bail with only a cup at hand. This was an additional duty for Marushka who, disheartened as an angler, hardly watched the line. It was nearly noon when she called out "Got it". We understood immediately. I jumped over the bard to the bow. Marushka was pale from excitement and explained that she had felt a sudden pull on the line and a resistance. I grabbed the line. Certainly there was resistance but I could haul in the line. Therefore it could not be roots. I told Marushka to make a place for me and asked the bard to push towards the bank. My heart was pounding. When hauling I sometimes felt the resistance go slack.

"It must be a pike." I called excitedly. "It feels like a really big catch."

"We will cook it the Jewish way with stuffing and butter and eggs," called the bard, licking his lips. Now the last tug and out of the dark depths came ... an old rusty bucket with a hole in its middle. I started cursing and threw the bucket back into the river and, going back to my place, told Marushka to go to hell with her fishing. For a while the frayed line trailed behind, then disappeared, and we gave up this unproductive business.

The Horyn started to turn and twist in many bends. Sometimes it took a few twisting miles to cover a distance of 50 metres. Our dug-out was too heavy to carry across the land. To make the boat speedier and lighter, we left only one man in the boat, the other two going by land.

After some bends, near a small bridge we once again saw Noah's Ark and our Robinson Crusoe. We were very astonished and couldn't understand how he had managed to pass us on his raft in this slow stream. He explained it quite simply.

“Because we travel in a house, we don't have to stop for the night looking for accommodation. We don't stop, we travel through the night.” At present he was in trouble as the small country bridge was very low and he was unable to pass under it. After several attempts, he decided to lower the roof of his cabin. The bridge was no trouble for our dug-out and we continued wishing each other a lucky journey without further interruptions. This was our last meeting - we never spotted the ark with its iron funnel again.

That day we covered quite a long stretch. At dusk when it was time to look for a sleeping place, we were passing through uninhabited wilderness. The evening mist was covering the meadows and above the river hung thick vapour when before us, suddenly emerged an old water mill. It was our first mill.

A plank was thrown over the weir. The old mill settled deeply into the ground. Foaming water flowed from the wheel. The Horyn formed a large pond here.

On the plank appeared some human shapes. They went in a single file, stepping carefully on the plank. We pushed the boat nearer to have a better look. Through the heavy mist we could distinguish Polish soldiers but they did not carry arms. Their coats were unbuttoned and some walked heavily, leaning on wooden sticks. They walked in silence. They were like phantoms produced by the falling dusk. Their single file appeared out of the mist covering the meadows. Bent and treading heavily along the river they disappeared once again, swallowed by the heavy vapours of the river. The sound of their footsteps ceased when they reached the grass.

We had a feeling of foreboding. Something had happened. For the last few days, travelling through the wilderness, missing well-trodden tracks, we had no idea what was happening. We wanted to find out. I jumped onto the bank and went towards the mill but they were all gone. I intended to follow them when a new file of soldiers appeared, coming towards us. We began to ask them questions. Where were they going? Why without arms. Had the war finished?

They did not want to talk. One soldier answered. “For us the war is ended.” He spoke with a decided Warsaw accent. “Why?” I continued asking. “Have the Germans surrounded you?”

“No, the Front has not even reached us. Our commander demobilised the company and told us to go home. We hid our arms and are now going home.”

“I don't understand. Did the commander think that there was no sense any more in fighting?”

“Yes.”

"But you said that the Front had not even reached you."

"Sure, but the Russians had hit us in the back. The whole Soviet Army is advancing to meet the Kraut. From one side the Front and, from the back, the Bolsheviks. We can't fight on two fronts. We are going home."

"What are you saying? Did the Soviet intervene?"

"If you continue with your journey, you will meet them." He finished talking and followed the others.

"Where are you going?" asked Marushka.

"We are going to the west," he called back.

We could not understand and were lost in conjectures. Was it true what we had heard? Maybe the Soviets had declared war on Germany? We headed towards a village. The bard stayed with the boat. We were accepted in the first house and given sleeping place in the garret, covered with fresh hay. We brought our belongings, hid the boat between the bushes and, with our host, sat down on a wide bench around the table. His wife cooked us potatoes and gave us a large pot of sour milk. We asked about news and the Front line. He could say nothing definite. He advised us to go to his neighbour who was manager of a co-operative. As his neighbour had a radio and, according to our host, was an educated man, we went there immediately after our meal. He was standing in front of his house, leaning against the fence. We introduced ourselves and asked for information.

"Don't you know that today Molotov, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, announced on the air that the Soviet Army is entering Poland."

"What are you saying?" I asked, amazed. "Did the Soviet Union declare war on Poland?"

"No."

"Is she coming to help Poland against the Germans?"

"No."

"For what reason did the Soviet Army enter Poland? Didn't Molotov say?"

"He said that the aim of the Soviet Union is to liberate Western Ukrainians and White Russia from the oppression of the Polish lords and safeguard these countries from war activities and ruin."

"Has the Soviet Army already crossed the Polish border?" Marushka asked.

"Not only have they crossed, but they are already not far from us."

"And what news from the Front? Does the fighting continue?" she was asking.

"I don't know where the Front is at present. I heard yesterday that Warsaw is still fighting, that we are still holding Hel and Westerplatte. But rumour has it that Lublin is already in enemy hands and that German tanks are near Luck."

"Did you hear by any chance if our army is fighting the Russians or are they neutral?"

"I don't know. Today soldiers were passing our village. They were without arms, going home. They did not say much. One man told me that they were given orders to go home and to avoid conflicts with the Soviet Army. They don't want to speak about the approaching Soviet Army as it might incite the people to revolt. One heard that there were already instances of assault at the frontiers. Please, do realise that in this region the population is mainly White Russian. I am one myself. There are many here who are waiting the coming of the Soviets with anticipation. I live here permanently and I work amongst the peasants so I know their mood."

He was called to the house and we went back to bed down. Marushka and I did not sleep much that night as there was so much to think about. Only the bard slept heavily, full of potatoes. The fate of the world did not concern him much.

It was the night of the eighteenth of September, 1939.

Next day, about noon, we met another obstacle on the river - an abandoned mill. The dam and the derelict sluice gates were still there and the waterfall was too high for safe floating down. To carry the heavy boat overland was not tempting either. I decided to negotiate the obstacle with an empty boat. Marushka tried to dissuade me, looking distrustfully at the rapids which were two metres high. I would not give in. We emptied the boat, I undressed and pushed the boat toward the middle of the river directly opposite the waterfall. Marushka and the bard were watching, full of attention, from honorary seats of a tribune the ruins of the old mill. The main stream caught the boat and pushed it faster and faster towards the falls. The noise became louder. I grabbed the edges of the boat, sitting right in the back.

My dug-out was hanging in the air with the nose pointing straight down. A second of uncertainty and the boat settled down nicely, like a duck, right in the middle of the stream. From the ruins, my audience gave me a great cheer. I stood up proudly to give them a deep bow and ... toppled over into the water. This was my first swim in the Horyn.

Afterwards, when we were preparing to continue on our way, the bard ran to some nearby huts looking for some food, especially eggs which he simply adored. He never missed an opportunity to ask peasants he happened to meet for eggs. This time he got six and started pressing us for a stay so that he could cook them. The evening was cold and we were rowing strongly to get warm.

We stopped at a fisherman's boatshed. On the bank were two boats, a fish trap and a large net drying on sticks. We decided to spend the night here. The countryside was beautiful. On a steep hill was the fisherman's cottage. The fisherman welcomed us very hospitably. He was dressed in the custom of this region. He wore bastshoes made from birch trees and old linen clouts (bastshoes are made from inner bark of a tree and clouts - a long piece of cloth to protect one's feet and legs). He gave us the barn for the night. His wife brought fresh milk, straight from milking, and some cold potatoes. The bard, of course, asked for eggs. When the bard heard that there was a village nearby, he disappeared and we prepared for the night. The barn was nearly empty - there was not even straw. We bedded down on a cart with a bit of straw and our rucksack for a pillow. The bard came late but in a good mood and talkative so we guessed that he must have been lucky in finding some eggs.

It was a very cold night and our teeth were chattering. The only cover for both of us was Marushka's overcoat. At the crack of dawn we were up. Even the wooden fence was covered with fine white threads of rime. The hut on the hill dominated the neighbourhood. At the foot of the hill flowed our Horyn, overgrown with shrubs and reeds, around us meadows covered with hoar frost and, on the horizon, the dark line of a forest. The first sunbeams were shining brilliantly, spreading their golden glow over the calm water. The fisherman was ferrying some soldiers to the other side of the river. They dispersed in different directions, each going hurriedly towards their home. For them the war was over.

This day we were really hungry. The evening meal had been inadequate, the night was very cold and we left early on an empty stomach as we had hardly anything left to barter. The bard was quiet, scanning the bank for some habitation. Marushka was chewing an old crust which she had found in her pocket when looking for her glasses. At last we saw a forester's cottage on the

edge of the forest. We sent the bard to enquire. Shortly he began waving his hands, indicating that we should follow. In the house was a woman with three children. She was Polish and from the city of Lublin. Her husband was a gamekeeper. He took part in the war of independence during the First World War. They had lived there for some years. Now they were very worried about the future.

She talked incessantly. "You know that the peasants could kill us all. They are very angry with my husband for all the fines he has issued to them for poaching logs and taking wood away. The Court gave them jail sentences and my husband was called as a witness. They have threatened many times that they will get their revenge. My goodness, do you know that they are all waiting for the Bolsheviks? I have heard that already some armed bands are being organised. They say that they will kill all the masters and their servants. My husband does not sleep at home any more - he is afraid. Now he has gone to find out how far the Bolsheviks have advanced. He has been gone such a long time. Mother of God, maybe he has already been killed. What will I do with three children? Jagusia is only two years old."

She was pouring out her sorrows, mainly addressing my wife, as we men were distracted by a big loaf of bread and some cheese and eggs which were lying on a shelf.

"Oh, my Godfather, Holy Mary. My milk will curdle," she exclaimed suddenly and ran to the stove.

We considered this a very good moment to stop her story by changing the subject.

My wife asked her timidly, "Could you maybe sell us something to eat? We are very hungry."

"Certainly, madam, everything will be looted anyway. I will not talk about selling. You just eat anything which is in my lowly house. Oh, my God, tomorrow we might all be dead. Who could think of selling in times like this?"

Who knows how long we might have had to listen to this torrent of lamentation but our bard had a ready approach. He was unable to wait any longer.

"Can't we fry some chicken?" he interrupted. "There are so many running around, maybe you could give us some?"

We were stunned but the hospitable wife of the gamekeeper did not hesitate and offered us four! We were thunderstruck, but not for long and started to work. The bard was killing the chickens, Marushka was plucking them and I entertained the hostess. The work was well distributed - perhaps I had the hardest job. Never since have we eaten such a wonderful meal. Nicely browned chicken covered with dripping fat, fried potatoes and cucumber salad smothered with sour cream. It was like a symphony for the senses. An unfinished symphony, as one chicken remained uneaten. We took it with us, thanking the hostess profusely for her reception fit for a king.

Steeped in a blessed feeling of satiation, we let our boat proceed slowly and lazily. After a few kilometres of such peaceful travel, we heard some shooting from a nearby village, some shouting and someone calling "Stop". Looking around, we saw some ten armed peasants waving their hands and signalling us to stop. We had to. We did not expect anything good from this armed group but there was no way of fleeing. I banked and the peasants ran towards us. Some had rifles, some hand grenades; amongst them were teenagers holding sticks and stones. We were worried.

"Out of the boat." yelled one, coming quite near.

"Hands up." was the next order. We climbed out, putting our hands up, facing ten hostile men. A large young man holding a hand grenade came forward. His dirty shirt exposed a hairy chest.

"Where are you going?" he challenged us.

"We are evacuees from Warsaw," I replied tersely.

"Ah..." he hesitated before the next question, "do you have arms?"

"No."

"No? You just watch out" and, coming a step nearer, he shook his fist with the grenade before my face.

"If we find arms, you see the birch?" pointing towards a tree. "That is where we will shoot you.

"Matthew, start searching," called another one standing nearby.

They threw all our belongings to the ground and started searching. The contents looked rather poorly. Some personal underwear, a frock for Marushka, a spare pair of shoes and a manicure set which the peasant examined very carefully and, turning to me said, full of authority "Aha, you are an engineer!"

"A big boss!" He probably assumed it to be a drafting set.

"Maybe they hid some under the boat?" suggested another.

"Right. Turn her over, brother, and we will have a look," said the leader of the gang. They turned the boat over and still no arms.

Suddenly one of the men standing farther away called out "Look, the grazier is departing." "Hoj, hoj" they started yelling excitedly. We all looked in the direction he was pointing. On the road were a few wagons loaded with trunks, suitcases and bags, each drawn by two horses and with thoroughbred cows tethered, secured to the wagon. It was obvious they were from a big farm.

Without hesitation, the leader of the gang turned and started running towards them, calling to the others to follow him. Some followed him immediately, others hesitated, but the heavily loaded carts looked very tempting. They also wanted to witness the destruction of a really great Polish farmer. At last they all left. No time to ponder - perhaps the leader would send some of them back to guard us? We did not know their intentions. Our fate depended on them. We turned the boat back, threw our things in and started rowing and pushing with the pole as fast as we could. Some cowherds from the other side of the river who had been in the previous search tried to stop us by throwing sticks and stones at us. We did not mind - we just ducked the stones.

We travelled for six kilometres and were just completing a large bend in the river when on our left appeared a hill covered with peasant cottages. On the top stood a small white church. It was a large village. From the other end of the village, behind the forest, came rifle shots. First just singly, then a whole volley, followed by bursts of machine guns. We stopped and listened. The shooting came from the north of the river.

We put our heads together. It was not safe to continue and we decided to seek information in the village. After our previous experience, we took some precautions. Firstly we took all our maps, wound them round a stone and threw them to the bottom of the river. There might be another search and a new partisan gang finding maps of Europe, Lithuania, Poland and Germany might take me for an officer or, even worse, a spy, and could quickly wipe us out. We hid the boat amongst deep reeds and taking only the oars, went to the village.

In the village were only scared-looking women standing in small groups, glancing fearfully around. They told us that the shooting came from a nearby town, Stepan, situated on the Horyn. The shooting was between the retreating Polish soldiers and gangs of peasants who had obtained arms from somewhere

and were now trying to disarm the soldiers. The women explained that the previous evening a large unit of K.O.P. (Corps of Frontier Guards) had retreated through there. They had found some of their mates killed by gangs, from Stepan and now decided to seek a bloody revenge. They had surrounded the neighbouring villages, killed all the men and burned the villages to the ground. Therefore, today men from other villages were hiding in the forest. We were afraid to continue by boat as it would take us directly into Stepan, the town in revolt. To start walking through this empty and wild part of Polesia seemed equally risky. We decided to aim for the nearest railway line which went through Sarny, Zuniniec, Baranowicze, Lida to Wilno. We needed a map but mine had gone to the bottom of the river. As there was a school in the village, we hoped to find a map there. I went with Marushka - the bard used this opportunity to ask for eggs. The primary school was quite large. Only one lady teacher remained as the headmaster and the other teacher had left. They had gone west, being afraid of the approaching, Bolsheviks. She did show us a large geographical map hanging on the wall. We found our position relating to the railway. The teacher gave us additional information six kilometres away was a village Komarowo and, from there, a straight road direct to the railway station Rajewicze. As the village was on the river, we decided to take our dug-out for the last time. It took us only half an hour to reach this small village which stood between the swampy woods and the river.

This small village consisted of a few old, decrepit huts. The straw roofs were covered with moss, grass and on some even small birches were sprouting. Broken fences made from unhewn poles were mostly broken down and clay pots hung from them. In front of the huts grew stunted cherry trees. Only a little light entered through the small windows which were mostly covered with dirty rags. Here lived the people of bog and marshy woods Polesie. People of short posture, poor and dirty, people who had to make their living in the forgotten district of Poland. We went from hut to hut looking for a buyer for our dug-out. One peasant gave us 30 eggs and a kilo of bread for it and also shelter for the night. This part of Poland so far had hardly any evacuees; therefore quite a number of men gathered around us, asking questions. They were sitting on benches and puffing pipes or smoking cigarettes hand-rolled in newspaper. It was already dark and the hut was lit by a smouldering resinous ship stuck into the wall - it was 'the lamp' of Polesie. Dirty children crawled on the earthen floor. They piddled on the floor and the sticky clay dirtied their little hands and naked behinds. The housewife, pushing a sooty cast iron pot nearer to the edge of the stove, drained the water onto the floor. The hut was hot and steamy.

We spoke about the Soviets. They were awaiting them with mixed feelings. The young ones were full of enthusiasm, the older ones with a friendly reserve and the richer farmers with distrust. Everyone dressed alike, in best shoes and darned shirts and all were smoking the same hand-grown tobacco. The kulak (rich peasant) and the poor peasant, both neighbours in the same village and often related, but with different emotions passing through their heads. Hidden thoughts, calculated, culled off from the propaganda of left and right agitators.

"We are not educated but we know the difference between the chaff and the grain although we are only peasant," said a really old man with a twinkle in his eyes. "The Bolsheviks would sooner take my three cows away than give me a fourth from a richer farmer."

"But bolshevism is the power of the labourer and the peasant. Now, here you are the last, but there you might be the first," I contradicted, searching for his true opinion about communism.

Some were smiling ironically, others listened full of attention.

"I'll tell you something," replied the old man. "Their politics are such that, if you go to a koechoz, that means you are not an owner any more, you are then a nationalised man. If you don't go they will take away your land and finish you off. There you have the power of the peasant."

"Ah, Simon, you have the soul of a kulak," said a youngish man. "You still haven't had enough of masters, you are just... the master's servant." He spoke with hatred and left the hut.

"He wants to become a Commissar," someone called out.

There was general laughter followed by animated talk. I sat in the corner and listened attentively. Simon would not give in. He maintained that he would not be persuaded by red or white slogans, that he had lived his eighty years and knew life and people. In Russia man does not live for himself singly, but for all. But do all live for the betterment of life for everyone? Such were the thoughts of the old man from Komorowo, trying to separate the chaff from the grain.

That night we slept on straw in the hut. I had never seen so many fleas in my life. I saw them jumping straight up at least 25 cm without any trouble. That means they can jump more than 250 times their own height as Marushka calculated immediately. They jumped in swarms, clutching on to our clothes, our laces and legs. We scratched and tossed and turned but could not sleep at all. At dawn we got up feeling seedy and longing for a smoke. We had nothing

with which to buy the home-grown tobacco. The peasant advised us to gather some cherry leaves, dry them and smoke. This smoke was often used when tobacco gave out. We followed his advice, dried the leaves on the stove and rolled cigarettes in newspaper. The hot and bitter smoke started to choke us, bringing tears to our eyes. We no longer cared for a smoke (but, alas, not for long).

The 'straight' route to the railway was 10 km, leading through swamps and mire, following some barely visible tracks. Our host was very kind and offered to take us across. Breakfast consisted of milk and some eggs which e received for the boat, and we were ready to go



# On The Railway Trail

Our journey was now by land. We gave a last look at Horyn and entered the empty woods. Our guide jumped nimbly in his best shoes, choosing the clumps and tussocks. We followed, stepping carefully, trying to avoid swampy holes covered with mouldy leaves. Sometimes we had to go over deep ruts and swampy streams, crossing them with the help of planks thrown over them. After a few hours we touched dry ground and a fir forest. The ground was covered with heath. Here our guide stopped, explaining that he had to go home, that we could not get lost as the road led straight to the station in Rajewicz. We all sat down for a short rest. Our guide offered us some home-grown tobacco. After we had rolled our cigarettes in newspaper, he took from his pocket a bit of flint and some tinder and a bit of metal. This was his lighter. He put the tinder on the bit of metal, holding it with his fingers and, with the other hand, he hit the flint on the iron, producing sparks. It took a while to get the tinder glowing. At the right moment he started blowing on the tinder, making something like a charcoal sponge. In this way, like cavemen, we lit our cigarettes.

Saying farewell to our guide, we continued on our own. The road was not as straight as expected and a few times we took a wrong turn but, after a few hours, we reached the outskirts of the town and could even see the railway building.

We stopped at a house to ask for water as we were very thirsty. In the house was only a frightened woman. She told us that the town had already been looted twice by armed gangs that the Soviet Army was not far away but had not reached them as yet. A delegation of townspeople had gone for help to the regular Soviet Army asking for protection against the marauding gangs. She also told us that no trains were going.

However we decided to go to the station. The streets were empty and the town deserted. At last we have the railway lines. On the station was a group of evacuees and some railway employees. They informed us that at present there was no hope of a train. No-one knew when the trains would start running as the railway was not co-ordinated by any authority. No Polish authority existed here anymore and the Soviet one had not yet arrived. Everyone was awaiting the Soviet Army. We were told that, more to the north, the Soviets had already reached the railway. Armed bands had attacked and robbed the evacuees, stripping them of all clothes and belongings. We also heard that some victims had gone to the Soviet detachment. Whenever possible, the Soviets intervened

immediately and, if catching the criminal, shot him on the spot, returning all belongings to the victim. Anyway we felt much safer in a group and soon continued our journey to Sarny by foot, along the railway lines. Sometimes we met the other groups also going to the north. We saw a bombed-out goods train, torn and with blood, still standing on the rails. Part of it was on the embankment, wheels broken. Along the line were big craters and sometimes a mound with a cross. Some crosses were made from branches of fir trees, on some hung an army cap with the Polish eagle. In one place there were five single mounds with crosses put up in a row. Some birch branches were hanging over the new tombs.

On the other side of the rail stood a trackman's cottage. As the rucksack was feeling heavy, we headed there to have a rest. In the kitchen were two railway employees. They were cooking. We were hungry - they lent us a pot and gave us a few potatoes. Marushka started cooking. They told us that a few days ago the Germans bombed a big army transport moving toward Lwow. The rest of the transport was still on the rails. Many were killed and wounded. The dead ones, or rather the bits of the massacred people, were buried in a common grave.

"For whom were single graves near the mound?" I asked.

"Those are for the Polish officers killed by the Bolsheviks."

"What?" we all called out.

"Well,..." he began, "yesterday we were very frightened here. Seven officers were sleeping here. They were heading west trying to avoid the Bolsheviks. We all slept here on the floor of this room. The officers were talking through most of the night. They kept their coats on, even when lying on the floor. The hut was full of smoke. I understood from their talk that their regiment had met with the Bolsheviks. The communists ordered them to put down their arms. When their commander refused, fighting started. Some of the soldiers ran away and the rest were surrounded when Soviet reinforcements arrived. The commander did not want any more unnecessary bloodshed and agreed to lay down the arms. Ten officers from the regiment did not want to surrender and decided to fight their way through the surrounding army. They succeeded, but three were killed. Those seven arrived there during the night. They were cursing their commander and the headquarters who had not issued orders as to how to treat the Soviets. One was even crying, hitting his head with his fists. He was screaming that Poland had been treacherously betrayed. It is a brothel and not diplomacy, he was repeating, how could it happen that the Soviets hit us in the back? Where are the allies? Instead of help we are being hit in the back. The world is an

atrocious gang, full of traitors and vile scoundrels and abject liars." He was sobbing like a child and we were all sorry for the youngster. Others were determined to keep their arms and to continue fighting the Germans in Warsaw.

"It was already dawn," continued the trackman, "when they calmed down and started to doze. Suddenly somebody started to bang at the door. I got up, asking who was there. "Open up, we are soldiers," a Russian voice called. I am telling you, covered in cold sweat, I did not know what to do. I yelled into the room "Bolsheviks." They were up in, seconds. One opened the window and, having their guns at the ready, they began to jump out. The pounding at the door increased. I did not know whether I should open the door or not I heard a shot behind the house. The pounding stopped, a second of quiet and then some more shots. I did not know what was happening outside. How many Russians were there? What should I do? Two of us were left - my mate and myself. All the officers had already jumped out through the window. We decided to do the same. We approached the window carefully when suddenly a machine gun opened up, the bullets spraying the room, the plaster falling off the walls. We fell to the ground by the window. A second and third machine gun started pelting our house. Sometimes a shot from a revolver replied from behind the house. The shooting lasted at least ten minutes. There was no hope of jumping out. The machine gun stopped firing, then a few single shots, and quiet. The quiet did not last long and we heard soldiers running. Some shouted orders and our house was surrounded. Something heavy was hitting the door, the door gave and some soldiers from the Red Army came in, their rifles at the ready. They had an electric torch and found us crouching under the window.

"Hands up!" came the order, then a personal search and interrogation. I thought our end had come. There were no arms, either on us or in the house. I speak Russian fluently which helped. I explained that we two live here always, that the officers came during the night and demanded a place to sleep. The Soviets were cursing the officers terribly. They said they would kill all those bastards. We were ordered to take shovels and follow them. A terrible thought crossed my mind - they will force us to dig our own grave and then shoot us. I had heard that the G.P.H. (Secret Police) were doing it. We went. By the door was a dead Russian soldier. Near the wall were three bloody bodies of our officers. One had his brain splashed on the wall as the bullets cut off his scalp. You can go and see for yourself. The next one, behind the house near the fence, seemed to be praying. About fifty steps farther, there under the tree, was another one. This was the one who was crying and telling us that he could not continue living with those traitors. Two were probably able to flee as we could not see

their bodies. The Soviet officer who had been giving orders to his soldiers returned to us.

“Take these dead ones and bury them so that no trace is left of them,” he ordered.

"We took a deep breath - not for ourselves were we going to dig the grave. We dragged the corpses over the track and began to dig a big hole. The officer ordered his soldiers to take their dead ones and, mounting the horses standing near the forest, turned in the direction of the village. We buried the unfortunate officers. There on the mound, the five graves in a row - that is them."

We looked at this ordinary room and shuddered. Last night between these four walls a tragedy overtook seven Polish officers. They were fighting the Germans and were killed by the Russians! They were fighting for Poland's independence and were accused of occupying western White Russia. How will the future judge them? What will history have to say? Will they be proclaimed as heroes or accused as traitors?

Anything is possible. History is written by the living. The dead ones who shaped it have no voice. Sometimes they might be put in golden urns; sometimes they might be taken from quiet tombs overgrown with grass and their rotting bones placed into splendid memorials surrounded by banners to shine as a symbol for others. Later might come others with their own history, with their own gods. They will burn the pantheons, kick away the urns, trample the venerated holiness, spit on the noble symbols. They will then resurrect others, their own. Now their dead will have monuments, for their remains will be built mausoleums, their names will be on banners for display to crowds. Those are our symbols, those are our gods, long live the new history ....

The dead ones could not be heard - their sleep is eternal. They are waiting to be judged by future history.

What ironic fate. Here they lie next to each other under the shade of the same bent birch - those crushed by the German bombs and those cut down by Russian bullets. What a cemetery! The cemetery of Polish tragedy!

Sleep, brothers, history is busy now, history is being reshaped. There will come a time when you will be removed from these graves.

What epitaph can we now put on your wooden cross? You who were born in the war, you who gave your life to the war?

## BELLUM VOBISCUM

(War be with you, as opposed to pax vobiscum - Peace be with you)

Our way continued along the railway lines, hopelessly straight, uninterrupted, indefinite, cutting through meadows, swamps and forests.

It was exhausting travelling along the lines, especially with tickets in our pockets. We were meeting other evacuees, some having a rest, leaning with their rucksacks against barriers, resting their backs. It was customary by now that evacuees asked each other questions and gave information about the road, the Front and the political situation. Wandering the trail of the evacuees was like living a newspaper. After the conventional questions "Where from?," "Where to?" and "How?," we were told that the Soviets were already near and were killing all Polish officers, even those not in uniform. We were advised to burn all documents if we should be officers of the reserve. One woman with a rucksack on her back told us definitely that Rydz-Smigly, Chief Commander of the Polish Army, shot Minister Beck and then committed suicide. The President was in England and, in Poland, Stalin would rule. Full of this news, we walked on waiting nervously for our meeting with the Soviet Army. We did not destroy our documents but were not certain what would happen.

There were so many rumours about the Red Army. Somebody had already seen them. They were supposed to be already quite near, like an army of ghosts which was swarming near us. We had the feeling that at any moment they would jump out of the bushes, they whom we had never seen - the Soviet people, these mysterious people of the Red Revolution.

Would they be the people who built Dnieprostroj? (The large dam, hydropower station and industrial centre on the River Dnieper - 1330 km in length), or the people who changed Stalingrad? Or people of the great Cham, as according to my mate, Lesman? (Cham = boor, churl, a vulgarian, primitive, brute, cad).

Or cadres of the bloody G.P.U. (Secret Police)?

Or gentlemen of the red land?

We were fed by propaganda; we looked through white glasses to the red east. Where do we go from there? From there, slowly the truth was filtering through. Not the naked truth but the truth draped with red cloth. We, the people of the age of 'Applied Propaganda', know what the official truth injected with

propaganda means. What are these people, the Soviets? What is their Red Army like?

With thoughts like these we travelled on, full of curiosity and anxiety. We did not know whether we would stay free or be imprisoned. We passed a few dozen more telegraph poles which Marushka was counting carefully. Counting them gave us some indication of distance covered. We approached a station building.

On small platform a soldier stood guard with a rifle over his shoulder. He was dressed in a dark grey short, army coat without badges and without shoulder straps. His thin legs were covered with black puttees, dirty foot clouts showed above his shoes. A narrow face, unshaven, rather pleasant looking. On his head he wore a soft, grey cap in the shape of a spiked helmet. On the hat was a large red star with hammer and sickle. He was our first Red Army soldier.

When we were a few paces away he called, "Who is that?" taking the rifle in both hands.

Our small groups stopped. I called back in Russian, "We are evacuees."

"Go to the station where other people are standing," he instructed and put his rifle back over his shoulder. At the station building huddled a group of people with their bundles and a few Russian soldiers. Through the door of the station came a military man, probably of higher rank. He was middle-aged, with a smiling round face and a snub nose. He was dressed quite differently than the soldiers, in high boots, dark navy trousers with narrow red stripes, and a long drill tunic reaching to his knees. On his collar was a red tab with dark red little squares. He wore a dark navy cap with a stiff leather peak and a red band. He was a Politruk (political officer) of the Soviet Army. We all looked at him full of interest, but also with anxiety. He stopped at the top of the steps, looking our group over.

"Where are you from, citizen?"

From the group came replies "From Warsaw, from Luck, from Lublin". He came down the steps and began speaking with some of us individually. People were answering his questions in Polish, Russian, and in a mixture of both. He came near us and asked me

"And you, where are you from?"

"My wife and I are from Warsaw," I replied in Russian.

"What were you doing there?"

"I worked in the archives," I replied in general with a careful reticence.

"And where are you going?"

"Back to Wilno. Our parents are living there. We are from Wilno."

"You a smoker?" he asked, holding out a packet of cigarettes.

"Yes."

"Try one of the Soviet cigarettes." He gave one each to us and to the others and, lighting one himself, continued, now speaking to all of us.

"Do you know, citizen why we came here?" This was a rather rhetorical question as he did not wait for a reply and continued, "We came here to liberate you from the oppression of the Polish masters who force the people to hard labour. Now there will be freedom. In our Soviet Union all have the same rights. You, citizen, don't know as yet our Stalin's constitution. We have no masters. We have no bourgeois oppressors. So now you know - the Red Army came here to protect your interests. The interests of the labourers and the peasants and, in addition, as our Comrade Molotov said - 'to spare your towns and villages from destruction of war.'" We were all quiet until someone asked, "What will happen to us, Comrade?"

"You can continue your journey," he replied and went into the station. We grabbed our bags and quickly went away, now travelling on 'liberated' soil. Our freshly-instructed group started to stretch out along the rails, becoming smaller as many began to look for sleeping quarters for the night. It was dark when we lay down in a cottage standing by the road.

We still had 25 kilometres to Sarny. We covered this distance the next day still walking on railway tracks which are monotonously straight and seemingly without end. Sleeper after sleeper, bolts after bolts, pole after pole, reappeared hopelessly at the same intervals. We walked automatically, rhythmically, bored stiff with railway tickets in our pockets.

We met a few more Soviet guards along the railway line. They wanted to buy my watch. Later, we noticed that they were very keen on watches. They tried to buy them, or just took them, whenever possible.

"Don't you have watches in Russia?" I asked one.

"No, you can't say that we have not got them," he replied slowly. "We have watches, only they are very large like a potato, not nice to wear, and they are also hard to get."

To be on the safe side, I put my wristwatch in a pocket to avoid temptation for the soldiers.

When we reached the outskirts of Sarny, Marushka stopped. The bard and I wanted to go to the centre of the town. We tried to persuade her to go just one more kilometres but to no avail she would not budge. She sat down on some planks. Irritable and tired, she told us to 'go to hell'. Up to now she had been a stout companion on land and water, but now she was finished. The railway track had been too much for her.

Only now did I realise how she had lost weight. She was pale. Her skinny, dirty legs in damaged shoes were hanging helplessly. Her large, grey eyes were full of tears. I understood those tears. During the journey we expected her, a female, to be our equal physically. She always adjusted her steps to ours, being proud and keeping up the team spirit, with strain and effort. Now her strength had given out before ours. Therefore the tears. She was not angry with me but, because we were stronger, because we could still walk and, above all, the nightmare of another 300 kilometres - so hopelessly depressing.

I sat down next to her, put my arms round her shoulders and hugged her tightly, stroking her hair, grey from dust. I was truly sorry. My sorrow was for those tired, sore legs in down-trodden shoes, for those large tearful eyes. My companion for life and comrade on this journey was clinging to me like a child, crying on my shoulder. She was looking for tenderness, affection and understanding. I comforted her as well as I could. She cried for a while and felt better. I dried her eyes and she rose with a smile.

Holding hands, we started walking. The bard in the meantime was asking the neighbours for eggs.

The Russians were already in charge of this town. In the streets there was much traffic and many pedestrians. Through the streets passed army columns and the footpath was crammed with evacuees. Demobilised Polish soldiers in their grey-green coats were coming from everywhere. They were directed to old army buildings. The organisation of civilians had also started. Young lads with red armbands, the beginning of the local militia, were rushing through the streets. On some houses red banners were flying. The mixed crowd in the streets consisted of evacuees, Polish soldiers, Red Army soldiers, and local Jews in their Sunday best. Queues in front of the bakery were growing rapidly. We pushed through the crowd looking for a shop less rushed.

Suddenly on one of the side streets the crowd started to move and we were carried along by the human wave towards the market place. Upon asking what

was happening, we were told that in the market place the Soviets were distributing something. In the square some trucks were standing, surrounded by a milling crowd. On the trucks were soldiers tossing into the crowd white, dried bread.

The old Roman slogan "panem et circenses" (bread and circus) was still applicable. The bard dived into the crowd towards the trucks. We still had the "bourgeois prejudice" and, although we were hungry, we were unable to fight in the crowd for tossed gifts but, when the bread came to us, we took it. It came to us by way of a truck which, for a better propaganda effort, started moving slowly along the street throwing dried bread amongst the people. In this way a few pieces of dried bread landed in our hands. The pieces were the size of chocolate blocks.

Before we were able to finish chewing our first gift from the Red Army, we were arrested by the Red Army Militia.

To this day, for what reason I don't know. One militia man came towards us asking for our documents, took a look at them and asked us to follow him. He took us to a large, red brick building - the offices of Gorodzkoy Ispolnitelnyj Komitet (Town Executive Committee). Many people were crowded into this room. A few tables were covered with papers. Around the table were gathered the representatives of the "Ispolkom" (Executive Committee). They wore hats and coats. Militia men were coming and going. The chairman was rushing in and out through the door. He was a slim man with Aryan features. Our militia man approached him, reporting something. The chairman listened, gave us a quick look and went back, calling someone. The militia man left, considering his job completed.

We stood and waited, not knowing what was wanted from us. When the chairman once again returned, he was surrounded by a group of people demanding the arrest and execution of one of the bakers as he was heavily over-charging, a profiteer. A very agitated discussion developed, complete with table-banging and fist-raising. The chairman listened with a detached interest. Some were pulling his sleeve, others giving him advice or asking questions. I had the impression that by now he was not certain how to start rebuilding the government in his town; shoot the baker or regulate bread prices? Or, maybe, have some more banners? Looking at the crowd which surrounded him, it was impossible to say who were the advisers, who the petitioners and who the arrested.

We decided to disappear and simply walked out. Nobody stopped us, nobody gave us a second look. Searching for bread, we joined a queue in front of a bakery where bread was to be sold within the hour. There was a peculiar smell of something charred and smouldering coming from the next building. I asked the man in front of me if this town had been bombed or if there had been recent fires. He told us that the previous night when the Soviet soldiers were entering the town a battle developed in the fire brigade house. A dozen or so officers, sergeants and firemen locked themselves in the station and, when the order to surrender arms was issued, they replied by opening fire. Many hand grenades were thrown into the station and some of the people were wounded and killed, but they would not surrender. All sides of the fire station were set alight and the station completely burned out, incinerating the fanatics who were fighting such impossible odds. The ruins were still smouldering with the characteristic smell of burnt flesh.

Another grim picture of the tragedy of Polish soldiers fighting on the eastern region.

When the baker finally started selling, it was a loaf per person. When we were just near the door, the same policeman who arrested us approached, smiling and greeting us like old friends and asked us to buy him a loaf. He probably assumed that we had been set free by the chairman after our papers were checked.

After securing the bread, we tried to find some place for the night. It was not easy. The town was overcrowded as soldiers and evacuees alike headed for a large railway station.

A few householders refused to take us under their roof as they were afraid to shelter men of military age. There had already been arrests of Polish officers who had changed into civilian clothes and were hiding in town and those who gave them shelter were also prosecuted. It was getting dark and we were very tired after a day's march and hours of walking in the town. We went across the railway line towards the outskirts of the town. As had happened many times previously, the richer houses closed their doors in our faces with a more or less polite excuse.

Understanding and pity were mainly shown by the people in the poor, cramped huts. This time we were accepted, without hesitation, by a poor postman living on the far outskirts of the town. He had one room and a kitchen. He lived with his wife and child. We were offered the couch and the bard slept

on straw in the kitchen. Next morning, looking through the window, I saw a rather unusual scene.

In front of the shire office was gathered a big group of civilians, all oddly armed. Some had light machine guns on their backs, some double-barrelled guns, some old matchlocks which had to be filled with buckshot through the muzzle. Some held in their hands different types of revolvers and hand grenades. Women had baskets full of cartridges. Near the window stood an old Jew in a crumpled hat. He was leaning on a sword, like a general at a levy en masse.

I was really curious. It appeared that the Soviets had issued a strict order to the population to bring all arms in their possession to the shire. This oddly-armed crowd was obediently following the orders of the red authority.

In the afternoon we heard a very pleasant rumour. Tomorrow the first train would be assembled from the undamaged wagons on the rail. It would be for the demobilised soldiers and evacuees. The train was supposed to go in the direction of Wilno which was already in the possession of the Soviet Army.

We rushed to the station for more information. On the station we saw signs of preparation. Polish and Russian railway employees were busy. Carriages were assembled, men were repairing the damaged rails, clearing them of rubbish. At last the dead rails, where grass had even started to sprout, began to come alive.

We decided to wait in Sarny for the first train to go north. None of us was keen to track along the railway lines. The waiting lasted three days, during which we watched the station. At last, on the third day, the locomotive arrived. Everyone cheered. Puffing and whistling, the engine shifted the carriages to new tracks. There was a large crowd of Polish soldiers and evacuees on the platform. All were waiting and ready to jump aboard the train at the given signal. After two hours the train came into the first platform, ready to start the journey. There was a great rush to the doors. It was hard to climb up the high steps of the goods train. After climbing into one of the carriages, we found some floor space in a dark corner. In this crowd, we lost sight of our bard and never saw him again.

After a few more hours waiting in the train, we heard a whistle and the train, amidst the cheering of passengers, started moving.

At each station there were more people waiting, all trying to board the train to find a place. There was an unbearable crush. There was no place to sit on the

floors. Like sardines in a tin. We were standing and if possible, leaning against the walls.

During the night, at a small station there came a loud banging at the doors.

"Let us in. What in the bloody hell - we also want to go home," the people called.

We couldn't distinguish anyone through the cracks.

"Who are you?" asked someone.

"We are Airmen. After all, this is a train for the army."

"Oh, Airmen," called another voice from the train amidst jeering and laughing.

"Where were you when the Germans bombed us? Not one of you was around then. Now, when the war is over, you are all pushing."

"Don't let them in. Let them fly home in their planes," other voices were calling.

Only a few of them were able to push their way in. Most were left to fight for another place.

In the morning we reached Baranowicze, a junction in north-east Poland. Some of the soldiers left and we had more space. One could even move about. Although the morning was very cold, we left the door open to let in the fresh air as it was hard to breathe in the stale, foul air.

The next day was better. Less demobilised soldiers were boarding the train. We talked with the soldiers. Some of them were wounded, mainly by German bombs - only a few through fighting with the Russians. The frontier detachment was quite disorientated. There were instances when the Poles opened fire immediately but the Russians tried to negotiate. But the opposite also happened; the Russians were greeted as allies and were expected to join forces and fight the Germans. There were also other situations. When the Polish commanders saw the Soviet Army, they deserted and fled, or tried to negotiate with the Soviets. The Soviets directed the grey masses of the Polish soldiers towards rallying points. There they were questioned and disarmed, if they still had arms, except for officers who were arrested. This was what the soldiers told me from their own personal experience.

We passed Lida, a small town in north-east Poland. The train was very slow. I dozed, sitting on the floor and leaning against the wall. Some played cards,

others sat in the open doorway with their feet dangling outside. Suddenly a train passed and we heard, from the front of our train, yells and cheers. I rushed to the door - a Soviet military train. Our soldiers were greeting them, waving their caps and cheering the Soviet Army, calling "Greetings comrade," "Hooray Red Army," "We are going home," "For us the war is ended." These cheers came mainly from the White Russian peasants, citizens of north-east Poland.

The soldiers from the Red Army returned the greetings and looked at our transport with great interest. The soldiers with the white eagle on their caps were going home. For them the war was finished for the time being and that was enough. Those with the red stars were quieter, more reticent. They were going to an unknown future and war. Their train was carrying them further away from their homes into a foreign land of the unknown, a land full of contradictions. Some people were greeting them with cheers and waving caps, others were firing at them. What should they expect? Fighting, or a friendly handshake? Uncertainty does not make one smile readily.

After passing Lida, we entered a countryside of forests near Jashuny forests of fir trees smelling of resin, saw mills and stored wood, fallow hilly pastures. This was already our home country, our Wilno scenery.

Soon our train started to descend a deep gorge into the River Wilja valley towards our Wilno, our native town with its many church towers, its narrow twisting streets.

# Occupation

*13th May, 1941.*

*Dear Friend,*

*I am a commander of the Red Army House, a recreation club in Kaunas. Knowing my options, you will not suspect me of opportunism. But I do know that you will hold the fact that I accepted this position against my wishes, you being a man of tradition to put it very mildly. I don't intend to argue with you about basic principles, as it would be futile. We have had different outlooks but the strong bond of friendship has kept us together since childhood.*

*I would like you to know what has happened to me and what eventually led me to this position.*

*I realised just now that a year has passed since we saw each other and I really don't know where to start. So many impressions, so many changes have occurred during this year.*

*Although living in the same province of Poland, in this short time you and I have become citizens of different countries. I, a citizen of the Lithuanian Socialistic Soviet Republic and you, White Russian Socialistic Soviet Republic. Before, we were separated by an insignificant country boundary, now by a closed frontier.*

*Yes, my friend, since Marushka and I returned to Wilno I have the impression of witnessing history in the making. During this year our Wilno has changed hands from Polish to Russian, from Russian to Lithuanian and from Lithuanian back to Russian. Wilno, like a courtesan, changed hands, was remodelled according to her temporary possessors. She even changed her name, as is customary for lovers. Today she is called, more softly, Vilnius.*

*Our Wilno became whimsical and unfaithful. In her old age she even has delusions of grandeur, wanting decidedly to be a capital city. Therefore we, her permanent residents, have had to change our citizenship twice - from Polish to Lithuanian and from Lithuanian to Soviet.*

*Today I am a citizen of Soviet Lithuania and am living in Kaunas. I left Wilno at the time when she was Lithuanian with President Smetona (the first and last President of Independent Lithuania). President Smetona, with the help of his 'kalakutas' (the nickname given to his policemen) and their rubber truncheons tried to remake Wilno, the ancient town of King Gedymin, into the capital city of Lithuania. At this time Wilno started to become deserted as many of the local residents and a majority of the evacuees went to Kaunas where, trying to get visas, they joined the long queues in front of different consulates and legations. From here was the last chance to go to the west, flying through Sweden. Some went to the east, others wanted to go to France and England (at this time the place of the Polish exile government).*

*My road was short. Thirteen kilometres from Kaunas, on the Wilkomir highway, a house with white shutters stood on a hill. There Marushka and I lived as this was her property. Life was idyllic. I was cutting wood in the snow-covered forests and she was knitting, nursing the new life in her.*

*With the spring came the storks, as well as Soviet bases. Afterwards the Red Army took over this country with its chapels and crosses along the waysides. The cream of the Lithuanian society and the government elite, including President Smetona, left the country. The tall policemen with their red spiked helmets disappeared from the streets. New people, of the Red Order arrived. The Red Army soldiers filled the streets and red banners were fluttering above the buildings. The Avenue of Independence was now called Stalin's Boulevard.*

*After the elections, the Lithuanian House of Representatives announced, with strong ovations, that Lithuania would join the Soviet Union as the 16th Soviet Republic. I was an observer at this historical session of the Lithuanian Parliament.*

*One of the first citizens to join the new republic was our new-born son. We registered him in Z.A.K.S. (Civil Registry for Birth Certificates), giving him the name of Jerzy (George).*

*Shortly afterwards my father died. When my son arrived into the world, my father departed. With dramatic punctuality, the old generation gave place to the new one.*

*I had to hammer the nails into the coffin where my father was lying. You can't imagine, my friend, what a shattering experience it was. When hitting the pine board with the hammer I heard a dull, hollow echo coning from inside. I had the feeling that I was doing my father a great injustice. He, who was lying defenceless in this coffin, I was forever depriving of the possibility of returning to his family. Those were hard moments.*

*After the funeral I returned to our house with the white shutters but somehow I lost heart and interest. In this land great changes were occurring, changes for which I had been campaigning in academic circles before the war. You remember our club for the intellectuals, our paper "Razem" (Together) "Druk" (Print)? You remember our 'Gugi', 'Muty', 'Wladek', 'Henruk' and 'Robespierre' and many other enthusiasts, building in our minds huge projects, dreaming about great changes whilst sitting in small smoke-filled rooms. And especially do you remember after I had been arrested as a suspect communist and brought in the night to the chambers of the examining magistrate, how I was brought in handcuffs for investigation? I'll never forget the moment when the door opened and we were facing each other. We were both in training for the Bar - you to become a judge, I a barrister. You recording, sitting behind the official desk and I, the accused, in handcuffs.*

*Now look at us today when our dreams of long ago are beginning to come true, when new people are trying to build the foundations for collective living - I, like a 'kulak', have to look after the interests of my in-laws' farm, to fight against the landless ones.*

*Do you understand the irony of my fate? I'll admit to you that I gladly agreed to the order of the shire office of parcelling out 20-odd hectares belonging to my wife. I left the running of the farm, Karmelowo, to my relatives who came from Wilno to Kaunas looking for work.*

*Fate intervened again, making a joke - I became the commandant of the Red Army House. The location of my first work for the labour socialist peasant government was amongst highly polished floors of stylish salons in a beautiful building designed for the previous Lithuanian Officers Club. In this building the House of the Red Army was now located.*

*I was walking on highly polished floors of the concert halls, on Persian carpets in visitors salons, climbing marble steps covered with red carpets.*

*Everything was illuminated by crystal chandeliers, with gilded pictures in the conference rooms and tropical palms and sunny hothouses as well. I felt as if in a dream. Was illusion a reality or was reality an illusion?*

*Such a short while ago I had been carrying manure out of the barn, trudging behind the plough. The contrast was too great to accept readily. After a while I became accustomed to it, to the house of culture and recreation for the Red Army. It consisted of a library, reading room, auditorium, picture theatre, restaurants, buffet, hotel, war museum, gymnasium and many lecture rooms such as for physical training, sewing, foreign languages, ballroom dancing, music, ballet, choir.*

*Mine was the job of administration, general supervision of the civilian personnel and technicians, as well as buying objects d'art and period furniture. Anything to enrich and beautify the interior of the House. I like the last two duties - they give me a lot of satisfaction as well. Yesterday, for instance, I met a very good painter of watercolours. His main subject is the sea resort, Polonga. I intend to give him a commission for a few pictures. I see them already hanging in the reading room which is covered with dark blue tapestry. I will not bother you with details and had better finish this letter. I have given you only a very rough outline, but I am unable to put in writing many of the topics I would like so much to discuss with you. We will speak about those things sometime later when the war is finished, IF our lives are spared.*

*Give my love to your wife, Wisia,*

*Your Zygmunt.*

My friend from early childhood was Edmund Oskierka. He never received my letter. He was deported to east Russia but never arrived at the labour camp. He was a paraplegic and died on the way from exhaustion.

May he rest in peace.

The future of my friends from the University mentioned in this letter varied greatly:

1. "Guga" (Druto) - wife of the future Ambassador in Paris and Rome.

2. "Muta" (Pziewicka) - became Chairman of the Polish Women's Society in the Polish People's Republic.
3. "Henryk" (Debinski) - previous leader of Catholic youth, afterwards leader of the left academic movement, a journalist and a brilliant orator. He was shot by the Germans as a communist.
4. "Robespierre" (Jedrychowski) - civic leader of the youth, editor of the academic Press. Became Minister of Shipping and Foreign Trade, chairman of the planning commission, Finance Minister, afterwards Minister of Foreign Affairs and also Deputy Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic.
5. "Wladek" (Tilebowicz) - administrator of the editorial office for academic and left Press. Interrogated and tortured to death by the Gestapo.

Next morning, going to work, I mailed the letter to my friend. I was supervising the decoration of the large marble hall for a ball that evening which was to be included in the new Russian film called "Lithuanian Spring".

In the evening the ballroom looked splendid. The crystal candelabra were sparkling, colourful balloons and lampions hung everywhere. Multi-coloured streamers were floating from the balconies, confetti falling softly on gala-dressed dancers blond Lithuanians, ladies in national costumes, Russian women in berets and short skirts. Among this bright crowd Red Army men in uniform mingled with guests in black tails.

The filming team arrived from Moscow. Cameramen on large platforms covered with filming equipment came into the hall with blinding bright lights. The producer was organising people for the foreground nearer to the camera. Marushka, a bit shy, with a few other ladies in long evening gowns, was chosen. The instruction was that Marushka, dancing with me, had to move towards the camera. The producer gave a signal with his hand and the filming started. The orchestra played a Strauss waltz and we were dancing towards the receding camera, lit by bright reflectors and covered with a rain of confetti. Next we had to go laughing down the large marble stairs towards the eye of the camera. When all the required episodes were filmed, the ball came to an end. We were ready to leave when I was called to Comrade Colonel, Chief of the Red Army House, and ordered to organise, immediately, the cleaning of the ballroom as the room would be required again the same night. The maintenance staff, working during the night, would have the next day off.

Going home I saw many covered lorries driving about in different directions. Next morning we heard the alarming news: Deportation!!!

Arriving at work I met men in navy trousers and grey tunics, also some unknown civilians. The ballroom was full of stale tobacco smoke. The assembled desks were covered with many folders containing lists of names for deportation. Telephones were ringing everywhere. Guards were posted at all doors. Here was now the head office and on the railway station people were already being assembled for the first transport. Some of our employees did not return to work. Life in Lithuania became drab and people stopped sleeping peacefully. The "Lithuanian Spring" lost its smile.

Some time later two huge pictures arrived from Moscow. One showed manoeuvres of the Red Army under the command of Marshal Timoshenko, the other was of Stalin addressing the Supreme Soviet General Assembly. It was not an easy task to hang them in the main front salon. Later I had a much harder job as we received from Russia two monuments made of reinforced concrete. One represented a mariner, the other a border guard with a dog. They arrived in parts and had to be assembled. They were so heavy that I had trouble just lifting the mariner's forearm holding his binoculars. The director, Comrade Karmin, gave me orders to put both sculptures in front of the main entrance. I hired bricklayers and stonecutters, specialist monumental masons.

They built pedestals and started assembling. I had orders to have everything ready by the 23rd June. Only a few days were left and my mariner had still no body, the other one had no head. The next day it was raining and work could not continue. I was angry and in a bad mood knowing that an unpleasant reprimand was in store for me. Straight after tea I went to sleep in our bed behind the wardrobe.

It was the night of the 21st of June 1941...

We were woken up by rifle shots and explosives. We jumped to our feet. We were no longer accustomed to this kind of noise. We rushed to the windows, opening them slightly. A familiar sound from the German/Polish campaign - the deep drone of bombers. Nervously, Marushka adjusted her glasses. We were watching the bomber fighters which were flying very high and wondering where the shots were coming from. Again we heard a cannonade. Simultaneously there appeared in the sky many tiny white clouds. We looked at each other - we understood. The planes were being fired at, therefore they were enemy planes.

Who was the enemy? ... We knew - the same one which in 1939, also at dawn, also without declaring war, crossed our Polish frontiers.

The planes departed. Hurriedly I switched on the radio to hear news from Berlin. "Attention! Attention! An important announcement will be made soon." Military march music in the background and shortly we heard Mr. Ribbentrop, Foreign Minister of the Reich. He announced that, in defiance of the Fuehrer's previous warning to the U.S.S.R., the Russians had amassed all their military power along the frontier lines. The order to attack had been given to protect Europe against communism. As from that day, the German Reich was at war with the U.S.S.R.

When I arrived at work I found many employees crowding the doors of the radio cabin listening to Molotov who spoke about the treacherous attack by the Germans, calling the Soviet people for intensified efforts to defend their country.

Later on the director called all employees together and advised us to stay at work, to work harder for the good of ... etcetera, etcetera ... but nobody worked much that day. People in larger or smaller groups were discussing the recent events.

Next day there came rumours that Germans had crossed the frontier and were advancing. Some high-ranking officers arrived at the Red Army House, many orderlies rushing around in dusty boots - many liaison officers.

When I entered the room of the duty officer I found a young woman lying on a bench. Her nightdress was torn and bloody and she was covered with a dressing gown. Her hair was dishevelled, her eyes were feverish and scared and she had no shoes.

Her slight wounds were dressed and we put her on a field bed in the ballroom. She was the first wounded evacuee to reach Kaunas. She told me that she was the wife of a Soviet officer and they had been living near the German border. The German attack was so unexpected that she had just managed to run away without dressing and hide in the forest. Afterwards she had found a road and continued running, with German tanks not very far behind. A car stopped and gave her a lift to Kaunas.

Now events moved quickly. Already by midday the order came to evacuate Kaunas. Private cars, packed to full capacity with people and luggage, were tooting along the streets passing dusty trucks. Cars started arriving in front of D.K.A. to pick up the families of officers and their belongings. Colonel Kadmin and some officers loaded the most important documents and the money from the strong box. The civilian employees were standing around and just watching the departing Soviets.

The building became empty. Comrade Colonel Kadmin entered the car and, giving the keys from the building, said, "Keep safe, Comrade Kruszewski. We will return to Lithuania." (At the time I did not realise how prophetic these words were). In seconds his car was lost from view. The people dispersed and I was left on the stairs. Beside me were the two unfinished sculptures; the border guard without a head and half the mariner. The cement in the trough began to set.

All that night the heavy traffic continued, only easing off in the morning. The permanent inhabitants watched and waited. Only here and there could we see tired Red Army soldiers and only occasionally a car with people and luggage - mainly Jewish evacuees.

In the afternoon some armed men appeared in the streets. They were rushing around singly or in groups. Across their chests hung belts with ammunition, they had rifles in their hands, and an armband in colours - gold/red/green. They were Lithuanian partisans. Later on we heard shots - sometimes single ones, sometimes a burst of a machine gun, also sounds of breaking glass. The time to plunder was getting ripe. On the other side of the street someone was smashing the window of a large wine shop. The windowpane broke and first a few men, and then more, entered through the hole, returning the same way laden with bottles.

At that time there was no authority in Kaunas. For marauders it was a golden opportunity to loot. I returned to D.K.A. The storeroom was already empty. The kitchen floor was covered with cream. There were also empty, broken vodka bottles, but no people. They had probably enjoyed the night here. The house was empty. Only in the boiler room did I find a man in a drunken sleep. I went up the white marble stairs. In the marble hall where such a short while ago the big ball had been in progress there was now only the echo of my steps. I looked at the furniture and pictures which I had so recently purchased, visited the hothouse where, amid the quiet of the palms and flowers, a tap was dripping. The goldfish were swimming erratically, opening and closing their little mouths. Everyone had forgotten them. I changed the water and attended to them. This was my last 'official function' in the House of the Red Army. I went down to the office, took my personal file out of the cabinet and, putting it into my pocket, left this house for the last time.

I had nothing to do here. No-one for whom to protect the property. I was an outsider in this country. I gave the keys to the drunken watchman before leaving the building.

In front of the building was a group of people watching some partisans who were smashing the unfinished sculptures. The mariner was already smashed to bits.

When going home, neighbours told me about the partisans who were entering houses and executing Red Army soldiers in hiding; also Jews and people who were on the Red Army payroll. While we were having tea and discussing what might happen, I saw through the window a group of partisans running towards our house. I thought they were the ones who had been in front of the Red Army House. Suddenly a thought struck me. They had found the address of the commandant – me, and were coming for me thinking me a Russian, especially as I could not speak Lithuanian. Explanations would do no good in these times. They were young Lithuanian chauvinists, angry and drunk. They would execute me on the spot and ask questions later. There was no time to lose. "I have to run," I called to my wife and in-laws and ran towards the kitchen where I jumped out through the window into the backyard. Going over the neighbour's fence, I saw Marushka, rather pale, shutting the window after me.

Going through a few more backyards, I came to Stalin's Boulevard. I stopped at the gate and looked around. The street was covered with smashed plaster busts of Stalin and tattered portraits of commissars and marshals of the Soviet Union. The shop which had been selling them had broken windows and an empty interior. Further away, near the corner, a group of partisans were arguing but they soon disappeared. I decided to go to our farm, Karmelowo. Crossing the street I passed the old cathedral and turned towards Parados Street. Here, at the foot of the hill, was an empty Soviet tank, spent cartridges all around it. From the hill came sounds of firing. In the park the Reds were still fighting. I came to the trees in the 'Green Hill' and was just ready to duck between the trees when a voice called out, "Stop." Looking around I saw, leaning from behind a tree, a partisan in the uniform of a railway employee. His rifle was pointing at me. I stopped. He ordered me to raise my hands, which I did. He came close and, providing my stomach with the barrel of his rifle, ordered me to show my identification papers.

I was lucky - he seemed a reasonable man. I gave him my documents and answered as well as I could in Lithuanian. He checked all documents, examined my passport and asked my address. He certainly was a better clerk than a partisan as, when examining my papers, he put his rifle against the tree before checking if I possessed arms. I could have silenced him with one blow of my fist. But why should I do it? He let me go anyway but would not allow me to

continue in the previous direction. I had to return to town. I went back as far as the first turn and, when the partisan could not see me, turned to my intended direction but, being more cautious, I was now going through different backyards using, whenever possible, holes in the fences to squeeze through. At last I reached the highway. On the highway I spotted a group of partisans. They were searching someone. I dropped into the ditch and crawled slowly to the adjoining rye field. A few kilometres further on I could already see the forest which continued right to Karmelowo. I began to hurry when, unexpectedly, I heard rifle shots. The whine of the bullets was very close, just above my head. I realised that someone was shooting at me. I fell to the ground, hugging the earth. My heart was beating wildly. After a while the shooting stopped. Slowly I raised my head to have a look. About 400 metres away, leaning against a house, was a group of partisans. I could hear them laughing. They were not following me. They were drinking - probably moonshine - straight from the bottle. Crouching in the rye field, I continued towards the forest. I had only another 70 metres to go but this last part was quite devoid of any shelter. It was a freshly mowed meadow. I decided to risk it and sprinted as fast as I could towards the forest. Immediately the shooting started again but the bullets were whistling past and I reached the first trees. The partisans were probably too drunk to take good aim.

After a few hours walk through dense, bushy undergrowth, I reached our house on the hill. The white shutters were closed. I wondered if everyone had left. I went round the house and was joyously greeted by our dogs. The kitchen door was opened slowly by my cousin. In seconds I was in the kitchen. Everyone came to the kitchen, hugging me and asking for news.

"Are the Germans already in Kaunas? Why is it so quiet? Where is the Front?" I was asked. They told me that, during the last day and night, the highway was covered with the retreating Soviet Army, with masses of civilian evacuees and many Jews, who were going by trucks, by horse-drawn carriages, and even walking. Local residents of the nearby village fled into the forest. The little village was empty as all were in hiding.

There were also rumours about heavy fighting near Wilno as, coming from the south, the German Army had supposedly broken through the Front near Suwalki.

I thought about it during the night. In Wilno was my widowed mother with our son Jurek (George) and my three old aunts. They lived, unprotected, in a large house on the outskirts of Wilno, far away from other dwellings. There

was nothing I could do here. To return to Kaunas seemed premature. I decided to go to Wilno as it was only 100 kilometres away.

At dawn I packed some food, took my old pushbike and, saying goodbye to everyone, was on my way. In the beginning I used country lanes for shortcuts. When the sun rose I went through the forest. There were no people and it was very quiet. Suddenly, after rounding a bend, I saw a man in the bushes. It was a Soviet Army soldier - part of his hand was torn away. The clotting blood looked black, his hair and face were covered with dirt and blood, his eyes looked frightened and feverish. Upon seeing me, he shrank back into the bush like a wounded animal. He had ceased trusting people and probably preferred to die among the animals in the forest.

I passed a few deserted villages, an empty railway station and bullet-ridden carriages with no engine. My way was now uphill. When near another village I heard shots from the forest. I wanted to get some information but the huts I entered were all deserted. There were not even dogs left behind. Soon I reached the River Niemen. Along it went the highway, Kaunas Wilno. The same road was used by Napoleon on his way to Moscow, nearly 130 years ago.

After a last sharp bend, I was on the highway and right in front of me was a Russian tank. In the open turret stood a soldier with binoculars and, around the tank, were soldiers with maps. I was stopped, my identity papers checked, a few questions asked and I was left free. They had bigger trouble on their hands.

A few kilometres further on Russian cavalry was crossing Niemen - swimming. The river was covered with horses. The soldiers were lying on the horses or swimming behind them, hanging on to the tails. Some were swimming without horses. Their clothing, tied with a belt, was hanging from their necks. They were in a frantic hurry. From the other side of the river could be heard calls, yells and neighing of horses.

After passing another empty little town (Rumshyshki), I had to climb a steep hill towards Zyzmory. I did not meet anyone. Only later near another forest I heard some shooting. In a trench were sitting Red Army men, their rifles pointing into the woods. Behind the wall of a hut was standing an officer with a revolver at the ready.

"Stop him!" he called to the soldier, pointing at me. Without delay I got off the bike. The officer approached with a hostile look on his face.

"Who are you?" he asked, in Russian.

"I am a local man. I am going to Wilno where my mother and son are," I replied in Russian.

"I love these 'local' ones," he drawled, with biting irony. "Look how they are shooting at us, the bastards."

"I am not a Lithuanian. I am a Pole," I replied, showing my passport.

The lieutenant did not look at it. He was more interested in my parcel hanging from the bike. He ordered me to take it off and show him the contents. A few sandwiches, a piece of bacon and a spare shirt. He gave me a dirty look, shaking the revolver at me and ... let me go.

Near Zyzmory I lost my way and turned into the forest. This mistake could have easily cost me my life. Here was a concentration of the Soviet artillery, tank formation and supply columns. All sides were guarded. It was a larger formation that had probably lost contact with the main force. I must state here that I had no idea where the Front was at that time, nor from which directions the Germans were attacking. One could not go by ear as there were no detonations, no sound of a heavy bombardment. Only from time to time some single shots came from different directions. Here, in these woods, I was in a tight corner. I asked a soldier if he could tell me the way to Wilno. An officer standing near probably thought me a suspicious character and he ordered me to raise my hands and searched me for firearms. Not finding any, he asked for my identity papers. Very carefully he checked all documents, including my birth certificate. He asked me to sign my name in Russian in his notebook and to compare this signature with the one of the Russian passport. He was still very suspicious. I did not know what he concluded.

I was expecting anything, but not what happened next. Destiny is certainly unpredictable. Within the next few minutes the Russian was dead. Quite unexpectedly, German bombers attacked the forest from very low altitude. The raid was so sudden that before the soldiers could grasp what was happening, bombs were exploding and trees were crashing noisily. Clouds of dust were rising above the trees. I was lying in a trench and was covered with earth. I was shivering, covered in a cold sweat, my ears ringing and, in my temples, the pulse was beating strongly. Again a hellish blast, the earth trembled, a whistling noise and something hit me on the head.

When I opened my eyes there was a tragic stillness around me. I was covered by a broken branch but was able to get up. Next to me lay the officer - a piece of wood had pinned him. In his dead hand he was still holding my passport. Branches and uprooted trees covered the ground, everywhere were

stumps. Dust and fir needles were settling to the ground. My pushbike was undamaged. I took my passport from the hand of the dead lieutenant and left the forest as fast as I could. Using lanes, I bypassed Zyzmory and at last found my way back to the main road that led me once more into a forest. Among the trees were supply carts, abandoned by the Soviets. The carts were unharnessed, the harnesses still hanging on the shafts. There were blankets on the ground and bags filled with oats. There were no soldiers. Some local peasants were cautiously looking around, hoping to find something of value.

After coming out of the forest I saw two saddled horses tethered to a tree. I started to look around. Further up the hill, lying in a ditch beside the road, were two Soviet soldiers looking intently towards the field. I asked them if one could safely go ahead. One of them looked at me indifferently and, after spitting on the ground, said "If you want to, go ahead, but there," pointing to a nearby hill, "are the Germans."

"Does it mean that the Front is already here?"

"Yes."

"And nobody is shooting?"

"Why the hell should we fire if they don't fire at us?" he laughed and lit a cigarette.

I was undecided. Should I wait? Or should I continue on my way? In front of me was an empty valley. If shooting should start, what should I do? There was nowhere to hide. Maybe on the other hill the Germans were also lying in ditches and only waiting for an order to start shooting? I looked at the Russian soldier distrustfully. When they saw me going towards the Germans might they not shoot me in the back? Who would prevent it? To kill people at the Front is not punishable. It is a soldier's privilege, and even their 'sacred duty'. These thoughts were rushing through my mind and I could not decide what to do. I sat down near the trench, lit a cigarette and waited. Anyway I was tired. I had already covered half the distance to Wilno.

Some time later the soldiers got up, mounted their horses and rode away towards Zyzmory. I was left alone. In the valley the wheat was waving with the wind, the clouds left dark moving shadows on the field, skylarks were merrily darting. Not far away a chained dog was howling terribly. His owner had probably deserted him.

Half an hour passed. Everything was quiet and I could not see anyone. I decided to risk it. I mounted the bike and quickly cycled down the steep hill.

The highway in this place was unfinished and the detour led through a very sandy road that was impossible to pass by bike so I started walking. I passed a broken-down army kitchen where the ground was covered with white noodles which two grubby little girls were gathering into their baskets. Seeing me, they darted into the shrubs. Down the hill, before me came a cart drawn by two horses. A peasant, looking terrified, was driving them on with a whip. Passing me, he yelled, "Germans are coming!" I stopped behind some trees, looked around and seeing nothing suspicious, moved on.

Arriving on the top of the hill, I saw the charred ruins of a farmhouse. It was still smouldering. On the sooty stove stood a deserted machine gun. Some blackened soldiers' helmets lay in the ashes. On the stone bench beside the house sat a grey cat. The road now led through birch woods, sloping downhill. After passing the woods I again had a full view. Quite unexpectedly I saw tarpaulin-covered lorries packed full of soldiers dressed in greyish uniforms. These lorries were entering the highway from a side road. In the middle of the road stood a military policeman with a green metal helmet. He controlled the traffic. On an old birch tree was hammered a piece of board with the words "Mach Wilno" in German. I was now on the German side.

I passed the soldier controlling the traffic he did not even glance at me. Big lorries and trucks passed me continually. The air was filled with clouds of dust and the highway seemed to tremble and buckle under the weight of the unending traffic. After I passed Jewje (a small town), there was a Soviet air raid. The column stopped, soldiers jumped out of the trucks, over the ditches, and hid in the forest. The ditch at my side was very deep. Holding my bike, I started to go slowly down when suddenly the shadow of a diving plane passed over me. I was in a panic. The bombs were much too close. I dropped the bike and sprinted as fast as I could into the forest, accompanied by loud noises of explosions and two rising columns of dust.

After an hour I came to Ponary, quite close to Wilno. A military policeman stopped me, forbidding me to continue as Wilno was being taken over by the German Army and all civilians were forbidden to travel. I slept a few hours in the woods, finished my sandwiches and, when the sun was setting, I was on way again going cross country through woods and valleys, avoiding roads and highways. Within an hour I had reached the outskirts of Wilno. The streets were full of German soldiers.

At crossroads they were putting up road signs showing the direction of advancement. Near 'Ostra Brama' (an archway across the street with a small

chapel and a famous picture of the Holy Madonna), soldiers were still in fighting formation but at the next intersection there were already signs with 'To Minsk 208 km.' I continued to Kolonia Wilenska (the suburb where my mother lived), along lanes well known to me, trying again to avoid main streets. It was dark when I opened our front gate and was greeted joyously our old dog, Jack. My mother, with my son in her arms, came to meet me. At last I was at home.

A week later Marushka arrived. As travel at this stage was strictly forbidden for civilians, she got a lift - first in a German armoured car and, later, in a small tank. She was very tired as all night she had been sitting on a box of ammunition with only two thoughts in her mind? Had I reached home alive and would the ammunition box explode with the jumping and shaking over the pot-holed road.

Marushka told me that her father was very anxious for me to return to Karmelowo and take charge of the farm during these uncertain times. After a few weeks in Wilno, taking Jurek and mother, we returned to Kaunas, this time going by train.

In Kaunas the organisation of the new regime was already quite obvious. The Fuehrer's victorious army was now at Smolenks. It was now the fourth occupation of Wilno's country and the second of Lithuanian Kaunas. This time banners with the black swastika were flying over the city. Once again the hopes of the Lithuanians were not realised. The Lithuanian partisans with their gold/green/red bands were fighting futilely as 'Lietuva' (Lithuanian native tongue) was wiped from the map of Europe. The Fuehrer's victorious army rushed forward on its Blitzkrieg. Following the army came the civilian administration. The employees of the newly appointed Minister for the Eastern Occupational Zones, Mr. Rosenberg, were organising the administrative machinery. There appeared 'Gebiets' - General and Reichs Kommissariats. Lithuania was only a part of the captured 'Ostland' (Eastland). Lithuania, with our old Wilno, was called General Kommissariat fur Ostland, with Kaunas as the capital. Her ruler was Party Member Freiherr von Renteln.

History as always was patient and, once again, ready to oblige her interpreters. The old capital, Kaunas, had to change its name. Traditions of old Hansa were again brought to light.

Once upon a time Kaunas was a Hansa town; therefore she must have been German and had to be called Kauen. Traditions from the middle ages were recalled and new orders issued.

Mr. Rosenberg ordered all Jews to the ghetto. After a bloody pogrom (organised massacre), 45,000 Jews were driven into the suburb, Sloboda, which was then surrounded by barbed wire. In smaller towns the majority of Jews were murdered outright and only the few remaining brought to Kauena. The direct control over them was given to - what irony - Mr. Jordan! These people with the yellow star were down-trodden and miserable but clung to the illusions that they were still human beings. Mr. Jordan was Chief of the Department for Jewish Affairs at the General Kommissariat for the Ostland (Eastern Countries - east of Germany). Mr. Jordan attacked his work energetically. The Jewish masses began to diminish behind the barbed wires. Mount Ponary, near Wilno, achieved a grim glory. Transports from Kaunas and Wilno were halted in the nearby forest. Then followed a bloody track between crushed bushes. Here the condemned were driven on their way to cemented ditches. When the deathly terror choked their cries and their brains were numbed, they had to pass in a single file their drunken tormentors who were shooting into the human mass. As the trenches were filled with mutilated bodies, lime was poured over them.

On the Avenue of Independence, in the offices of the General Commissariat, Mr. Jordan was probably marking off some figures in his progress reports.

Thus died the people of the Star of David. They perished because they dared to be born Jews.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

October, 1941. Trees bare of leaves, cold winds whirling leaves high, grey clouds over the rusty coloured bare fields. Our white shutters were rattling against the walls. I returned to the farm. Today I spent ploughing all day - it was cold and the wind penetrating. My feet were tired after a whole day of walking behind the plough. With pleasure, I returned home to sit down on a comfortable couch in front of the open fire while my mother prepared dinner by the light of a flickering kerosene lamp. My Jurek was sitting on the carpet among his toys. The wooden rabbit and the car without its wheels did not interest him any more. He was over a year old and loved chewing his big toe which he preferred to his old dummy. Marushka was ill and so was in Kaunas with her parents.

Next morning the cold wind was still blowing. I had to go to Kaunas to deliver my requisition as ordered by the Germans. I was sitting on wheat bags,

wrapped in a fur coat. I had to hurry and was whipping the horses as the wheat contributions were accepted only until 2 p.m. in the suburb, Sloboda, behind the river. I had to pass the so-called small ghetto. Behind its barbed wires it was quite empty. Boards were nailed over the broken windows and doors. In the empty street of the dead suburb only the wind was howling. I remember how Marushka and her friend, Karaliene, were able to rescue some of the Jewish children. The despairing mothers were throwing their little children over the fence to be picked up by Marushka and her friend. They were trying to save some life - some uncertain life of the orphans but still life. Marushka and her friend were finding places between the Aryan families which did adopt them later on. There were no more Jews behind the barbed wires. I hurried my horses along, wishing to leave behind me this nightmarish suburb as quickly as possible. After delivering the wheat, I drove through the city to see Marushka. On the walls of some houses and on posts I saw some placards. I stopped the cart and, pushing myself through a crowd of people, started to read. It was a new order by the German occupational forces. This order was concerned with Poles, previous Polish citizens and their families, as well as Russian civilians who had stayed in Lithuania after the arrival of the German Army. All the aforementioned had to leave their present place of abode and, within three days from the date of this order, had to move to Sloboda suburb, to the small ghetto vacated by the Jews. This order was signed by the General Commissar and dated 16th October, 1941.

That meant ghetto for the Poles. I could still see those empty, broken-down wooden houses in Sloboda. I began to shiver. The Jews vacated the place for us. Would our future be the same as theirs?

All Poles were greatly alarmed. At home the atmosphere was very depressing. "What to do?" Everyone was asking. There were still many thousands of us in this country. Nobody had any intention of going to the ghetto. Better misery and quick death than to be behind barbed wires in a ghetto, waiting for certain death. The very thought of the ghetto filled one with horror. The decision not to go was quite definite and unanimous. The results of this decision were definite beyond all expectations.

After three days when Mr. Jordan arrived before the ghetto to satiate his eyes with the new conquest, there was not even one Pole there. Only ten poor Soviets took up residence in one small house on the edge of the ghetto. All the other houses were quite empty. The Poles simply left Kaunas, this town of grim ghettos, and dispersed in all directions into the country.

I had to save Marushka who was ill, and my son Jurek. Because before the war I was a Polish citizen, they would have to go to the ghetto as Marushka had committed the crime of marrying a Polish citizen. Thanks to the law, I found a way out of it. Marushka and I got a divorce - she could keep our son and had to take her maiden name again. I hid in the country. Many Poles followed my example but some fled to Wilno, maintaining that, should the Germans order people to the ghetto, the whole town would become one big ghetto.

Some took to the roads, tracking along small lanes, sometimes getting a lift or, like tramps, finding sleeping accommodation in empty freight trains and following the railway tracks, looking for some lucky break. Here in Kaunas everything was against them. Just the thought of the ghetto filled one with horror. The evacuees were like pilgrims, searching for human rights in this world. Would they find it in their own country, their country trodden down and suppressed by war? Even they doubted it.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

Winter was approaching. A hard, ominous winter of 1941-1942.

The bare soil, not yet covered by snow, became hard as rock. Even the small sprigs were covered with white frost and a greyish frost hung in the air.

I was bringing milk to Kaunas, peddling my pushbike vigorously from Karmelowo where I was living in the house with the white shutters, hiding from the Germans. My breathing was becoming laborious, my eyelashes and eyebrows were covered with hoarfrost. The highway led past empty paddocks, the telephone wires were ringing hollowly and the frost was tightening its forceps. My hands were becoming blue from the cold. On the misty highway a long column of Soviet war prisoners appeared. They walked bent, their heads pulled as far as possible into their collars of their trench coats. On their shoulders were visible the big letters SU. SU. SU. (short for Soviet Union). The column progressed slowly and tended to stretch out more and more, never ending with those who already were weak. They just shuffled their legs. Their grey faces were very thin, their eyes deep and hollow. Some of these human skulls covered with skin were wrapped in rags, under which the wounds might heal. It seemed that some of these prisoners would be unable to reach their camps behind wires. They were dragged by their mates, their heads hanging down, their feet dangling along. They were slow and lagging behind. The impatient German soldiers were prodding them along with the butts of their

rifles. Why should they hurry? Where to? Death would find them anywhere - in the labour camps, behind the barbed wires, in barracks erected quickly from thin planks, and on the earthen floor among dirt, lice and various infections ... and in the queue to the kitchen with its pots of frozen potatoes and rotted cabbages ... and there in the streets being used as horsepower, dragging heavy cartloads, as there were more prisoners than horses. Death was lurking where they had to shovel the snow away, where the frost was coagulating the blood of the starving S.U....SU...SU..., living skeletons, chopping trees in the forests or digging peat in frozen swamps. Everywhere! Everywhere! ... Where the hundred thousand humans could be disgorged from the Front. Why should one care about these humans? Should they perish, others would take their place. Victory was assured. The Fuehrer's army was at the gates of Moscow. In eight weeks the war would be finished. Conventions and humanitarianism were only for declaration in the Palace of the League of Nations. In the 'New Europe' this herd of prisoners of war would be looked after by the 'Arbeitsartit' (Employment Office).

It was a terrible winter for the people with the SU... SU... SU... stamped on their backs. They were branded like cattle taken for slaughter. The dead ones were grabbed by their legs and thrown into a common ditch. The sick ones were allowed to stay on their wooden bunks to wait for death.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

January, 1942.

General 'FROST' became the victorious Chief Commander of the Soviet Army.

The snow became hard, the water frozen and like rock on the rivers. The air looked grey - it seemed that at any moment it would get hard too, that it would turn to ice.

I was on the railway station. On the first platform stood a long transport. The engine was covered with ice but there were clouds of white steam from the engine. Behind the engine were freight cars with a most unusual load. The Fuehrer's victorious soldiers, suffering severe frostbite, were lying on the floors. Bandaged soldiers covered with blankets, shawls, rags and torn Russian army coats, were lying on the floors of the freight train. They were untouched by enemy bullets, not even scratched by shrapnel. They were the victims of

'General Frost', the enemy without mercy who started his offensive in January, armed with the most powerful weapon. This weapon was the freezing air. At the Front the mercury in the thermometers was still contracting, the silver column was going down the minus Celsius scale 30 .. 35 .. 45...

'General Frost' was tightening his pincers without mercy. His wind was chasing the transports, his snow massed on the railway lines, the waiting engines were covered with ice and the soldiers were freezing in the unheated wagons.

The white general took the side of the Red Army. Now he was not only the general, but Marshal Frost, stopping the attack on Moscow, halting the Fuehrer's offensive. Already in 1812 he had struck down Napoleon's army at the same Moscow gates. Now he intended to repeat the debacle a second time.

The transport with the frostbitten soldiers of the twentieth century's Napoleon was standing a long time at the platform in Kaunas railway station. Those who could climbed to the platform, using sticks and dragging their swollen legs, covered in rags. They could not wear boots. Sisters from the Red Cross were serving hot coffee. Some had to be fed by spoon like helpless children. They could not manage by themselves as, instead of arms, they had only two useless stumps frozen up to the elbows. There were also some who could not drink at all. Their faces were too stiff and they looked ghastly.

With a piercing whistle and screeching of brakes, a new transport appeared from the tunnel. The engine was covered with a shield of ice, the cars were covered with stiff, frozen snow and the Red Cross signs covered with white hoarfrost. It surely was a transport of the White Cross as the victims were cut down in a bloodless battle by the white enemy. At last thousands of frost-bitten soldiers were returning to the Fatherland, to their home towns and their hospitals, to wait there for amputation of their limbs which they were still dragging with them. They were hoping for a miracle but the gangrene was spreading in the badly frost-bitten and neglected limbs. In the Fatherland the hospitals were getting ready to receive them.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

A young shepherd arrived, panting. "Sir, the Germans are digging up corpses."

"Where?"

"There, in the woods where the grave is."

I pushed the scythe into the field, put my whetstone alongside the pitcher with water and went across the river to the woody hill in the direction indicated. I saw a group of people and three white coffins made from planks. I came nearer; the smell was putrid. Two Russian war prisoners covered with aprons and wearing long rubber gloves, were carefully removing a large rag from the bottom of the pit. A few German soldiers were standing nearby supervising the exhumation. One of them was making some notes. A few young shepherds watched, full of curiosity. When the Soviet prisoners removed the sheet from the pit we could see three German soldiers. They were lying huddled together like sleeping brothers. One, with his outstretched arms, hugged both the others. In the dry sand of this hill their bodies were fairly well preserved considering that a year had passed since shells from a Soviet tank had ended their lives. The broken fir stump was still there. They had been sitting under this fir tree on this, their fatal date - 27th June, 1941. I remembered the shelling very well as it happened barely 200 metres from our house. Our house had trembled, the windows shook and a large dust cloud rose over the hill. Only later did I see the new grave and the broken fir tree. On the ground remained the metal helmet with holes, a few shell fragments and a dirty notebook. I read his name: Obergefreiter Stanislaus Kuzzawa from Selesia. On the last page was a short note; 27.6.41. *In the woods near Kauen, Soviet tanks are shooting from the village ....* These were his last notes. The most important fact he was unable to note in his diary was that in a few seconds he would be dead. He, a Pole on Lithuania's soil, fighting for the ideals of the aggressive German. Now he was lying in his grave - I did not know which body was his; the one with the smashed skull, the one without legs, or the one holding his comrades in his arms. Their faces had no expression, stiff in a deathly grin.

Many of these graves marked the roads of Hitler's war up to the Volga, the Krim vineyards, reaching even the far hills of the Kaukas. The Fuehrer was at the peak of his victory. He gave orders that graves far behind the Front should be opened and his soldiers returned to their native soil, the soil on which they grew up for the 'Fuehrer, Volk and Vaterland'. They were to be buried near the battlefields only as a temporary measure.

Crosses topped with German helmets were standing guard on the conquered lands. The living went forward to conquer new lands as per the Fuehrer's orders. The victorious army advanced through the Volga steppes, through sandy Libia and climbed the hills of the wild Kaukas.

Victory, Victory - the words of the paean were on the stages and on screens with a background of thousands of planes and tanks and innumerable columns of captured prisoners. The song was echoed by the marching army. The German radio repeated it in their news: "Special announcement. Krasnodar has been taken, Majkop is taken. The enemy suffered great material losses.. Thousands of war prisoners have been taken ... Tobruk has fallen .. Solum has fallen ... Marshal Rommel is standing with his unconquerable army at the frontier of Egypt ..." and, finally, among these names marking the triumphal march of the Fuehrer we heard the two: STALINGRAD - and EL ALAMEIN.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

Once again the winter has come - 1942/43. In our house on the hill the white shutters were again rattling in the cold wind. On the cold, misty mornings I took my saw and we went into the forest to cut wood - half for us and half for export to the Reich.

In the evenings, as before, I used to sit on the old couch in front of the fire which illuminated the room with a red glow, but my little Jurek did not play in front of me on the carpet. I was alone. The family were in Kaunas where I delivered them milk and food. The highway was not empty. I did not meet my transports; nor Soviet prisoners driven in long columns. The Front was far away. The fight near Stalingrad seemed to come to an end. Now the Russians were taking German war prisoners.

Jurek always met me at the front door. While I was unpacking my milk can he climbed on the pushbike and, furiously dinging the bike bell, announced my arrival. After tea, making sure all the doors were locked, I sat by the radio. Listening to the voice from London was punishable by death.

But Jurek was always with me. "Wait, wait daddy, I will switch on the radio." Climbing on my knees and manipulating the knob with his tiny fingers he would say "Look, see? There is light behind the glass" and, in a few seconds, came the voice from London: "This is the Polish Radio Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan ... broadcast from London. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Firstly the latest news. The three hundred thousand strong army of Field Marshal Paulus is trapped. The pincers of the Soviet counter-offensive have closed. The Soviet headquarters had issued an ULTIMATUM. After 97 days of bloody fighting, Hitler lost the battle of Stalingrad.

Next morning dawn again found me cutting wood in the forest.

The German administration demanded more and more. The amount of the requisitioned goods always increased. We had to deliver wheat, potatoes and milk to the Germans. The eggs I carried in a basket to the collection centre. I also had to deliver vegetables, hay and straw, hens and meat. Our herd was decreasing rapidly. There were only five cows left; the rest went to be converted into tinned food for the 'Wehrmacht'. About fifty percent of our products had to be given to the occupation forces. This winter they took horses and carts as well. As it was getting harder to make ends meet, my relatives who had arrived more than a year ago from Wilno, left Karmelowo looking for jobs somewhere else. My cousin became a waitress in a Wilno restaurant and her husband got work in a mill to be nearer the flour. I was left only with my Simon. He was a farm labourer and had a wife and two children. We three had to do all the work between us. Life became even harder.

Spring was coming. When the March sun melted the remaining dirty snow and the furrows were dried by the wind, we went to work in the fields. Simon walked behind the harrow and I, with measured steps, sowed the seed, thinking about our Krystyna. She was not born yet but we had already given her this name, the name of Lavrans daughter, because Marushka and I liked the author Sigrid Undset.

At the end of March, 1943, Marushka bore me a son. Thus our long-awaited Krystyna became Roman. He came into our family as the second war child, another male offspring. Both grandmothers took him under their wings. Jurek was thrilled. When his new brother arrived from hospital, he grabbed a vase of flowers and, before anyone could stop him, he was bending over Roman's head, tilting the vase and saying "Smell them, my little brother, they are smelling lovely". Of course all the water from the vase went over Roman. Thus the two brothers met for the first time.

Summer progressed quickly. The wheat sown with my own hands grew and Simon and I were already sharpening our scythes to be ready for the reaping. Sitting in the shade of a willow tree, our hammering on the scythes made the melodious sounds so familiar to all harvesters. Jurek was dragging a long chain and making puffing sounds, pretending to drag a train behind him. A small puppy, Miki, barking loudly, was trying to grab the chain. The same chain which represented a train to George was probably to Miki a hunted animal. Fantasy on both ends of a chain.

Mr. Alfred Rosenberg also had his own fantasies. In the chain of war events he was adding new links. He changed the face of the Ostland. The countries along the Baltic Sea became 'Forefront Fatherland'. The general commissar received instructions in the utmost secrecy. The ruler of Lithuania, Freiherr von Renteln, ordered all Poles to be deported from Lithuania. No placards or proclamations were issued. He had learned his lesson with the arranging of the Polish ghetto. Instead he sent lorries into the country with his Gestapo men. They took the people from farms, from private homes in cities and small towns. The people were ordered to leave behind all their immovable possessions as well as most of the moveable ones. The Polish owners were rounded up and transported as a labour force to the Reich. In the Reich, Germans were ready to come and occupy the empty farms. Into Lithuania arrived new colonists. Export and import of humans was flourishing. Rosenberg shuffled people, building his house of cards. From the east the thunder was approaching and an ill wind was blowing, shaking the foundations of his house of cards. Not many colonists had arrived in the newly-formed 'Forefront Fatherland' when the first evacuees began to arrive into Germany. They were the 'Wolgagermans', the old German colonists from the fertile Ukraine.

The Red Army was pushing forwards. The Fuehrer took over as the Chief Commander of German armies. A new phase began "The brilliant strategy of the 'mobile war'" as it was called by the new agency. Each Tuesday there was a broadcast by General Diettmar "With tremendous material losses for the enemy, the German Army have occupied new and better positions, withdrawing according to plan".

The Anglo-American air offensive was increasing its range causing the German Minister of Heavy Armaments, Reichsminister Speer, many sleepless nights. Many factories were in ruins, but the Fuehrer required new guns, tanks and airplanes.

More people were required for labour in the Reich. Berlin was sending new instructions to the General Commissariats in the East. The employment office, Gestapo and police were busy. People were captured in the streets, cafes, picture theatres, in market squares and on roads. Lithuania had to supply an additional 100,000 labourers. Transports were organised, on the railway station people were de-loused in specially prepared disinfection rooms and loaded into trains. Here Marushka and her friend, Alma, who both worked in the 'Abeitamt' were able to facilitate the flight for many women from the transports to Germany. Out of the disinfection room the women were conducted to the back street and to freedom. Only at the last moment was I able to rescue Simon, our

farm worker. I lived on forged documents. Marushka was transferred from her job at the Red Cross where she worked as an interpreter to the employment office where she was an interpreter/ typist, and later on, to the offices of military workshops for transport vehicles. Through paying her tribute in work, she was allowed to stay with her children.

Another winter came, the fifth in Lithuania. Much could be said about those years. They were the years of 'Drang nach Osten' (Expansion to the East). But now came a special year, the year 1944 - two scores and four. Bewitched by the prophetic words of the old Polish bard, we expected great historical changes in this coming year. The might of the Fuehrer started to crack. On all fronts blows were falling on the invincible Wehrmacht. The Fatherland was being crushed by allied bombs.

This year was the beginning of total retreat.

The European underground started to rise again.

In Lithuanian forests, partisans appeared. Some of them, in colourful armbands, had long ago greeted the advancing, victorious Germans in the streets of Kaunas, but now they were throwing hand grenades under the wheels of the German vehicles. The expansive Lithuanian forests presented a good hiding place for the underground. The Germans issued an order to cut down the trees along both sides of roads and railways. Disobedience was punished by death. It was easier to fight the forest than the people hiding there. For thousands of kilometres the trees were felled, 200 metres deep. The felling was the duty of the local people who had grown up in their shade. I also had to fell the trees on our hill. Simon and I felled the silver firs, the gentle white birches and the tall pine trees smelling of resin, until the hill was bare along the highway. Many trees went but many new people came into the forests. The vast forests of Lithuania and Wilno county were sheltering an odd collection of people. History will be silent about many legends from these forests. The ideas and laws in these forests were not always pleasant to the ears of the chronicles of the Polish Government, nor to London. The slogans were different for BOR and different for ROLA (BOR-Komorowski, Chief Commander of the white partisans -AKA. ROLA-Zymierski, Commander of the Red Polish detachment - AL.)

Not only the Poles had their lairs in the forests. Hiding in these forests were also Soviet war prisoners, many German deserters from the Fuehrer's army, and the fugitives from ghettos. Soviet paratroopers jumped down into the forests too and started to organise the cadres of the Red partisans. The Lithuanian

forests forces grew in strength when the men from Plechavicius battalions came to hide as their mutinous General Plechavicius was to be arrested by the Germans and his men were to be sent to the Front. The armies from the vassal countries started to rebel - they did not wish to shed their blood for the General Commissariat in Kaunas. In these hospitable forests various gangs of robbers and looters also found shelter, hiding under the name of partisans.

In the beginning of 1944, in the north-eastern part of the former Polish republic, the partisans grew to great strength. In the virgin forests of Rudnicks, Lida and Traki, they had foray bases and, from Smorgonie on, their power was complete. The peasants were paying the requisition to them only. They were given signed receipts which they handed to the village chief, hoping that this would stop the Germans demanding their share. The German administration existed here in theory only. The German civilian clerks had left this inhospitable part long ago, seeking protection in the 'Gebiets Kommissariat' where the Germans still ruled. Protected by army garrisons, there they even ventured outside - but in armoured cars.

At this time the German forces were holding the bridgeheads near the famous Berezyna, and the Soviet Army was forcing its way through the Prypec swamps.

A storm was brewing once again over the land trampled so often by various wars. The distant thunder could already be heard. People again crowded around their radios. Once more there were frightening rumours as well as hopeful predictions of early peace. Anxiety grew. Would the Front pass gently over this land? Maybe the war would finish even sooner? It was senseless for Hitler to continue fighting, the people tried to convince each other.

As before, I was bringing the milk to Kaunas but the highway was no longer empty. Towards the Front, the German soldiers were advancing and from the opposite side came the first wave of evacuees.

Jurek met me at the door as usual. But now he took my hand and we went to see his small brother who was holding a dummy in his mouth. Lying in his cane cot, Roman looked like a tiny animal in a cage. "Daddy, do you know that this, 'our puppy', can already get up?" He was saying it with a certain pride, pointing to the openings in the old cane bed.

As before, I listened to Radio London, Moscow and Swit (a secret radio station in occupied Poland). The news was good and getting even better. It was the beginning of an epilogue for the great historical drama. In a good mood I was returning, as before, to my house on the hill. The white shutters were rattling

slightly in the gentle Spring wind. The last snow had melted in the valleys, and the earth became warm and streaming. It was time to go and work in the fields. But this time I was sowing half-heartedly as the future ownership of the land was rather doubtful. Who would be reaping these fields? Would the storm coming from the East destroy the crop and the house? These and similar thoughts did not encourage enthusiastic work.

The sowing was finished, the fields were soon covered with the new green grass, all the potato field was covered with new manure but the Front was still far away.

At last came the day. I was sitting with Jurek in a strawberry paddock looking for the first ripe berries when I heard the news that Minsk (now the capital city of White Russia in the Soviet Republic) had been re-taken and the German Army had surrendered. The road to Wilno was open. The last Germans were leaving the Soviet Union.

The theatre of war again touched our land. The roads were full of evacuees from the east. The highway was covered with long lines of Russian 'telegi' drawn by small, thin horses. Sitting on their dirty bundles were the evacuees from the faraway east. Under these carts dangled the empty buckets. The children dozed and the tired women stared blankly. The men, in torn shoes and shirts, were walking heavily alongside the cart followed by a thin cow on a chain. Day and night the carts dragged by, forming columns - homeless people, half-starved animals were travelling for months into an unknown and, to them, a foreign west. They were often overtaken by dusty trucks, packed with goods, driven by the 'Volksdeutsche'.

Mr. Rosenberg's house of cards tumbled. The imported German colonialists were hurriedly fleeing from the Ostland. Those, who only a short while ago had arrived as the 'Herrenvolk', had already packed, and soon after the Lithuanians started to flee from Wilno, especially Lithuanian public servants who were leaving their new Lithuanian capital city, Wilno, in fear of reprisals from the Polish inhabitants.

Once again there were bombers over Kaunas - this time Soviet ones. Again air raids, bombs, and people fleeing to shelters. Kaunas had only a few shelters. The raids were usually at night. Whenever the siren sounded people rushed out from houses and, in the outer suburbs, towards the bunkers of the old fortresses. In the streets people loaded with suitcases, prams and crying children were yelling and shouting. Great flares of light brightly illuminated everything, accompanied by the noise of the circling bombers and tracer bullets under the

dark ceiling of the sky. We would put Jurek and Roman in the pram and, taking only the bare essentials for the children, rush to the bunkers. Such were the grim nights in Kaunas.

In the meantime news came from the front. We heard through London radio that Wilno was surrounded by the Soviet Army and that there was heavy fighting in the streets.

This was a signal for us; we started hiding our goods. With Simon, we dug a big hole in the barn under the hay where we hid a large barrel full of wheat and a box of personal clothing. Under cover of darkness, we dug a hole in the bushes for the bacon from our last pig. All the neighbours were doing the same. Everywhere one could see smoke coming from the chimneys as people were smoking their bacons and preparing meat for the brine. Everything was dug into the ground. We all knew that the bloody fighting in Wilno's streets had already continued for the fifth day. The Germans were now fighting for every foot of soil, being near their Fatherland. Heavy battles were expected on the line of the River Niemen and over Kaunas. We were living near this town beside the highway and near the extremely busy airfield. Nothing good could be expected in our countryside.

When the companies from the Front started arriving in our village the peasants started to leave the neighbourhood, taking all their possessions with them. They went to the hilly forest on the other side of the river. Things started to get hot for us too. On the highways were the remaining evacuees from the Soviets. They were mainly policemen who had worked for the Germans. In Russia, during the German occupation, they were employed mostly in prisoner-of-war camps and in helping to catch the partisans. The road of return was closed to them. They were the ones who were doing a lot of harm. They looted and plundered the houses near the roads; they took horses and cattle. We were helpless as they were armed. We had already received a few of these visits and decided to go to the other side of the river to try and save some of our goods. Simon and I harnessed the horses to the cart, packed the remaining goods, roped our remaining cows and crossed to the other side of the river. At the ferry we had waited in a long queue of carts. The cows were mooing, the dogs chained under the carts were barking and the peasant women, surrounded by their children, were lamenting and wailing. On the other side of the river, using winding country lanes, we went uphill. In one of the deep gorges I spotted farm buildings, quite well hidden.

There we found shelter. I left Simon there with all our possessions and, taking a boat, went back home. At home I found military police had been billeted in our house. On the highway stood a guard. Some officers sat on the veranda. Jurek, touching some shining buttons on the uniform, asked questions and could not understand why the German did not speak Polish. Marushka was packing rucksacks with our personal belongings. We were not certain what to do. My in-laws wanted to stay in Kaunas with little Roman. My mother wanted to take Jurek and go to the forest on the other side of the river. I brought Jurek and mother by boat to the other side of the river. I decided to stay with Marushka in our house and await further developments from the Front.

At that moment we had only one aim to keep us all alive and, if possible, to save some of our possessions.

One rumour was being persistently repeated: on the recaptured lands the Soviets were mobilising all men of military age and, after a short training, sending them to the Front. Our anxiety increased. I had never belonged to the group of men who liked the profession of 'being a knight', especially in such 'un-knightly' times. Fighting with arms, shooting people, using methods of violence had always filled me with disgust and loathing. It is a dirty business. Should one behave like a monster, even in the name of the highest and most noble ideals? I know, I certainly know, what reply I can expect - for ideals ... for freedom ... if someone is attacking you, you should defend yourself.

Yes, Yes and, once again, Yes! I know, so go and kill each other, slaughter each other, so go and rape each other's wives and sisters - in the name of the holy ideals. I would like to know if fighting in the name of ideals makes the uniformed masses, fighting their battles, any more noble and gentle? During the fighting there exists a special unwritten morality where young men of twenty or so, steeped with blood and alcohol, can form their character by indulging in killing, raping and looting, without fear of punishment. No... I hate war with its well-organised machinery, irrespective of who is killing whom. It is enough for me to know that humans are killing humans, that they try to annihilate each other in the most brutal and criminal ways. I also have the right to voice my 'holy ideals'. Up till now, fate has helped me to stay away from this sad duty. Would I now, by the end of the war, be forced to go against my most holy principles? During these five years I had seen enough of this criminal war. Should I be forced now to actively become a part of it? There was even something worse - I would be incorporated in the Lithuanian battalions with strange people, not even knowing their language. I would feel completely defeated. Marushka, afraid of all this, hesitantly suggested flight, whispering

flight. I did not want to flee with the Germans. The thought nauseated me and, anyway, where to? And what would become of my children and parents? What should I do? What?

A few days passed. Wilno was recaptured. During the night we could see the glow on the far horizon and hear the explosions.

The Front was getting nearer. On the dusty highway, occasional groups of stragglers from the German Army began appearing. We were familiar with these signs; these were the symptoms of lost battles. Emaciated German soldiers in torn uniforms, unshaven, supporting themselves with sticks, dragged their way along. As 132 years before with Napoleon's army, so now with the remnants of the German Army, struggled along the road. History was repeating itself but, unfortunately, nothing had been learned. On these old roads dragged the remains of Hitler's decimated army. After years of bloody fighting they, who had wanted to own Moscow as well as the Egyptian pyramids, had only secured for themselves enough land for their graves. Today their way is marked by crosses.

This time I went on foot to Kaunas as the retreating soldiers were crowding the highway and cycling was not possible. In my hand I carried a milk can for my little Roman. Sometimes a private car or a motorbike passed the columns, covering all of us with clouds of dust.

In Kaunas I met a man who was able to make his way from the east. He had passed the Front in the Wilno forests and arrived unharmed in Kaunas. He was quite emphatic regarding the rumours about the mobilisation of the local people by the Soviets. This had been his main reason for fleeing from the east. He was a Pole and wanted to be in his own country. On my way back to Karmelowo I thought about him. With all these evacuees and the chaos behind the lines of German armies, perhaps there was a chance of reaching my homeland. There was my native land, there lived most of my relatives ... I was so immersed in my thoughts that for a few seconds it did not register that a truck had stopped beside me. The driver, a German officer with a map in his hand, was making signs for me to approach. The truck was carrying German soldiers. When I came near enough, he asked me "Nach Wilkomir? Nach Wilkomir?" I replied in German that he was on the right road and that he had another 75 km to go. When he was ready to move on I asked if he could give me a lift, standing on the steps of the truck. He agreed. It was getting dark and, on the horizon, one could see the glow of burning forests. The soldiers were sitting in silence, their

heads resting on their rifles. They were nearing the Front perhaps that very night would see them in the fighting lines.

"How far is the Front?" I risked asking.

"In Wilkomir," replied the officer without a moment's hesitation.

"That close?" I blurted out.

"Yes, sure, and soon it will be even nearer," he added with an odd smile.

A few minutes later I jumped off the car as we had come to the lane leading to our house.

Till late in the night we discussed the project to go to Warsaw. Warsaw. Why Warsaw? Warsaw and the surrounding counties were occupied by the Germans, but not incorporated into the Third Reich like many other cities. Nor could the Russians take one from there and enlist in the Red Army. In Warsaw there were many relatives and friends - Marushka's and mine. I wanted to share the war years, still ahead, with my own countrymen. Marushka's eyes were full of tears. Her parents did not want to go but they wanted to keep Roman. My mother wanted to be in the forest on the other side of the river, keeping Jurek with her. Anyhow, it would have been impossible to take the children. I suggested she stay where she was, as only my life was at stake but, at this, she burst out crying. She took this dilemma very hard. The tragic dilemma for a mother, wife and obedient daughter at one and the same time. She wept silently. Occasionally we could hear some muted detonations - the clock was ticking away, marking the passing of the night. I was silent. It was dawn when Marushka threw her arms around my neck. Between the children and me, she had chosen me. The decision was taken. A hard and painful last decision. We would both go to Warsaw.

Next morning we finished our packing and checked our bikes.

Looking through the window, during lunch, I saw two riders coming up the hill towards our house. The very thin horses climbed the hill with great trouble. I went out to meet them, accompanied by the barking of the dogs. The two very tired riders came into the yard, stopping at the draw well. Looking at them I was unable to suppress a grin. In front of me were two classical caricatures. Don Quixote from la Manche with his Sancho Panza. This sight would have been humorous if not for the deep tragedy of the situation. A symbolic tragedy.

The riders were two soldiers in German uniforms and bareheaded. One was extremely tall with a pale, long face. Round his neck was slung a rifle his

strapped feet were bare and dirty. The other was a young man with a round face. In his hand he was holding a birch rod and he was seated on a small Kirghis pony. While I was looking at them with astonishment 'Don Quixote' started talking in German.

"We are hungry. Do you have something to eat?" I nodded my head. They dismounted and the horses rushed towards the grass near the fence. I took them into the kitchen. "I," continued 'Don Quixote', "have a bad stomach and can't eat anything heavy. I would really like some sour milk."

"And you?" I asked 'Sancho Panza'. "I don't care as long as there is plenty of it," he replied, to my astonishment in Russian. "Aren't you a German?" I asked him.

No. The German, sitting down, hurriedly explained.

"He is a Russian from the Wlasov army.<sup>1</sup> A young lad of seventeen. He escaped while his army was surrounded. I found him on the road beside the forest. He was sitting and crying. He did not know what to do with himself. I felt sorry for him. You see I also have a son like him at the front. I don't know what is happening to him. My God, what is the war doing to us?" He sighed heavily and called to the boy - "Sit down, Alex." After the boy sat down he continued "He is a Russian, but he is a good boy so I took him with me. What does he know about the world? He was only a child when the war started, just like Hans who might be dead already. It is more than half a year since I have heard from Hans." He sighed again and from his pocket brought out a worn photo of his son in uniform.

He continued: "Photos, only photos, that is all that remains. Near Hanover I had my own business. In 1943 everything was bombed out including my house. My wife died leaving me with my only child, my son Hans. Will I ever see him again? Half a year. My God, half a year of this war is very long. Oh, the damned war. What has the Fuehrer done with his cursed party?"

"He promised to create a new Great Germany, to give everyone work. And we believed it. He spoke so convincingly, so beautifully. And what has he given us? Ruins and cemeteries. Instead of the Great Germany now we have not even

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<sup>1</sup> \*WLASOV - A Russian general, taken prisoner by the Germans who agreed to organise Russian battalions from war prisoners to fight with the Germans against the Soviet Republic which he hated. If those men were taken prisoners by the Soviets, they were executed immediately.

a Fatherland." He put the photo back in his pocket, sighed, and continued eating.

I looked at the boy. He was eating ravenously. "How did you come to be in the German Army?" I asked him. "I joined voluntarily." "Voluntary?" "Sure, what should I have done? There was no other life. You see in our parts it was this way. You either had to join the German Army or go into the woods to the red partisans. You couldn't do anything else. If you didn't go to serve in the German Army joining the Wlasovs, the Germans would deport you for labour into Germany. In the forests with the partisans it was a very hard life. To the Wlasovs the Germans issued boots, uniforms and better food. The family was also better off. So I went and joined the German Army."

After they had finished eating they went to the barn to sleep. When, in the evening, I came to look for them I found them still sleeping. The German was lying on his stomach, his long, bare feet stretched out, the Russian curled into a ball with his hand under the arm of his protector. Don Quixote and his Sancho Panza - two knight-errands of our times. What tragedy was incarnated in those two ludicrous figures.

That is what people are to the war.

That is what war is to people... and the two scraggy nags were feeding along the fence.

## To The West

Midsummer of 1944. For the last time we walked along the terrace of our sunny veranda. Our turn had come. Once again we were leaving our house like other war evacuees. Burdened with heavy rucksacks we started towards the highway, pushing our bikes. Mother and Jurek came to see us off. This parting stuck in my mind for a long time. Jurek was chatting happily, sitting on the frame of my bike and ringing the bell. Mother was walking behind, kneading her handkerchief nervously. The dogs were dragging at their chains, barking madly. In front of the veranda, in a low chair, sat one of the billeted officers looking indifferent and bored at our departure. We passed the creek. On the highway the military policeman stood guard. When we came to the highway he stopped a military vehicle to check documents. As the car was empty, the soldier agreed to give us a lift to Kaunas. There was no time for further farewell. We secured our bikes and the car started to move.

Three figures were standing on the wide highway - my mother, our little son and the guard in a helmet. The distance separating us grew quickly, the figures grew smaller. Our Jurek, in his white cap, was already just a blurred spot on the long highway. We climbed the hill and far away I could still see the wavy field of rye, barley and oats that I had sown with my own bare hands. On the top of the hill we could still see our house with its white shutters, its windowpanes reflecting the sun. And that disappeared too. There was left ... only a dot on the map.

During our future homeless wandering we looked often with longing at this dot on the map, remembering the moment of our separation from our dear ones.

In Kaunas the atmosphere was very tense. Some of the German officers were already evacuated. The streets leading to the railway station were crowded with evacuees, burdened with suitcases and bundles. In front of many houses carts were being loaded. Through the city passed endless columns of evacuees from the country. Tree coves were treading awkwardly on the asphalt and dogs, scared of the city noises, were trying to hide under the carts. Barge 'bridgkas' (carts), ladder wagons and Russian telegas were going through the city to cross the bridge over the River Niemen, their peculiar noises filling the town and reverberating from the brick walls.

Our intention had been to travel by bikes, without documents, as evacuees. However we were told that trains were still leaving Kaunas in the direction of

the German frontier but only people who had travel permits issued by the military were allowed over the frontier, or those who could prove that they were going to work in Germany. The second seemed easier to achieve. The 'Arbeitsamt' (employment office) had opened a new office in a former travel agency and, after years of poor results, was now reaping a good harvest. There were many volunteers looking for work and permits to enter Germany. How ironic - what the German military police were unable to achieve was achieved in a few days by the nearing Front. A long queue of men of military age, and women, were waiting in front of the new 'travel agency'. In their windows were still the old posters from Tyrol, palaces along the Rhine and old German towns. Between those old photos for the tourists was written: "See the beauty of the German towns".

The officials of the Arbeitsamt were as polite as the employees from the previous travel agency. Showing a large map of the Third Reich, they were pointing out all the beauty of different regions. Everyone was allowed to choose the place of his desired destination according to his tourist taste or his hidden political calculations. Very politely they stipulated only one condition: upon arrival you had to report to the nearest Arbeitsamt - only then were you issued with a travel permit and a free railway pass.

Our aim was Warsaw. We wanted to reach Poland and there await future events. But entrance to the General Kommissariat (the name given to central Poland) was prohibited. On the map I found the nearest point to it - it was Modlin that was shown on the map as belonging to the Third Reich. Within minutes we had nice stamped documents stating that I, as a farm labourer, and wife Maria were travelling to Germany with permanent residence in Modlin.

The transport was to leave the next day and so now the bikes were not required. At home we re-packed our rucksacks again, fighting off the generosity of my mother-in-law who tried to equip us like an expedition to the North Pole. No arguments were of use. Neither that the war would not last very long nor that we had plenty of relatives in Poland who would help us; nor the argument that it is not advisable to be overloaded with a heavy burden. She strongly believed that in Poland people were starving. Therefore, next morning we left with huge bread loaves, a few kilograms of fat and lard, butter and dry sausages plus two changes of clothing.

Again a sad parting. Our little son Roman, just over a year old, could not speak yet and was only producing some funny sounds. I didn't know what he was trying to tell us. He was laughing happily when we kissed him and waved

his tiny hands. He gave us his most charming smile when we were leaving. This was the way he stayed in my mind.

The station was full of evacuees. No ticket control or information. Nobody knew anything about a transport of labourers to Germany. At the second platform stood a long military transport and some evacuees were trying to board it. This transport was going to East Prussia. Not waiting for anything else, we climbed onto the open lorries. Marushka's parents, who accompanied us to the station, heaved up the rucksacks into the lorries. As we started to climb down to have one more kiss, there was a sudden signal and the train began to move. We stayed on the train and just looked at her parents who were waving a white handkerchief. The white handkerchief was not only a sign of farewell but also a symbol of submission to the new rulers of bleeding Lithuania.

One could already hear the Front. On the River Niemen, floating towards the open sea, were bodies of German soldiers.

Our dearest ones stayed in Lithuania waiting for their destiny. Leaving them, our roads parted and we started once again on our road of evacuees.

The wagon in which we travelled was very deep - like a freighter without doors and cut-off roof. It was packed with machinery, probably from the evacuated factories. The rest was filled with boxes and ammunition on which the soldiers and evacuees were sitting. Above us was the open sky. The train was travelling fast, the wind was cool and pleasant. The start of our travel was favourable as we had expected a lot worse and going by bike along dusty, crowded roads did not seem so attractive.

The train entered the large forests of Kozlowa Ruda. The warm fir trees smelled strongly of resin. The wind died down. The white clouds from the engine were lying lazily on the top of the trees. All seemed peaceful; so good for taut nerves. But we knew that in these forests were large groups of partisans and more than one train had been derailed here. The mines hidden between the rails were a terror to the driver. We were travelling on a military transport, sitting on boxes of ammunition, looking around anxiously. The engine braked and we arrived at the station Kozlowa Ruda. Some travellers left, taking their numerous luggage. They probably intended to await the Front in some of the small villages, hidden in the forest.

The German soldiers with whom we travelled looked tired and depressed. They were not talkative but told us that the railway to Olite was cut off and therefore they had to make this detour through East Prussia to reach the front lines near the lakes of Augustowo. It was evening when we arrived in Virbalis.

This was the frontier station between 'Ostland' and the Great German Reich or, to call it simply, the previous boundary between Lithuania and Germany.

On the station was a teeming mass of people. All platforms were packed with luggage and crying children hanging on to the luggage. People were trying to push in all directions looking for information about next trains. On a siding stood an open goods train. Some of the wagons were completely furnished - wide beds, robes with mirrors and crates and suitcases, tables covered with plates and food. These were the privileged evacuees, employees of the General Kommissar Ostland. Leaving the burning east, they were taking home to their Fatherland all that they were able to amass during their fat years of occupation.

Going over the iron bridge above the rails we reached the first platform where we were promptly told to leave as it was strictly for the army. In the first-class waiting room we met many Lithuanian professionals and white-collar workers. They were also evacuees, mainly from Kaunas. They had nice leather suitcases, their wives had their hair set, were nicely manicured and carried expensive fur coats over their arms. On the wall, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, hung a huge picture of Hitler. The thought of sleeping on a station was not attractive. Marushka remembered that a friend of hers was living on a nearby farm with his family - Messrs. Gromadzki. Asking for directions, we went to find them. After a few kilometres the rucksacks began to feel heavier. I don't know how long it would have taken us to cover the eight kilometres but we were lucky to be given a lift by a peasant who was returning from the mill. Sitting on the bags of flour, he brought us right into the front yard of the home-stand. It was midnight. All was dark, completely quiet, no sign of life. Under the deceptive light of the moon, I examined some barns until I stumbled to the front of a house, or rather the porch which was supported by columns. All shutters were closed. This had to be the house of the owner. Shyly and gently we started knocking at the door for maybe ten minutes or more. Nobody came to the door. We started to knock louder and then even banging. Still without results. Leaving our belongings, we went in search of other doors. There were five of them. We tried them all, banging as loud as we could. The house remained silent and dead. I started swearing - gone was the shyness of an uninvited guest. I wanted to get in. After unsuccessfully trying all shutters, I noticed on the second floor two windows without shutters. Taking some twigs, I started throwing them gently on those windows, being careful not to break the glass. At last - a window opened and a human head looked out.

"Does Mr. Gromadzki live here?" I called. A female voice confirmed this. I gave our names and a short explanation. The window was shut but there was some movement from within. Between the cracks, of the shutters we could see light and at last the bolts and padlocks were removed.

In the hall we were cordially greeted by the elderly owner of the house. He was dressed in pyjamas and the housekeeper in a nightdress. She was holding a candle in her hand. Our friend was sick in bed. The explanation for the unresponsive house was quite simple. The remaining people were sleeping on the second floor with their windows facing the park and so the ground floor was empty. The friendly owner directed us to a spare bedroom where we went to sleep immediately.

It was a hundred kilometres to the Front.

Next morning after being fed and having a good wash, we went into the town for information. As we had no luggage and were clean, the police did not bother us, probably taking us for local people. All evacuees were directed to barracks where there was an information centre for transports as well as the de-lousing centre. It was a whole set of small, long buildings covered with tar-boards, surrounded by a high fence and barbed wire. Near the fence bartering was blooming. Behind the fence - well known to us - the camp life of the east labourer. Tired women hanging their washing, badly dressed and dirty children playing on the dirty ground. The gate was open. We decided that Marushka should go to enquire as her German was faultless and I would wait in a nearby street. It was nearly an hour before I saw her returning. The guard at the gate did not stop her and I relaxed. In the administration centre she met an old acquaintance from Kaunas. They had a long chat and he was able to inform her fully. To our disappointment, we learned that the last transport with civilians had left yesterday and that the border, as from last night, was closed by the S.D. (Security Service) until further notice. Permits would be issued individually after a check by S.D. Nobody seemed to know the reason for these orders. We had to wait. After returning to the homestead we found more evacuees from Kaunas. They were relatives and friends of Mr. Gromadzki. Some, like us, wanted to leave Lithuania; others, like our host, wanted to stay. They were certain that the Front could not possibly go further west, that the Germans would push the Soviets back further away from their own border. To this group, so trusting in the power of the Germans, belonged two new arrivals who had with them an unbelievable number of suitcases and a crate of bacon. They were two professors from the Kaunas University, one of them a well-known surgeon.

Our daily walks to the town brought no results. The frontiers remained closed and there was no news about a new transport for civilians.

There were more and more people in the farmyard. Evacuees were sleeping in the empty barns. The squire was despairing as carts and horses were requisitioned and taken away. Arguing angrily he rushed around the farm, returned to his salon and played Chopin's music on the grand piano to calm his nerves. This large old-fashioned antique salon was now the only place where quiet still existed. This room was rather a relic and worth remembering.

Long, narrow windows were covered with vines. The glass door led to a large front porch with columns. Only a little sun filtered through, lifting the dimness of the room. Some sunrays were touching the gilded furniture in the style of the French Empire. Old glass door bookcases contained books and magazines from the previous century. Green tapestry covered the couches and chairs which were dainty with beautiful carved legs. But these legs sometimes had no support as the floor started to rot and pieces of board were missing. In some places one could even see the dark, mouldy foundations. No-one had repaired this floor for a long time. In one corner stood an antique clock, long out of order. The long brass pendulum rested between heavy cobwebs in its glass case. Time had stopped symbolically. If the tall, grey-haired squire played too long, his housekeeper, a big Lithuanian woman rushed into the room, saying:

"Sir, you are just playing this old music and playing, and the Front is coming nearer. People are fleeing and we have not even packed. A pig must be killed - we must have food, not music. God has punished me with you, Sir. Nobody is thinking here - everything rests on my poor shoulders."

This poor woman could not understand her employers. The old squire said that his son must take charge as everything would be his very soon. But the son, a slightly sentimental chemical engineer, was partly a researcher and partly a musician and was not keen to make any decisions in these uncertain times. He took the way of least resistance saying that the Front might be stopped before reaching them. It was true that no-one made decisions or looked after the farm.

On the fourth day of our stay the head of the village brought the following German Order: All people, male and female between the age of fifteen and fifty, permanent and temporary residents of this shire, must assemble tomorrow at eleven in the morning on the market place of the town. They must take with them food for three days. They will be employed in digging trenches against tanks. Those who disobey these orders will be punished by death.

There was great confusion on the farm. People did not know what to do. Should one go and dig? If not, how could one avoid it? Arguments broke out and it seemed that the discussions would go on forever. We decided to leave and, thanking our host for his hospitality and kindness, we departed immediately. Our first stop was the border town. The order did not apply to people living in the town. Here again our luck held. At the Post Office we met Marushka's old friend, Wanda. The girls were friends from early childhood. By the end of the First World War both their parents were evacuees from Soviet Russia, going together to Lithuania. The girls remained friends throughout all these years. She was one of the bridesmaids at our wedding. Now, in the hard and uncertain times, they were together again. Wanda took us immediately to her house and, being extremely hospitable, even gave us her own room. The house was on the outskirts of the town, right on the boundary. From the windows we could see the barbed wires of the frontier that were in a wheat field. On the other side of the wire were German sentries whose main duty was to catch those who tried to enter Germany illegally. The trains going through Virbalis (the last Lithuanian station) to Eydkau (the first German station) had no checking of documents but, on the German side, the S.D. were hunting those who had no proper permits. All their belongings were taken away and they were transported back to Virbalis barracks.

In the meantime, just in case, we obtained de-lousing papers which were essential for entering Germany. I doubt if even a letter written by the Fuehrer would absolve one from it. De-lousing proceeded as follows: the culprit had to take off all his clothing which went to disinfection chambers where they were slightly charred and buttons crushed. Very unpleasant if you had trouser buttons. Now quite naked, holding his boots in his hands. The water was tepid and there was no soap. The one pleasant thing was that, during this ritual, one was attended by female employees. After the de-lousing, the abashed culprit had to proceed, still naked, to the office, still holding his boots in his hands. Here he was issued with a de-lousing certificate - this time by a military orderly.

Next day the same fatal order to dig trenches was issued here but this time it was signed by the mayor as well. The order was headed "everyone to the trenches," and placards appeared all over the town. The following day round-up began in the streets. Even the Germans and the Volksdeutsche had to go, leaving their belongings, children and old people on the German side.

We now understood why the frontier was closed. The people in the barracks were grouped into columns and, under military police guard, turned back towards the Front to dig trenches. I was told that they were going for ten days

only. It was getting harder to keep avoiding round-ups organised by the S.D. We did not venture into the street but stayed indoors. But even that was not safe as next day the houses were searched. One day a policeman came to Wanda's house searching for people who tried to avoid the issued order. This time we were rescued by Wanda's tenant, a men's hairdresser. She understood immediately why the policeman had come and asked him to the dining room where she offered him a large cup of vodka and some food, then she went to the next room where I was sitting and, taking a handful of cigarettes from me, returned to the policeman and, giving him the cigarettes, announced quite firmly that no-one was in the house. After a second glass of vodka, the policeman was at last 'quite convinced'. This time we were saved ... but for how long? The situation was getting worse each day between the closed frontier and the approaching Front. We decided to have one more try at the military command post. We heard that some civilians, having military travel permits, were allowed to cross the border. We concocted the following story: Marushka, who had been employed in Kaunas as an interpreter in the maintenance workshops of military vehicles (H.K.F.F. - Heeres Kraftfahepark), still had her employment card with her. This document was the cornerstone of our story. She had to say that, being an employee of this military establishment, she had received orders for evacuation, together with her offices. Her husband, being a labourer in the workshops (but with no documents to support it), was also evacuated. As all workshops had left and already crossed the border, we were trying to catch up with them, having missed our evacuation transport. The documents of her husband were with the major of the military workshop. Marushka took the hard mission. By the way, during war it is much easier for females to get results with doubtful missions.

It was more than an hour before I saw Marushka coming back. She was happily waiving documents stamped with all the necessary stamps and a travel permit stating that we belonged to the German Army civilian workshop staff. The paper not only entitled us to cross the border but gave us the right to use all available transport in the German Reich. The point of our destination was Modlin. Marushka was able to convince the unsuspecting military adjutant of the East Command that her workshops were going to this town. In the future, this document gave us tremendous help. I have to point out that in Germany rubber-stamped documents are much valued and respected.

The same day we passed the barrier with our rucksacks. We were directed to the Customs House. All the checking was 'performed by the S.D. Our

documents received a new rubber stamp including the de-lousing certificate, and were dated 17th July, 1944.

We continued along the same street but now it was called Adolf Hitler Strasse and the town was now called Eydkau. Going towards the station we saw the differences in the same town. Already here it looked quite different from the 'Ostland'. The market place was paved with bricks, smooth stones, and not with cobblestones. Near it was a typical town hall, a town hall library, a city chemist and a guesthouse. Near the station was a hospital. At last we arrived at the 'Bahnhof' (station). A large placard on the station read "The wheels are rolling for victory". A company of boys from the Hitler Youth passed us. The boys were dressed in their dark uniforms and were carrying shovels, holding them like rifles. They also were being sent to dig trenches. They looked happy and proud and were singing military songs. On the benches some German women were sitting. They were not talking but following the boys with their eyes and knitting grey socks.

The big waiting room was empty. An elderly waiter was reading a newspaper. It was strange to think that only 500 metres away there were such crowds of people occupying station buildings, platforms, streets and highways and large barracks. All were fleeing from the approaching Russians.

A few hours later we were travelling by train in the direction of Insterburg. We saw a goods train going in the opposite direction carrying tanks and their crews. The soldiers were lying on the floor, sunbaking. Some were watching the sky, standing guard near their anti-aircraft guns.

Near us sat a tank corpsman in a torn uniform, thin and badly shaven. Looking at the transport going towards the Front, he was shaking and cursing loudly. He swore that he would rather be dead than return to the Soviet Front. Through the window we could see bunkers, various cement reinforcements and barbed wires between the ripening wheat fields. All still looked peaceful and quiet. On the horizon we could see the lakes of Mazury.

It was dark when we arrived at Insterburg. We had to change trains - the next one was leaving in the morning. There was no hope of getting sleeping accommodation in town as it was very overcrowded, especially with bombed-out Berliners. We spent the night on benches in the waiting room. Next morning we continued our travel.

Next stop was Olsztyn where we had to change trains again. Here already was the atmosphere of the nearby Front as we were nearing the actual front lines, Malkina and Lomza. Again the station was packed with people and their

belongings, again the military police were checking. Waiting for our train, I studied a large map hanging on the wall showing the timetables and railway connections. I noticed that there still existed a railway connection between Olsztyn and Warsaw going through Ostrolenka. The next train was due in half an hour. Suddenly I got an idea to try and go straight to Warsaw using our documents which had already opened one border for us. Our post of destination was marked Modlin. The way through Warsaw was a lot shorter than through Mlawy, Ciechanow and Nasiels. It should seem natural that we were trying to use the shortest route. The old cashier was not too happy, explaining that the border to the General Commissariat was closed to all civilians but he relented seeing that our documents were supported by military authority and our argument that we should be passing only as transit passengers. He issued the tickets but warned us that we were not to hold him responsible if we were stopped at both frontier stations. The frontiers here were rather complicated as there were two of them; one between the previous East Prussia and Poland, the second one between the German Reich and the General Commissariat. Of course there was some risk, but without risk we could not achieve our aim.

The desire to reach Warsaw was soon so great that very shortly we were travelling on a small, slow train using one-way railway lines in the direction of Ostrolenka. The nearer we came to the Front, the more hectic the atmosphere became. The slogan: "To the Trenches" was everywhere. The train filled with people carrying shovels and pickaxes. On the small stations were boys and old men all with rucksacks and shovels. They were kissing and hugging before their departure, leaving on the platform groups of crying females. Many of them already had sons or husbands in the army - now they had to say farewell to their old and their children. The Fuehrer was taking the last ones away.

Through the open window the young boys were calling "Heil Hitler, Mummy, Heil Hitler". Although it was raining, the 'mummies' were standing for a long time on the platform, their faces wet with rain and tears. "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler" - the sound remained in their ears.

In the compartment the mood was gloomy. Yet in the rain, the peasants were puffing their pipes and holding their shovels between their knees. The force of the rain and wind increased - a storm was approaching. The sky was rent by sudden lightning and the thunder seemed to growl - **Bellum Vobiscum**. We felt the electricity in the air and our anxiety increased. In one corner sat a group of Poles. They spoke in whispers between themselves. Their clothing was torn and they had a large letter 'P' on a yellow patch sewn onto the back of their garments. They also had shovels - they were the forced labourers. This time

they and their masters were sitting on the same benches and travelling in the same direction to do the same job.

The storm passed, and the rain had stopped when, in the evening, we arrived at Ostrolenka, now called Scharfenwiese. As the train did not continue in our intended direction we had to change. The front was only 40 km away. On the platform there were many soldiers with helmets and packed rucksacks. At a siding stood a train full of tanks. Pushing our way through the crowds, we went for information which turned out to be quite depressing. No-one was allowed to cross the border without special military documents and approval by S.D. One train should leave at 3 a.m. in the direction of Warsaw but it was reserved for soldiers on leave. The offices of the Commandant were in the township, four kilometres away. As a bus was just leaving, Marushka went to try her luck. The waiting room was crowded and very stuffy. At the tables sat tankmen in their dark uniforms and along the walls slept soldiers from the infantry. Further away sat a Party member in his brown shirt, hugging a German fraulein. At the counter two soldiers in German uniforms were speaking with the barmaid in fluent Polish.

"Could you find us somewhere a glass of beer?"

"I told you, there isn't any," replied the girl, pouting slightly.

"I see, you are probably not friendly inclined towards us because of the uniforms we are wearing, therefore there is no beer for us. You think us traitors," he continued with irony.

I could not hear her reply as soldiers at the nearby table started to laugh loudly. Their table was covered with Party leaflets and one soldier was reading aloud about some soldier who, with his machine gun, killed fifty Soviets, lost his leg but received the Iron Cross of 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

One of the men at the table commented "Beauty - he took his leg under the arm, his Iron Cross in his hand and ran to his Frau to brag. The stupid clot."

Roars of laughter met his comment. I was quite astonished, one of the tankmen raised his glass of water, the only liquid available, towards the portrait of the Fuehrer which hung on the wall.

"Cheers, my Fuehrer," he called out, full of irony, "I am drinking your health with this 'Wine of Geese' which you were generous enough to provide, as well as for the refreshment supplied" he finished, waving the leaflets. Other soldiers laughed and cheered.

The Front was so close that they felt free and uninhibited. Himmler's Party guardian angels were far away.

A few hours passed. Night came. Soldiers stopped talking and were lying down on the floor. It became quiet, only interrupted by snoring.

Marushka had still not returned. I became worried. Another half hour passed and my anxiety increased. At last she arrived. She was very tired and her feet were wet and dirty, as she had to return by foot on an unknown road in the darkness of the night. Unfortunately without any results. She had tried various offices, even the Gestapo, but to no avail. The border to Occupied Poland was closed. It was a depressing night. Tired, dirty, without sleep, without a roof over our heads and a completely unknown immediate future. In addition, military policemen came and advised us that all lights had to be switched off as Soviet bombers were over Ostrolenka and an alarm situation was announced. It was not a pleasant thought to spend the rest of the night in a railway station during a possible air raid. Marushka wanted to leave the station building.

It was impossible to push our way through the first class waiting room, especially with our rucksacks. All the floor space was covered with sleeping soldiers. It was so dark that we had to hold hands so as not to get lost between this mass of human bodies. Outside it was again raining heavily. We found an empty corner under the ticket counter and, holding tightly to each other, slept heavily.

I was awakened by new noises. Some of the soldiers were leaving. I asked which train they were boarding and got a short reply - "To Warsaw". It was like an electric shock. Marushka and I looked at each other and, without further words, the decision was made. Taking our rucksacks, we also went to the platform to try once again our luck. Dawn was just breaking. On the platform were only soldiers, not even one civilian. We certainly felt out of place. We pushed our way in amongst the soldiers. On the platform stood a military policeman with his helmet and his official metal shield on a chain around his neck.

We held our breath. At last we heard the engine and the train came to a halt at the first platform. The train was reserved for the 'Wehrmacht' only. The soldiers began to board the train, with us behind them. The policeman shouted. Marushka rushed to him and, shoving her paper under his nose, spoke in her fluent German. "This is my husband. We are travelling on military permits and are entitled to use all transports available to the army." He looked at the military rubber stripes known to him and, before he could make up his mind, Marushka

jumped after me onto the train. The doors were closed and the train started to move.

What would happen to us now? Would there be another control point at the other border point? We had no idea but we were moving towards Warsaw and this was important. The train was going very fast, not stopping anywhere.

One hour, another half hour. I was watching, full of concentration. Again a station - here was written the word "Tluszcz" - not a German translation of the name. It meant we were in Poland proper at last.

What a joyous feeling when, on the station where the train stopped, all the passengers boarding the train were speaking Polish. The atmosphere changed too. There was a lot of talk, laughter, jokes, and all in Polish. We also felt much safer now as before we were the only civilians on the whole train. Now there were more civilians than army men. Even officially our train changed its look. The Germans moved to special wagons reserved for them and other cars had the sign 'For Civilians'. The train was overcrowded but at each station more people were boarding it. They were hanging on steps and lying on roofs as there was certainly no more space inside. We passed Wolomin, Radzimin and were entering Warsaw.

There was a light drizzle that morning. We watched the stations as we passed. At last Warsaw East. The train stopped. What an emotional moment - the heart seemed to stop beating. After five long years we were back again. "Do you see that is that where they sell soda water?" I asked Marushka. It was here, five years ago, where we met so miraculously, also here that we left Warsaw on the day of the evacuation in September 1939.

The hut was standing but the station was partly in ruins and we could see some barracks being built. On the lower platform were three exits with signs "For the Army," "For Germans," "For Poles". Next to the exit for the army was a large board with the following writing "Attention - Entering the town, have rifles at the ready. There is danger of attack."

We left the train at the main station, intending to go home by dorozka (similar to a fiacre coach). Here we encountered our first surprise. We had with us some 'Eastmark' as well as some German marks but the driver informed us that in Warsaw only zloty were acceptable. Therefore the idea to go by dorozka fell through. It was a fair distance to my uncle's home at the end of Rakowiecka Street where we intended to stay. We thought we might go by tram.

Near the main station were a lot of people. Business was flourishing. Before we reached the tram stop we were offered sweet cherries, ice cream, socks, biros, books and saccharine. After a long wait, we boarded the No.3 tram. Once more we were in trouble. The conductor advised us that he was unable to accept anything but zloty. When I told him that we were evacuees returning home after five years and we had not even one zloty, he became very friendly and, patting me on the shoulder, told us to continue travelling 'on the black'. A young fellow, listening to my conversation with the conductor, pushed 5 zloty into my hand. When I thanked him and asked for his address so that I could return the loan, he left his place and, wishing us all the best, jumped off the tram. I returned with the money to the conductor, wanting now to pay my fare. He refused to take the money. "Look, sir, we are nearing the end of my line. Don't bother about the ticket - keep these five zloty for a happy beginning." At the last stop he helped us with our rucksacks. I was deeply touched by this episode in the tram that somehow gave me encouragement to face the future. We will survive among our own people, I thought, hopefully. Our travel was nearing its end. Hardships, troubles and obstacles were overcome. We passed the gate to the big block of flats in Falata Street, No.6. Two flights up and we rang the bell. Hugs and kisses, warm welcome, a hot bath, dinner and a well-deserved rest. Lying in the comfortable bed, I looked at the well-known room. On the walls, as before, were hanging the portraits of my grandparents. The big calendar hanging on the wall showed the date as 19th July 1944. Marushka was already asleep. From the room next to ours, I could hear the ticking of the clock and, from the street, the noise of the passing trams reached me. I also went to sleep.

# Warsaw - Last Days Before The Uprising

Five years of war had branded Warsaw's face, or rather her two faces. Today Warsaw had certainly two faces and this was her Signum Temporis. We saw busy streets, undamaged houses, shops full of attractive goods, old firms, old advertisements. In the corner newsstand was the same old invalid selling 'Kurier Warszawski'.

We were walking along, remembering old times. Marushka was pointing to the house where she used to live whilst studying in Warsaw. Quite suddenly the view changed - we entered a field of ruins. A whole street block was gone. A desert of bricks and rubble, overgrown with grass. Here and there dark, empty holes; remnants from old basements looked like eye sockets of a rotting skull. Between the rubble goats were grazing, climbing nimbly over heaps of bricks. Next was a street full of people, trams and cars. Then again, on Marshalkowska Street, children were sunbaking and swimming in a tank which had been built between the ruins to fight the fires. Children were jumping into the water from the gatepost of a house which long ago lay in ruins. On the opposite side of the street once again an undamaged fragment of old Warsaw. It was like this everywhere - a city between ruins, and ruins between the city.

We also saw other, more strange faces of Warsaw. We saw barbed wire entanglements sometimes surrounding a single house, sometimes squares and also whole suburbs. We saw sandbags piled high along walls and, poking through small holes, were the ugly ends of rifles protecting the entry. A town existing between fortresses. Where was the enemy hiding in a town long ago captured? The people going through streets seemed to disregard the barbed wire. They talked animatedly and walked energetically.

On the streets of Warsaw were rickshaws drawn by push-bikes. The cabmen of the fiacre looked down on the Japanese way of commuting. Where was the enemy? One could not see him.

The next side street was blocked by barbed wire with only enough space left for a tram to pass. Soldiers were on guard - soldiers in steel helmets, their rifles at the ready, were looking full of distrust at the tram covered with people hanging on to it. They watched that none of the transit passengers could leave. People on the tram were going by 'transit' through this German 'ghetto'. It was like a dead town. Only rarely some German female with a shopping basket

ventured out. The tram continued through the famous Aleja Szucha - the head offices of the infamous Gestapo. Belveder, Botanical Gardens, Aleja Ujazdowska were torn out of Warsaw. We, the Poles, were only allowed to look through a moving tram at the trees and lawns in the beautiful parks of Warsaw. On the other side of the street lived the 'Herrenvolk' (master race) in charming little palaces and villas.

At last the barbed wire finished and, at the next stop, most of the passengers left the tram, joining the busy traffic. Even the pigeons cooed happily on the place of 'Trzech Kryzy', fluttering down from the roofs of the surrounding buildings onto the steps of the church. This face of Warsaw seemed pleasant and friendly. We went to a cafe which was very crowded. Artists from the theatre were employed as waitresses and former waitresses were sitting at the tables, escorted by men in very well-tailored suits. Some men with bulging briefcases were discussing something leaning close to each other. Some women in long ago outdated hats and shabby coats were looking around carefully. They were the people of Warsaw's war years who fought for her during the September days of 1939. Today the city was being crushed by the occupants.

Soon we learned how to recognise these people who were careful and distrustful.

Those two gentlemen with bulging briefcases were certainly in possession of documents stating that they were working for the army and were indispensable but their briefcases were packed with goods like saccharine, tobacco, ladies' underwear. Black marketing was blooming in Warsaw. Everyone was trading with anything and anywhere. Employees, judges, postmen, railwaymen, doctors, solicitors, janitors and paper boys. In a cafe one could buy ladies stockings, combs, silken lingerie; in the gates of houses one could buy shoes and clothing. Food was brought to houses. For money one could purchase anything - tropical fruit, Russian caviar, a hundredweight of butter or machine guns, whole trainloads of coal from Selosia which were intended for the east. During our stay in Warsaw there appeared on the black market rice of American origin. U.N.R.R.A. had sent it from America to East Poland which was occupied by the Soviet Army, for distribution amongst the Poles. This rice in some mysterious way crossed the Front and appeared on the Warsaw black market. Ration tickets, by which the Germans tried to curb Warsaw's consumption, played only a small part.

The vigorous speculation opened the doors wide for trading. All German orders, round-ups, executions were to no avail. Trade continued to blossom. German price control offices were drowned under all their orders, announcements and records. To us, arriving from the East where we were used to ration tickets which covered everything beginning with baby nappies and finishing with a coffin, these conditions seemed exotic. Shop windows displayed tempting foods; oranges, halwas, pure cream ice-cream. We were unable to resist. Part of our financial reserves, given to us by Granny, such as golden earrings and a brooch with semiprecious stones, ended up on the very sensitive scales of a jeweller. We received a few thousand zloty and, feeling very rich, invited our friend for dinner to the restaurant 'Pod Bulkietem'. Some herring, a pork steak and a few glasses of vodka. For dessert, on a silver salver, the bill of 1,000 zloty. This shook us. (It was the equivalent of the golden earrings). Granny's earrings disappeared into the pocket of the waiter. We decided to live more frugally. Warsaw asked a high price for goods which, by some detours and lanes, carried on backs of hucksters, by railwaymen, army tourists, hidden amongst the wood in the carts of peasants, arrived in Warsaw to be sold by many middlemen. These middlemen made a fortune as they were selling the most valued goods - food. They were buying the cheapest goods: furniture, good pictures and villas. Those were the principles of war economy and her upside-down theory of prices. For a few kilos of bacon fat one could buy a valuable picture. Again the two faces of Warsaw. Nightlife with cabarets, elegant restaurants, secret gambling houses and a multitude of people always hungry looking for new queues in food stores with ration cards in their hands. People whose main diet was a watery soup supplied by cheap eating places. Their houses were bare, their furniture sold. To them war was a curse and disaster. They were waiting for the war to end but others wished war to continue.

During our first days in Warsaw the paper boys were selling sensational news. Hitler was assassinated! People were grabbing the newspapers. The price for 'Kurier Warszawski' reached 30 zloty (a price never reached before even on the black market) and the price was gladly paid for such news. Hope surged up for a short while. Hitler was war, and war was Hitler.

The Kurier wrote: "A group of stupid and ambitious officers tried to kill Adolf Hitler ... miraculously the Fuehrer was spared ... under the providence ... the nation ... The Reich is peaceful."

The people of Warsaw were reading, shaking their heads and rushing home to read the secret London bulletin that was passed from hand to hand. The newsletter came from the underground and was brought to houses in shopping baskets covered by foodstuffs. The delivery was usually made by old ladies, children and old men. In these bulletins Warsaw was seeking the truth and sometimes an elusive hope. This time the hope was delusive. The bulletin was writing about riots in Germany, about Prussian regiments marching towards Berlin, about the new government organised by the authors of the attempt. Everyone tried to read the newsletter and listen to the prohibited London radio. After a few days the disillusioned Warsawers decided that the 'New Kurier' was right - it really was a group of stupid officers! They did not dispose of Hitler but they themselves were marched against a wall and shot.

Not only the town and people had their special expression, but also the daily Press. The official papers were the 'New Kurier Warszawski', 'Warschauer Zeitung', 'Signal' and 'Krakauer Zeitung'. They were displayed in cafes, at hairdressers and in waiting rooms of doctors. They were gladly used by shopkeepers for wrapping. These papers were hanging quite legally in public toilets as proper toilet paper was not available.

The Press was flowing by the underground of the fighting Warsaw, a Press much alive and full of passion, formulating new political thoughts. London was sending its bulletins and Moscow its red armies. The front lines came slowly nearer, the time started to get ripe. More signs appeared on the walls. Written by unseen hands - "Poland will win," "Out with Invaders," "Long Live the Polish National Army" (Armies Krajowa - A.K.) Between all these were large dark shapes on the walls of a bent, listening man with a hat, crossed through by a yellow question mark - a sign of suspicion, distrust and anxiety. "The enemy is listening". It stood as a watchword for the enemy as well as for us.

The time of the bloody terror seemed to have passed. We did arrive in Warsaw when the regime became milder. Herr Frank (General Governor for Occupied Poland) was trying to draw the Poles on his side against the approaching Red Army coming from the east. The announcements of shot hostages disappeared from the walls. The transports to extermination camps of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Maidanek were not as numerous as before and even the round-ups in the streets were less frequent. Herr Frank was even speaking sweetly to the Polish peasant. But time was running out. Siedlce, Malkinie, Garwolin were re-taken. Refugees from the Front started arriving. Food stores were besieged and rising prices did not matter. Warsaw was buying 'just in case'. Under Zelazna Brama crowds of people buying, discussing and joking,

full of good hopes. Around the stalls of the previous large market place stood German soldiers looking distrustful and gloomy at the masses of people, separated from them by barbed wire. The market halls were now being used as army garages. Next to them were the ruins of the ghetto with its narrow, empty streets. Empty and quiet, a cemetery of three hundred thousand slaughtered Jews. We looked with futile horror at this dead panorama of one of the most tragic events of war-torn Europe. I had to think back to five years ago when it was full of life here, lives of people connected by blood ties, temperaments and demands. Life was pulsating in the yards covered with playing children, in the shops, gates and stalls, bustling life was flowing into streets and halls ... and now this silence, this gloomy, eerie and majestic stillness - 300,000 dead.

"Ausrotten" (exterminate) were the words in the gospel of 'Mein Kampf'. "Ausrotten," his disciples were calling.

The drunken followers of the Fuehrer started their war of annihilation. They battered the brains of women and old men, they crushed the children with their boots, they guzzled their vodka and continued crushing Jewish skulls. This is what the Fuehrer ordered for the good of mankind, for the good of the New Europe.

The order was obeyed. Reeking of blood and vodka, his servants left the smouldering ruins. Smoke from the dying ghetto covered with legends this bit of damned soil, rumours that there, under the ruins of the houses, were somewhere still living ghosts. The Warsaw ghetto was slowly dying away. The soil, nourished with blood, was showing signs of sprouting weed.

I tore my eyes away from the empty streets. A few steps further on streets were seething with life. The square near Zelazna Brama was crowded. The traders were Aryans - they had inherited the empty stalls from the dead.

On the way home we were stopped by an air raid. People disappeared from the streets, sheltering in basements - only empty trams were left. Far away one could hear the noise of flight squadrons and anti-air raid guns. Soviet planes circled over the city, diving towards singled-out targets like bloodthirsty hawks. Today bombs were falling on Bielany. A few small bombs ruined the library in Nowy Swiat.

Soviet air raids became more frequent. One of them bombed out many holiday houses near Otwock.

Although July was still very hot, people started to return from their holidays. They brought news from the approaching Front. They told us that on the far outskirts of Warsaw one could even hear the Soviet cannons. The places near Warsaw mentioned were Lachew, Zukow, Minsk Mazowiecki. Excitement ran high. It was remarkable that no-one was leaving Warsaw. Just the opposite - those who could were coming back under her wings.

Warsaw - she will defend us, the enemy is scheming, the unknown is coming, Warsaw will protect us.

Trains coming into Warsaw were disgorging refugees. Warsaw was swelling. The streets were ruled by crowds - crowds were more united, more talkative than ever, more sure of themselves. Crowds were proudly passing the barbed entanglements, in trams people disregarded the notices "for Germans Only". The few Germans who ventured out had to walk or stand on steps as their compartments were taken by Warsaw people. The angry Gestapo wanted to retaliate. We witnessed one of these scenes. A few Nazis with sticks in their hands boarded the first compartment on a tram (for Germans only) and started hitting to the right and left with their sticks, aiming at the heads of the Polish travellers. People started to jump out through doors and windows and the driver was ordered to go faster. The Nazis were swearing, the people were yelling, crying and moaning. The compartment became empty. On the street were lying the beaten people. In the empty tram only the Nazis were standing, wiping their brows. Behind came the Polish tram dozens of angry eyes were watching this incident. The driver continued travelling, ringing the foot-bell.

The hot July days were nearing an end when Warsaw was electrified with news: Germans are fleeing!

From the direction of the Vistula came the retreating German Army. Along Aleja Jeruzalimska came armoured cars, large trucks and private cars with suitcases. It was a continuous stream. All Warsaw turned out to have a look at this unusual parade. On crossroads military policemen with their white/red disks were now showing the direction to the west as once before they showed the way to the east. This flood was increased by cars coming from side streets as employees from German offices were joining the procession. In the cars Germans in Party uniforms were sitting on furniture, crates and suitcases. Also in cars were their friends and 'Volksdeutsche'. Most of the females hugged their fur coats. They were leaving with a rich booty taken from Jews. The rich heirs of the slain were reluctantly returning to their Fatherland. Here they had spent their fat years. Rows of onlookers were jeering and calling scathing remarks.

Some girls sitting on a balcony were waving their handkerchiefs and calling sarcastically, "... bye ... bye! Never see you again!"

It was the last 'parade' in Warsaw by the German Army. The Front continued pushing: Rembertow, Radzymin. More people were looking for shelter in Warsaw. The refugees were bringing news straight from the Front. German evacuation became feverish. Buildings occupied by the Germans became empty. We saw soldiers throwing out from the windows of a fourth floor saddles, harnesses, ammunition belts, leather goods, into the trucks standing below the windows. They were all in a frantic hurry.

We were returning home for dinner. People in the streets were chatting animatedly like a crowd during holidays. Many walls had tar writings: "Kaput! Kaput!" (finished). Unexpectedly, from the corner of Wilcza and Marszalkowska came a shot, followed by a second and a third. In seconds the crowd dispersed in all directions, trams stopped and passengers rushed towards side streets or gates. Warsaw knew what might follow is round-up and Gestapo, and many innocent people could pay with their lives behind the walls of Pawiak gaol, therefore the street emptied quickly. Again a series of shots, followed by an echo along the brick walls of the street, a cry, a muted moan ... a sound of single steps. I grabbed Marushka's hand and rushed to a cafe door which was immediately closed and locked. A group of people were standing along the walls and peering through the windows. We heard a low voice saying "Someone is squaring his accounts," "A.K. is lifting its head," "Shortly it will get really hot" added another voice. The waitress, sighing heavily "Oh, my God, don't let them start too soon. The Germans can cut us all down. There are still plenty of soldiers in town". The waiter was trying to calm her "They are all running away. The Soviets are chasing them." Fifteen minutes passed and the Gestapo did not appear. Slowly the people started to sneak out. We rushed out and stopped in a gate of the side street. People were speaking anxiously about the event. Two Gestapo men were killed, it was repeated in whispers. We took a long detour going home, leaving this suburb behind.

We were late for dinner. My cousin, Marysia, was just ready to leave. Under her coat was a nurse's bag and in her hand a suitcase full of medicine, cotton wool and bandages. She informed us immediately that today she was again on duty. "I have barely an hour to reach my meeting point" and, turning towards me, she gave me a piece of paper. "Just in case, here is my address, but be discreet .. you understand?" She was happy and excited. Her eyes were shining proudly. She was sure of herself in her exuberant youth. "Keep well. Maybe in

five days we will see each other. Bye, bye, mother,” and the door closed behind her. Standing in the hall we could hear the sound of her steps running down the stairs. She went to do her duty just like many other young girls in Warsaw, a nurse in the underground army. Downstairs the door banged and then silence. She never returned home. She was killed during the uprising.

The old grandfather clock was ticking away the hours of Warsaw.

My old aunt sat down in her old rocking chair near the window. She was the only one left at home - a mother of a family. Once it was quite a noisy nest. The last one left just now, the youngest one. The others? The others were chucked out by the war. The son, a prisoner-of-war, who knows where he might be? There was no news - her son-in-law was deported to somewhere in the far east of the Soviet Union and her daughter left the house to look after her family. Her own husband was killed by the war. She was left alone like mothers who bore children for the requirements of wars. Is it worthwhile, is there any sense in bearing children when the world still has wars? Cynical powers look on motherhood as production for cannon fodder just like the necessary production of tanks, airplanes and tinned foods.

The day seemed to drag on - nothing was happening in the home. The clock continued ticking loudly. The faded calendar in Uncle's room gave the day in large letters as the first of August, 1944. Marushka was curled up in bed reading a book. I decided to go into the city, just out of boredom.

"Please don't go. You heard the shooting - it is dangerous. Please stay" - Marushka had eyes full of tears and was nearly hysterical. I hesitated. The clock was still ticking. I grabbed my hat and slammed the door behind me. Soon I was at the tram stop of Rakowiecka. No tram was coming. Others were waiting impatiently, looking at their watches. "Maybe the trams stopped coming" someone asked, "why?"

"I heard in the city that something is going to happen at four o'clock."

"What is going to happen?"

"How should I know what; I just heard."

Minutes passed and still no tram. I started thinking about Marushka's tears. She was alone at home. I went back home and a few minutes later our friend Czeslaw arrived.

We were chatting about old times, especially about our families back there in Lithuania. Through the open window came the noise of playing children. The

clock was chiming the hour as FIVE p.m. Suddenly the noise of shots. Marushka jumped to her feet. We all listened. After a second of silence the sound of machine-guns firing. First just a short blast, then a long one. "What now?" Full of anxiety, Marushka looked at us for an answer. We moved nearer the window. The nearest shots were answered by some farther ones. Somewhere a machine gun was firing without stopping, answered by an echo from a side street. Somewhere a Tommy gun was barking. The shooting intensified. Our side street was empty - the children fled home. From the opposite side of our house a door was opening slowly. Looking carefully up and down the street, three young girls entered the street. Two were carrying a stretcher. The one walking in front had a first-aid bag over her shoulder. They had Red Cross armbands on their sleeves. Turning towards Marushka, I pressed her hands and whispered, "The uprising has begun"



# Warsaw Uprising

Warsaw's time had arrived. The army of insurgents came out from the underground. Gates were being locked, shutters let down, no trams were moving, passers-by disappeared from the streets. Houses became fortresses, streets and squares battlegrounds. The block in which we lived also had a gathering point. The block of houses where we stayed was built by a co-operative for treasury employees and was very well suitable for forays by the insurgents. It was a big block of solid brick buildings enclosing a large yard with exits to Rakowiecka Street and the fields of Mokotow.<sup>2</sup> It was surrounded by four streets, two closed iron gates guarding the entrances. In the middle, a rectangular yard the forum for the co-op. members. The fronts of the houses faced the yard. The balconies, overgrown with vines, were facing towards the yard from where the entrances led to the separate flats, each marked with Roman numerals. Acacia trees provided shelter and, instead of asphalt, there were green lawns with shrubs. Fat rabbits were jumping around playing with children. This was our yard - the arena for future events for people who lived here. There were about one thousand inhabitants in these flats.

When the uprising started there were friends and acquaintances who had come for a visit in our block. Some came from nearby streets, some from further suburbs. All these people were now unable to return to their homes as the streets were covered by crossfire. They all had to stay with us and share our fate until the end. Those from our block who were out had to stay where they were. Most of them never returned, especially those who were caught by the uprising whilst in central Warsaw or the 'Old Town'.

UPRISING .... UPRISING ... the news flew around. The clatter of steps down the stairs and anxious faces peering through the windows. This exceptional news penetrated all floors, attics and basements and the yard. In the yard the insurgents were already gathering into their sections. The last one had just arrived. Where did they come from? Who knows - just out of the ground. There were about thirty of them. Hurriedly they were fastening their insurgent's armbands. Some had helmets, some only hats - there were railway and tram caps and also caps worn by high school students. They were all in civilian

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<sup>2</sup> A suburb of Warsaw with large fields reserved for a future aerodrome - at that time used for gardens but not privately owned.

clothes. They were a part of the Warsaw crowd which only a short time ago was covering streets, busy with their everyday lives. To the foreground of the group came a solidly built young man with a sub-machine gun in his hand and binoculars hanging from his neck. Hand grenades were distributed and orders issued. He was the leader of this section and allocated each to his post. Some singly, some in pairs were leaving the group taking positions near the gates, in the attic and windows. The remaining few were left as reserves and posted near the entrance to the basement. Our block was closed off. The leader rushed towards the east gate as from this direction intensified shooting was coming. In the other corner of the yard women were organising a first-aid station. Into the basement where the laundry was they brought field beds and tables for operations, medicines, bandages and various containers were placed on the shelves. On the door appeared the sign: First Aid Station. Along the wall stood stretchers and three young nurses were ready to receive the victims.

Evening came. One could hear, somewhere far away, heavy artillery, its thunder reverberating between our walls. In the street the shooting continued without stopping. Rifle bullets were breaking the plaster, grazing the walls and some of the bullets broke the windows entering the rooms.

We were cut off from the rest of the world. Those who at the last minute found shelter here had to stay and those who were away were unable to return.

I went nearer to the group of insurgents who were standing near the basement entrance. The young nurses were just bringing them a hot drink in metal beakers. Some of them were leaving, going towards the south gate. Opening the wrought iron gate carefully, they left in a single file. The street was empty. They were walking close to the walls. Each one of them was holding a hand grenade, or rather a petard, the shape and size of an egg. These were their only arms. Apart from the leader, I had not seen anyone of them with a rifle, revolver or any other firearm. Noticing this fact with astonishment, I went towards one of the youths. He was standing guard at the gate, holding his grenade. He was a young lad without a hat, with hair falling on his forehead, very clean with a well-ironed shirt and a dark jacket. He looked like a matriculation student. "Did you see something?" he asked, edging outside. "At present it is empty. Do you have some other arms?" I asked him.

"Unfortunately, no."

"Were you issued with grenades?"

"Only this one," he told me, showing his egg.

"What? Just this one? And with this one you are to..."

He interrupted, "Our section in this suburb will try to capture a munition store. The preparations have already begun - if we succeed we will have arms."

We heard steps on the street. The young boy looked through the gate and immediately opened the gate wide. Two insurgents were holding a third one who was barely moving his feet. When he lifted his head I saw a large bleeding wound just above his eye. He was deathly pale and blood was dripping down his collar. He was the first victim. The young nurses took him under their care.

This was the first August night, full of stars. It was also the first night of the uprising. We did not sleep this night. Under cover of the night the young partisans were storming the arms depot. We could hear the fighting. German searchlights moved over the roofs and dull sounds of the Front came from the outskirts of Warsaw. Only at dawn were we able to get some sleep but were woken suddenly by the sound of anti air raid artillery coming very strongly from the fields of Mokotow. The shooting was so near that one could hear the jarring sound of cannon gunstocks during the recoil. It reminded me of the roar of a hoarse elephant. The nearest guns were about two hundred metres from our house. I rushed to the balcony. Most of the people were standing at the windows and pointing somewhere towards the sky. I looked up. Between the white clouds gleamed white dots in the sky. They were probably Soviet planes. We went down to the basement. The majority of people were already there. Some were sitting on suitcases, some on chairs that they had brought down. A long narrow corridor of red bricks connected all the separate basement rooms. In the corridor, every few steps were numbered doors to the basement cellars of their owners. Some families even brought down their beds and all their belongings. Crowded together we all discussed the last events while waiting for the end of the air raid. I learned here that all partisans had left our block, supposedly to join other groups in our district. We were left to ourselves, a prey to the fancy of future events. Generally, feelings and rumours circulating between the people were quite optimistic. The general opinion was that the uprising would not last more than a few days. With great excitement it was repeated again and again that the Soviet Army was already in Praga (a suburb of Warsaw) and that Radzyn and Rembertow were already re-taken. These rumours were given as facts.

"Don't you hear the Soviet artillery shooting at the last German positions near the town? And these air raids overhead? The German situation is hopeless. This is quite obvious. Warsaw surrounded by the Soviet Army and in the city

the uprising. You don't have to know strategy to evaluate the situation. It is critical for the Germans. It is only a matter of days." This was delivered in a booming voice by an evacuee from Lublin - a chemist who lived here with his relatives. Another voice, somewhere among the suitcases, "I have heard that the insurgents already have full control in Stare Miasto (Old Town) and the main railway station. The Germans have lost liaison with other units and are surrendering en masse." This was the 'vox populi' (voice of the people) in the catacombs of our housing block.

In the meantime our observers from the roofs announced that the planes had left. A bit distrustful, the people started to leave the basement. The shooting was less violent than before. Shooting in the streets did not scare us as much as in the first days. Slowly we started to adjust to the situation of the uprising. The high brick walls gave good protection from stray bullets. So far nobody was hammering at the gates. Slowly we began to get used to the atmosphere. The streets remained empty. The inhabitants started to come down to the yard and sit on benches, children played between shrubs with wooden sticks, the game was war .. and chasing rabbits which were trying to hide from the screeching warriors. The men were walking along the footpath, commenting on the scanty and infrequent news.

From the moment of the uprising we were quite cut off. The telephones did not work, nobody had a radio, the paper published on the morning of the uprising never reached the streets. As there was no communication between the suburbs, the London bulletin did not reach us either. The news travelling around our block came from some elusive sources. Someone had heard from someone in the next house who had a radio ... all our information centres were only of this kind. Standing on the balcony and just looking down I would know when news arrived. Someone would stop somebody and start to talk earnestly, others would join and listen, the group would grow and then disperse. Men would rush home and news would travel through the whole building. The same was happening just now. Amidst the increasing group I saw an unfamiliar face and came down the stairs. For the first time a woman from outside came to our block (from Kielecka Street). Sneaking through parks and backyards, she had reached our block. The situation in Kielecka Street was very similar to ours. The partisans had also left. There were also no Germans - they, like us, were in no man's land.

"What is happening in the city? Where are the Russians?" Questions came from all sides.

"The heart of the city is in the hands of the insurgents, our white/red banner is flying on the Town Hall."

"The Russians have already taken Praga and are near Grochow," she continued, proud of her mission.

This news was accepted without criticism - one simply wanted to believe. Nobody even asked where this news came from. Why should one ask? Our banner was flying on the Town Hall .. and everyone knows that the German situation is quite hopeless .. one does not have to know strategy ...

The mood was happy, the August weather was good and the evening quiet. Even the pigeons which disappeared during the noisy first day of the uprising started to come back, circling the roofs and, with friendly cooing, settled on the trees of the yard.

The night of the second day of the uprising passed quietly. At dawn some planes circled over Warsaw. Making large circles, they were flying very high. Even with binoculars I was unable to read the markings. Many people were already in the basements, some standing near open doors scanning the sky with field glasses. Some were certain that the planes were Russian, others just as certain that they were German. Others were ready to take an oath that they were English. From inside the basement, an elderly lady intervened.

"It is unimportant to which side the planes belong - each of them can bomb Warsaw. The Germans will bomb and shoot the Poles. The British and American ones will shoot the Germans. The Soviet planes" - here she hesitated a second - "could shoot one or the others. It is important that the doors of the shelter are closed. I ask you, sirs, please come inside and kindly shut the door."

Shortly after the doors were shut, sounds of shots and hollow drumming came from the street. The vibrations were so strong that the walls of the basement were shaking as if in an earthquake. Our anxiety grew during this unknown trembling. There was no detonation. We started to get up when a man rushed into the basement screaming "Tanks are coming along Rakowiecka Street." Through the open door an ominous sound of grating metal and continuous drumming of cannons reached us. Through the small, dirty basement window I could see the pavement and metal caterpillar tracks of large tanks. They were grinding along the pavement. I could not see their tops but could hear their gunfire as they were firing in front of them. They passed us fairly quickly. The walls stopped trembling. All of us were excited. Could they have been Soviet tanks? Comments, guesses and surmises were coming from all sides.

"Of course they could be Soviet tanks. You heard yourself from the lady in Kielecka Street that already yesterday Praga was in Soviet hands."

"My God, could it really be the end of the uprising" sighed a young woman with a child in her hands. She looked exhausted and depressed, and no wonder. Three days before at half past four she went shopping with the baby, leaving her other girl at home, a few streets from us. The first shots caught her at our gate where she took shelter and here she was to remain. "It is already three days that I have been here with my baby" she was crying "and my little girl is quite alone. Three days and three nights uncared for, unfed. My husband had not returned from work," she continued, sobbing.

The planes left. People gathered in the yard. Unfortunately all hopes concerning the tanks were crushed. There were eyewitnesses. They were German tanks.

Faces became solemn, there was little talk, depression hung heavily over us and we were still cut off from the rest of the world. They were very disappointed people who went home to prepare a meal. This task was not easy, as food supplies in homes were getting quite low. We particularly missed tomatoes and bread. We sat down to some thin soup, artificially flavoured. There was not much talk, the mood was gloomy. Three days of uprising, three sleepless nights. The German tanks did not promise a good future. In addition, Czeslaw's dilemma: Should he actively join the insurgents or shouldn't he? Should he just passively wait for future developments? For the last two days he could not make up his mind.

Czeslaw was rather an unusual Pole. He was a product of international conflicts. He came from Lithuania where there e many families having to solve the same kind of problem. It was the aftermath of Polish/Lithuanian Union in the XV century. From one and the same family nest, the offspring could be of different nationalities. This was the case in Czeslaw's family. Czeslaw considered himself a true Pole and belonged to Polish organisations in Lithuania. His brother was a Lithuanian who stayed home to fight for his Lithuanian country. Czeslaw came to Poland, his adopted, chosen country. He was given a Polish Christian name but had a Lithuanian surname. He matriculated at a Polish school but finished at a Lithuanian University. He worked for the Polish community whilst living in Lithuania and longing for Poland. One of his sisters felt the same way, another was indifferent, but he dearly loved all his family. Different national feelings between the members of one family was not unusual Lithuania.

Pushing away his empty plate, Czeslaw said

"I have to join the group of insurgents in our block I should have done it sooner - now I should be fighting instead sitting in this prison."

"Does fighting as such attract you or do you consider it your duty? Or maybe your chosen profession?" I asked, being in a pacifist mood.

"I consider that fighting makes sense and is justified if it is the only way to defend my ideals or to protect the public welfare."

"For which ideal would you be fighting now?"

"For the most important one - the independence of our country "

"How do you imagine this independence?"

"Quite simply - a free country where Poles are ruling."

"I don't think it is that simple," I remarked.

"Why not?"

"You must realise that today we are unable to achieve our aim fighting alone."

"So what?"

"Fighting the Germans, we have to accept the help of the Soviets."

"Certainly."

"But it is also certain that, having accepted their help, it will be their armies pushing the Germans out of our country and that, being allies, we will have to co-operate with them. We will have to agree to their political programme. Yes or no?"

"Not necessarily."

"Not necessarily? I don't even know if they will be asking anyone. All Poland will be under their military control. Of course it will be very tempting for them to bring into our country their political ideas and the same administration as they have in their Soviet Union. It is self-evident from the principles of the Communist doctrines. In Lublin (a large city in east Poland) a complete administration organised by the Russians and headed by our Polish Communists is already waiting to take power. I think that the Russian radio station 'Tadeusz Kosciuszko', broadcasting in Polish, fully explained the

political programme and aim of the Association of Polish Patriots - this means Polish Communists living in the Soviet Union."

"Yes, but don't forget there is still England and America. They will not allow it to happen."

"What will they not allow to happen?"

"Poland to become a Communist country."

"There you are, now you are getting to the core of the matter. We are all speaking about independence, about free Poland, but in reality we are thinking about a system of government which suits us best. For you, independence means Christian bourgeois democracy; for other radicals - it is the People's Republic. To reach the desired aim some will welcome the help of England, others the help of Russia. Therefore we have a Mr. Bierut\*<sup>3</sup> - Polish Communist

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<sup>3</sup> Explanations:

Bierut - in Poland.	Became President of the Polish People's Republic in 1945.
Rackiewicz - in London.	Became President of the Polish Exile Government.
Mikolajczk	In 1945 became a Minister in Warsaw and afterwards fled the country and became Prime Minister of the Polish Exile Government in London.
Osobka-Morawski	Prime Minister of the Polish People's Republic, first in Lublin and afterwards in Warsaw.
General Bor-Komorowski	Commander-in-Chief of Polish Under ground Forces - A.K.
General Berling	Commander-in-Chief of Polish Red Troops in the Soviet Union.
A.K.	National Army - Polish Underground Armed Forces - politically white.
A.L.	People's Army - Polish Underground Armed Forces - politically red.

leader in Moscow, and Mr. Raczkwisz\* leader of Polish liberals in London. Therefore we have General Sosnkowski - Commander-in-Chief of the Polish exile army in London, and General Berling\* - Commander-in-Chief of Polish Red troops in the Soviet Union. Therefore there is the A.K.\* - white underground armed forces and A.L.\* - red underground armed forces.

"Can we say with a clear conscience that we all aspire to the one goal? Do you think that General Bor-Komorowski\*, Chief Commander of A.K. has co-ordinated his military strategy with General Berling, Chief Commander of A.L.? And that Prime Minister Mikolajczk\* his political ideas with Prime Minister Osobka-Morawski\*? Already for three days Warsaw has been fighting and bleeding and at this time they are bartering in Moscow about Poland's future government. "Our history" - I continued - "gave us many sad examples in the so-called 'aspiration of common aim'. Just as well that this time our emigrant leaders found some support with foreign allies, otherwise Poles would now be fighting each other. Is there is just the one common cause? Independence? Democracy? Those are just words, not the real issue. Why should we deceive ourselves? In Poland before 1939 did the words independence and democracy have the same meaning for a landless peasant as for the wealthy mine owner? For whose independence are we fighting?"

Czeslaw interrupted - "You and your politics. There are historical moments when one has to fight and not talk. If everyone was just criticising and trying to predict, it would not even have come to an uprising!"

"Who knows? Maybe that would have been better than an abortive attempt. Our history has many such examples. Warsaw is burning, her people are dying and somehow our allies don't seem to be in a hurry. In the meantime the Germans are swarming over the streets with their soldiers and tanks and shooting as they like and we have not even enough ordinary rifles. This is the result of action taken without previous political discussions. First a slogan is given and later politics are made. Who knows the outcome of the Moscow conference?"

"Now we have a common cause which unites us all - to fight the Germans. They are our enemies and therefore we all have to mount the barricades with guns in our hands."

"And after that? Which of our allies will have the deciding voice, sitting in the ruins of free Warsaw? To whom of the powerful protectors will the 'independent' land belong? Who amongst the people will be the hero and who the traitor?"

Czeslaw interrupted, "Defeatism, it is ..."

"What you are saying is sheer..." he did not finish. On the staircase we suddenly heard loud noises of boots, yells, banging doors.

Opening the door a crack I heard voices in German. "Where are the men?" Closing the door silently, I called out in a hoarse whisper, "Germans!" We all jumped up from the table. What were we to do? Where were we to hide? It was certain that the Germans in our house were looking for partisans. How would they distinguish a partisan from an ordinary Warsaw inhabitant? There was no way at all. There were no documents and the same civilian 'uniform' for all. Searching for insurgents was a very simplified procedure. Czeslaw had the answer to his questions. We were two young men not living permanently in this house from which partisans were shooting and where a First Aid Station had been organised. We did not know whether the Germans would kill the men on the spot or treat them as prisoners of war. We could not flee from the third floor and the Germans were already moving up the stairs. There was only one way left - to hide in the flat and hope for the best, that the search would only be a superficial one. Marushka and Auntie would have to say that no men were living in this flat. We started looking for a hiding place, expecting the Germans any minute. Czeslaw hid inside a wardrobe, I on the entresol (a small, long shelf under the ceiling) of the kitchen. Marushka, taking away the ladder, covered me with empty suitcases. I asked Marushka to hide our hats and overcoats that were hanging in the hall and leave only two plates on the table. I also asked her to appear calm and not to show any nervousness, even during the search. Marushka performed all these instructions superbly and I was deeply impressed. Even her voice sounded un-troubled during the last moments of preparation. I knew how this sensitive woman was feeling and admired her full control over her emotions in moments of extreme danger for her husband and her close friend. I will never forget the moment when, after adjusting her glasses nervously, she calmly and thoroughly inspected the hiding places. Seconds and probably minutes were hurrying by. For the first time in my life I could hear with my own ears the beating of my heart, could feel the hot blood rushing to my temples and thoughts, trivial and important, rushed through my head at the same time. Then, for a few seconds, jut an empty feeling... I could hear the ticking of the clock and thought perhaps I will live only fifteen minutes ... thirty seven years and fifteen minutes. Why those fifteen minutes? Maybe because they are so hard to take. The suitcase pushing into my back was not leather, only imitation ... if they shoot in the head would it be instantaneous or would death take a few minutes of terrible pain? I saw my mother's face, but

why is she smiling? That is silly. A stomping of boots on the stairs ... they were coming. Suddenly I became calm - an odd senseless calm. Something had happened to me. I felt empty ... waiting for my destiny.

Marushka is waiting for the bell to ring. Again seconds pass, minutes. Some doors are banging on the floor below. Silence? I can't hear the stomping of boots .. minutes pass - nothing. Marushka is opening the door slightly ... silence ... she goes out to the stairway. From my hiding place I can hear voices on the staircase. Marushka returns and says only two words - words like soothing balm ... "They've left."

We left our hiding places and peered through the window. We could just hear the departing footsteps nearing the gates. People were coming down to our yard-forum. Soon the yard was filled with people, all relating the latest happenings. Several S.S. men, armed to the teeth, had forced our main gate. Going along the walls they entered by different staircases. Not meeting any opposition, they entered the flats and started a spot check, searching for insurgents. Most of the men were able to hide.

In some flats men were found. After, checking their documents, the permanent residents of our flats were left in peace. A few who came from outside were shot. Some of the S.S. men were looking for insurgents in chests of drawers and commodes and some valuables disappeared into the pockets of the S.S. men. Our housing block had paid its first tribute. When dusk came we could see from the northern part of the city the glow of fires and smoke clouds which dispersed as darkness was deepening. At night only the glow of burning fires remained over the fighting in Warsaw. At three o'clock in the morning I was awakened by sounds coming from the yard. The door of the balcony was open and I listened. Again the sound of boots and then some loud orders issued in German - a reply in broken German. Once again steps under our balcony. "Where is the entrance to the basement?" asked a German voice with a cock of the rifle and a door closing on the first floor.

We stayed in bed as there was no sense in constant hiding. Half an hour passed and the Germans were still in the block. We could hear the splintering of wood as doors were broken down. Again voices in the yard, some barking orders and, at last, silence.

We did not sleep much that night. In the early morning a German officer and a few soldiers came back again. They were fully armed. He gave his orders to the people who were in yard. People living in this housing block had to choose from amongst themselves a commander of the block who had to allocate duties.

The commander would be responsible for order and discipline with his head. The guards must watch the gates constantly.

Gates had to be locked and opened only on German orders. If only one shot was fired from the block, all the inhabitants would be brought to the yard and "Here" he yelled and waved his revolver, indicating the wall, "they will be immediately shot." He gave one more look at the scared pale faces and left, followed by his soldiers who were holding their machine guns, ready to riot. We all remained motionless until they left the gate and sounds of hobnailed boots quietened down and the S.S men disappeared from view. Those who did not understand German asked for details of his speech. Within minutes our whole forum was full of people, even those who were inside during the issuing of orders. One of the members of the co-operative was asked to become the commandant. Guards were chosen to be relieved every four hours.

Now our block and our entire suburb came under full control of the Germans.

Groups of partisans had left in the direction of Pulawska street. We were faced with a difficult problem. How to protect our block from the irresponsible actions of a few men who could invoke a bloody retaliation by the Germans. One ill-advised shot from a window or from behind the wall would have to be paid for very dearly - with the death of a hundred defenceless people. Could somebody come to help us? Most unlikely. Our suburb was now completely in the hands of the Germans. They were the masters of life and death. To keep alive, to keep over one hundred families living was the duty of the guards who watched the gates and controlled the roofs, attics and basements.

However, it did happen!

When most people were busy preparing a midday meal, some shots were fired into the street from a window of the staircase. Who fired? Nobody knew. Not many had heard the shots but a few seconds later we all heard a loud, rumbling crash and our whole block trembled. We all jumped to our feet. The crashing noise was repeated a few more times. Looking from our balcony I saw broken glass, bricks and plaster tumbling into our block. Over the front of our block facing Rakovicka Street dark reddish smoke was rising. In panic, people started to run to the basement.

This was the German revenge on our block. Cannons stood in the field of Mokotow and they opened fire, directed at our block. Two storeys of the front were smashed and a few large holes appeared in the walls and roof. Nobody was killed. Those who used to live in the flats facing the main street now

lived permanently in the basement as this side of the building had previously been damaged by machine guns and windows were broken.

Would the Germans leave us alone now? Had they satisfied their revenge? This thought was uppermost in our minds. Remembering the words ... "if even one shot be fired ...," this thought sent shivers down our spines. Frightened faces and feverish eyes were looking through the crowded basement windows. Maybe they were on the way with machine guns to kill us all, lined up against the wall? These were hard moments, grating on the nerves. The tightly-packed crowd was waiting for its destiny. We heard a grumbling noise further away, shots and a jarring sound of metal on the street. "Those are tanks" people whispered. They came nearer very quickly and the walls began to tremble. Heavy Tigers, shooting from their gun turrets, were tearing the asphalt with their caterpillar wheels. "My God, will they be shooting at us?" asked a woman, leaning against the shaking walls. The tanks with their beastly screech passed us quickly, entering the Mokotow field in a scattered battle order, and disappeared from our sight.

Evening came. Depressed and tired, we were settling down for sleep. In the long basement, passages were filled with deck chairs and plank beds. Tired children were crying and old people, lying under the walls in uncomfortable positions, were sighing heavily. Piled luggage made it hard to move. On suitcases were candles, giving some light. It was a sad picture. Mothers were feeding their children with bits of food - no milk. Grown-ups did not eat an evening meal. The ghost of starvation was hovering over our block. Many had finished their supplies. Our co-operative shop was sold out. More and more people went to sleep hungry.

Our family also got ready for the night. From our balcony I saw the empty yard. The fires over Warsaw were casting a pale glow over the roofs and from the field of Mokotow came volleys of shots. In the neighbouring street I could hear an occasional single shot echoing along the walls. Our guards were patrolling the yard. From the windows next door I could hear loud sobbing.

At two in the morning we were awakened by the ringing of the bell and insistent hammering at our door. Marushka rushed to open it.

"Who is there?"

"Aufmachne" (open the door). Marushka obeyed and two S.S. men entered with their automatic guns in their hands.

"Are there men in this flat?" was their first question.

"Yes," answered Marushka in German after a second's hesitation.

"How many?"

"Two. My husband and our friend who is staying with us."

One of them opened the door of the first room where Czeslaw was sleeping and both entered.

"Documents," yelled one, shining his torch in Czeslaw's face. Czeslaw gave him his passport. They started checking.

"He is a foreigner," called one, reeling on his feet. They were drunk.

"Out with him into the yard," he yelled, pushing his gun towards Czeslaw. We knew what that meant. The life of our friend was hanging just by a thread.

Enter Marushka. There are moments when strong words of a woman can achieve miracles. In her perfect German she flooded them with words interjected with "foreigner," "travel orders," "army follower". They were impressed. The less drunk one, pulling his companion by the sleeves, started to edge towards the door. They forgot about me and left. We could hear their receding footsteps. They whistled through their fingers calling others and at last left our yard.

We could not go to sleep that night. Who could sleep with this white glow of the fighting Warsaw. We sat on the balcony. The opposite walls were bathed in the glow of fires. A light wind carried some burnt paper and the smell of burning. In the yard were the measured steps of the guards. From the balcony next to ours came heavy sighing and whispered prayers and, on the ground floor, a woman was crying. We could hear her sobbing for a long time.

During this night drunken S.S. men raped four women in our block.

In the morning shooting intensified in the suburbs surrounding us. The rumours were that the insurgents were attacking from Puiawa Street. The heavy cannonade which we had heard during the first days of the uprising had stopped. Some planes were circling over the city. At about ten o'clock Germans appeared again. This time there were many army men in their camouflage uniforms holding their automatic guns at the ready. They covered all the exits and ordered all men to come down to the yard. There was no way out. Slowly and full of distrust we assembled in the yard. We were surrounded by the S.S. men. Behind them stood our women, weeping. Their sons, husbands and brothers were here. The Germans ordered us to line up against the walls with hands up. A thorough

search did not reveal any arms. After the search was completed we were let go free. Thus ended the act of pacification of our block.

From this day onwards the Germans visited our block more often in a random fashion. They tried to converse with the inhabitants, they came and sat on benches in the yard, they tried to play with the children, they offered smokes to the men and smiled at the women. After the pacification of the block, they tried to win over its inhabitants.

They were getting bored sitting in the trenches on the fields of Mokotow - nobody was shooting at them. Here one could be with people, look at good-looking women and play with children. The children were just children; it did not matter that they were Polish children. There was the same childish prattle, the same tiny little hands touching them. Many of the soldiers had in their 'Heimat' similar toddlers who also tried to pull out the bayonets leaning against their daddies. What a pleasant feeling to remember. The soldiers would try to speak to the mothers in a mixture of German and Polish words. They would open their tunics and show their most treasured possessions - photos of their families and, pointing to the snaps, would say "I have two children. Here, look, my daughter two years, look here is my Frau."

The German soldiers felt good. It was so much better to talk like this than to sit in the damp trenches. One could even forget the war for a little while. A queer thing is war and its psychology. Yesterday they were threatening to shoot us all and today they are playing with our children. Yesterday there was a brutal search and rape and today they come as visitors bringing brandy and cigarettes.

Slowly we began to get used to the new way of life. Many of us still shrank back instinctively when we sighted a German. We were all still very distrustful but, with time, we got used to them. The Germans brought us the news that the Russian Army was pushed far back from Warsaw. They were quite certain in their assertion received from the Fuehrer's headquarters that the Soviet Army under the German attack had retreated a hundred kilometres. We did not want to believe it. But still there must be some truth in it. People were saying, "Why didn't the Russians standing in the Praga suburb of Warsaw attack the city? Why had the Front become so silent?" Some were saying, "It can't be true. The Germans are saying those things on purpose to undermine our morale." But a nagging doubt remained.

About noon there were again planes over Warsaw. They were very high and seemed to circle very slowly. I was sitting on a bench, talking, when children began calling "Look, look, papers and more papers." Looking up, we saw

leaflets fluttering down on the roofs. Some fell down behind our walls and were lost to us, others floating gently settled down between our walls. We started chasing them; some even tried to catch them from their balconies. Children and grown-ups alike were trying to grab these papers. There were not many of them which landed in our block; therefore everyone was vying for the privilege to be the first. These leaflets represented the first news from the outside world. Anyone able to catch a leaflet was immediately surrounded by a crowd. One had to read loudly. I was in luck and caught a leaflet and started reading:

### SOLDIERS OF THE NATIONAL ARMY

Our Government from London announces that Prime Minister MIKALAYJCZK's position in Moscow is such that he is unable to reach free decision and to have freedom of speech.

ONE HAS NO DOUBT WHAT INTENTIONS ARE HIDDEN BEHIND IT.

I started to negotiate with representatives of German authorities, looking for common ground to co-ordinate actions against the Moscow traitors.

I HEREBY ORDER a stop to all acts of hostility against occupational German authorities and an immediate return to initial meeting places of alert!

Everyone disregarding this order is taking sides with those who made an attempt on the life of our Prime Minister and will be shot immediately.

Further orders will be issued.

Long live Poland!

Chief Commander of Polish National Armed Forces.  
(-) BOR. Warsaw 2nd August, 1944.

I finished reading and all were still holding their breath and listening to the echo of such odd and quite incompressible words. "Has BOR really signed it?" asked someone.

It was read for a second time.

"It is quite impossible."

"You are quite right."

"This is just a plain in lie, a forgery."

"It certainly is," agreed the others.

"Just listen. You see what the main point is - stop fighting the Germans and return to the point of alert. This is their main aim."

"It certainly is the work of the Germans."

"Oh! These buggers, these bandits, the forgers, trying to pretend to be BOR."

"This way they have not a hope to win the war - they will surely come to grief."

This was the general reaction and opinion of our yard. I folded the leaflet carefully and put it in my wallet. It was certainly a unique document. The group dispersed, looking for other leaflets to compare whether they had the same contents.

In the afternoon the firing from the city became heavier. This was probably the partisans' reply to the leaflets. A few hours later German bombers appeared over the city. They were flying quite low and one could easily see the black crosses of the Luftwaffe. The bombing of the city began. Again we sheltered in the basement. The walls were trembling from the heavy explosions. A cloud of dust rose above the roofs. Some were of the opinion that we would not be bombed and they were right, as we were in the part of the city where Germans had full control and, in addition, their heavy artillery was positioned next to our block. Some even went outside to watch the planes. They were flying low, making turns over the centre of the city and dropping their bombs. The erupting dust clouds pinpointed the places of explosion.

That night I was on guard duty. At two a.m. a gentle knock came at the door. I was ready. I, and the other guard, came down the stairs. The guards who had finished their watch gave us instructions and the key of the gate. My duty was to watch the east wing and the gate. Switching on my torch, I went to the basement and cellars. People were sleeping everywhere - on the naked floors,

under the walls, in the boiler house. People of Warsaw were pushed down to the basements. From the moment when the uprising began the roles were reversed; the underground army came into the open and the civilian population went to the underground.

I continued my way up the stairs to the attic facing Rakowiecka Street. All over there were strings and drying laundry. On my left, holes in the walls and roof from cannon shells. In front of me was a large view of the city. Warsaw was covered by fires. A sea of red flames lit the sky. The stars looked pale and the roofs were covered with a reddish glow. The smoke over the city was like darkly gathering clouds before a storm. Somewhere behind our block were detonations, firing and screeching of machine guns. Warsaw was fighting on. In front of me - an empty street with some leaflets here and there. Quite near us, in the field of Mokotow, the dark silhouettes of cannon with their long barrels, and there were German patrols in the field. Coming back my torch shone in one of the corners where, to my astonishment, I saw a man sitting on a child's rocking chair. He was a man of about fifty, unshaven, with a heavily lined face, and clothed in a dirty and torn suit, torn shoes on feet without socks.

"What are you doing here?" I asked suspiciously.

"I sleep here as you can see," he answered without any embarrassment.

"Why here, in the attic?"

"I don't like the basement, it is too damp there. I have rheumatism and it is warmer here. The sun heats it nicely during the day. I have nothing to cover myself with."

"Are you from this block?"

"Oh, no. I am from prison. I was there over a year; near here in the Mokotow gaol. You know, the red brick building in Rakowiecka Street."

"Were you released?"

He laughed. "We released ourselves. When the uprising started the Germans opened a few doors and drove the prisoners into the yard, telling them they would be released. We who were still locked up shortly heard shooting in the yard. News spread immediately - Germans were shooting the prisoners in the yard. We started a riot in the gaol. Some were able to flee but the Germans started shooting at us from the yard and the street. We climbed on the roof and, although the building was burning, we were able to reach the roofs of other buildings. In this way about 380 of us got free. Now I am here and waiting for

what will come next. I have nowhere to go. I have no house - my wife was killed in September 1939 in the ruins of our flat. One son died during the Polish/German war near Kutno and the Germans took my second son to Oswiecim (the extermination camp Auschwitz). Don't know if he is alive."

"Do you mind me asking why you were imprisoned?"

"You see I was put to work to repair the highways and I ran away and, coming to Warsaw I bought some goods from the farmers. As bad luck would have it, a Gestapo control caught me with the goods in the train. They took the goods away and put me in gaol," he finished.

I left him in the attic. The yard was silent. The guards were speaking quietly near the gate. We were relieved at six in the morning. I went to sleep but somehow I could never get enough sleep. At nine Marushka woke me, explaining that the Germans were shooting at the house next to ours and that our people were already in the basement. Explosions of hand grenades and shooting from machine guns were very close, coming from Akacia Street. We went down to the basement. Here we heard the latest news the Germans had broken into the Jesuit chapel that was about 200 steps away from us. What was happening there nobody knew. Maybe shots had been fired from that house and the Germans retaliated? After half an hour the shooting stopped. After leaving the basement we saw fires and smoke. Rushing up to the top floor we saw that the chapel was burning. Smoke was pouring through the windows covering the wall with soot and we could hear the glass breaking. In a very short while the whole chapel was on fire, cleaning the traces of the recent tragedy. We all worried about the fate that had befallen our nearest neighbours.

In the afternoon our nurses brought some wounded partisans to our block. These young girls were extremely brave. By unknown routes they were constantly sneaking outside and looking for wounded in our suburb. The armband of the Red Cross could not be relied on for protection. One of the nurses was killed whilst on duty. She fell, maybe hit by a stray bullet, in the potato field and her mates brought her home but she died on the way.

Again planes came from the west. "Maybe they are English?" people said. Somehow they shimmered differently in the sunshine. They were flying in a regular formation, just like cranes. Unfortunately they were German planes. Shortly the walls of Warsaw were once again shaking from detonations. It did not last long and anyhow, by now we were becoming indifferent to raids. There were many who never went to the basements, others continued walking in the yard during the bombing of the city.

It became quieter in the evening. The shooting in our suburb stopped but by now we were unresponsive to the sound of fighting further away. We considered it the normal way of life.

The chapel was still smouldering but the fire was localised and had not destroyed their total block.

People were spending more and more time in the yard as it was the only place where one could get some fresh air and stretch one's legs. High above the town some single planes were circling again but nobody took much notice. During the day so many of them were flying over our unhappy Warsaw. Some were bombers, some observers, and some were dropping leaflets. My God, one would go berserk if one rushed each time to the basements.

Some were watching the progress of the planes with field glasses. Someone from the balcony was calling for our attention. Some white objects were falling out of the planes. At first they fell quickly, then they just seemed to hang in the air. Our first thought was – parachutes. But soon those big umbrellas burst into thousands of white dots. "They are leaflets," voices called from everywhere. All of us were watching. It looked very impressive. All the sky seemed to be covered with white petals. They were swaying lazily, becoming bigger as they slowly descended. Prepared by the previous experience, we were waiting impatiently for news from the sky. What will they bring? What will they feed us with? We had to wait a long time until the leaflets reached our roofs. Those with a quick eye could distinguish the different shape of the leaflets. Does it mean they will have different contents? The boys were rushing to the balconies hoping that, with luck, they would be the first. The leaflets were just, just above our heads. We began chasing them. The leaflets were dodging us, swaying playfully to the left and to the right, until at last they landed amongst us. The crowd wandered to different direction in groups and started to read.

## **CITIZEN!**

The time of freedom is approaching. The Polish People's Army, with self-sacrificing battles, paved the way for victory. The Russian allies had broken the yoke of the fascists' occupation. The Polish Government in London acknowledged that the Red Army and the Polish People's Army carried on their shoulders the weight of the battles for freedom. Marshal Stalin had guaranteed wide boundaries for Poland.

C I T I Z E N: The reborn Poland is Poland of the people. Everyone must add their efforts to rebuild the country. All kinds of fascist elements will be crushed. Every Pole, every organisation has to co-operate with us. The Free People's Poland is calling you. The new vigorous state organisation will guarantee your freedom and prosperity. The Polish People's Army is defending our Poland.

This historical moment requires a joint effort under a united leadership of the Polish People's Army. Who is not subordinate is sabotaging free Poland. The lordly, grand leaders of the National Army have to step aside.

Watch them!

Being in the pay of Hitlerism, their undermining work is finished.

Death to the fascists:  
Long live the Polish People's Republic:

General Berling, Commander of Polish Army in Russia.  
Government Press - in Wilno.

Another leaflet read like this:

**STOP!**  
**THE UPRISING IS OUR DEATH!**

Now the Communists have achieved their aim. We ourselves are destroying Poland. The Polish underground is getting weaker in her fight with Hitlerism; later the Bolsheviks will come and crush her. It was like this in Wilno, the same will happen here.

We are blind:

We were led into this error.

**NEVER WILL WE GIVE OUR COUNTRY TO THE COMMUNISTS**

You must understand that Hitler has to fight the Soviets if he intends to stay in power. This fight will finish him, giving the English basis for victory and allowing the allies to help us.

Guard against ill-judged actions!

Keep cool, remember our fallen heroes. They sacrificed their life for free Poland, never for the support of Communists.

OUR STRENGTH: wait for the right moment.

THE RIGHT MOMENT: a victory by our allies in the west.

People were reading and listening, looking for new leaflets and building new groups. Nobody was sure how many leaflets there were. What was their real meaning? Did they have the same propaganda thoughts?

I heard the following.

"Which one did you read?"

"The one by General Berling."

"About the People's Army?"

"Yes."

"And you?" asked another one.

"The smaller one."

"Which was the smaller one?"

"You know, the one about the uprising being the death of us."

"What do you know? I have not read this one. What did they say?"

"That Communism has achieved its aim ..."

"Pardon me, but that was the one I just read - 'People's Army with their sacrifices had paved the way for victory - that means Russia achieved her aim.'"

"No, you are wrong, just the opposite. The one I saw stated quite plainly that the Soviets will crush Poland, Poland which we ourselves have destroyed."

"Simple - we are hitting Hitler and Stalin will crush us so why should we fight? Better to wait until Churchill and Roosevelt finish both. You see, that will be our victory."

"You know, there is truth in it. I even like it. Where is this leaflet?"

"There, you can see the group reading near the rubbish stack."

One person left and another joined the group, asking timidly.

"Excuse me, please, but would you have the leaflet, how can I say ... about Stalin, Hitler and Roosevelt?"

"What, is there one like it?"

"Yes there is - the most reasonable one."

"No, I am looking for it. I was told that you had read it."

"No. We caught only the one with grammatical errors."

"With grammatical errors? That means there is a third one. Could you show it to me?" ... scanning the leaflet, "Ah, that is from Berling. I have already read it."

"The one you mentioned before - who signed it?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody?" He was very disappointed. "An appeal without a signature? That is impossible - you probably missed it. Somebody had to sign it. Maybe a general, or did it come from a party or a committee?"

"I assure you, nobody signed it. Anyway is it important? If you like their polite opinion, you can sign it."

"The position has already been decided, on the Warsaw's barricades. Opinion? The opinion during war is formed by bayonets."

"You are a cynic."

"And you are naive." Everyone started laughing. The fellow who had come looking for a leaflet gave up as at this moment someone new came towards us. He called out to the newcomer, an elderly gentleman living near our flat.

"Hello doctor, good to see you. Maybe you have the second leaflet?"

"My dear sir, firstly I don't know which one was the first. Were they numbered?" he asked, smiling.

"The smaller one, the one which was unsigned."

"But it is quite irrelevant. In my opinion they are all coming from one and the same source. There - from heaven," - he was pointing upwards. "In this heavenly matter are engaged Mr. Hitler's planes. First they throw bombs on us and then leaflets. Just for a change so we don't get bored whilst waiting for help from our allies which is coming at a snail's pace. They are all means to the one end and the gullibility of people is boundless."

It was late and already dark when the last inhabitants left the yard to return to their flats or basements; only the guards were keeping watch. That night I slept undisturbed.

Next morning when I was taking the rubbish bin outside I found a new, red leaflet. By which wind and at what time it was blown into our yard I didn't know. Nobody had seen it the day before - the night had brought it. This is what it said.

### **We demand a Soviet Poland!**

We the Polish Soviet workers who have mounted the barricades to fight for Poland's freedom against the fascist beast, in this hour we are raising our voices announcing to Poland and the world so that the people, our friends and enemies, should we have risen to fight against Hitlerism to revenge ourselves on the terrible enemy of our people and of the people of the Soviet Union; we have mounted the barricades to destroy the fascist beast and at the same time to establish in our country a government which will be the only one to give happiness to the Polish worker and guarantee his freedom -  
**FOR THE SOVIET POLAND!**

In the hour when in our capital city we raise our aims against fascism, the oppressor of mankind, we declare solemnly that with this battle on the barricades we will wipe out the old Polish reactionaries, capitalists and the clergy.

The Polish Soviet worker who mounted the barricades is demanding a Soviet Poland without large landowners who were inhuman exploiters.

Through our fight on the barricades we will create this type  
of Poland for which we are ready to give our blood -  
FOR THE SOVIET POLAND!

Joining our brothers in the Soviet Union, we will destroy  
the old order and will create the Polish state of the worker.

Long live Stalin!  
Long live Soviet Poland!

Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party.

I finished reading the leaflet and was emptying my rubbish bin when Adam joined me. He was called Adam by everyone. He was a student of classic philosophy.

"Have you been reading something new?"

"A new leaflet, this time a red one," I replied, greeting him. He began to read, supporting his chin on his fist. It was his typical gesture when concentrating. Sometimes he even bit his nails. From next door came Marjory, also bringing her rubbish out. She joined us. She was the maid of the doctor's family who lived opposite us. We all knew each other. She was a short, broadly built girl full of energy and covered with freckles. She wanted to know everything and tried to have her own opinion.

"What is new, Mister Adam?" she asked, emptying her bucket.

"Nothing good, Marjory. By now people don't know themselves what they are fighting for in our unhappy Warsaw. This is tragic nonsense," he continued his thought. "You just think, the Polish Communists also mounted Warsaw's barricades, fighting for Soviet Poland. Right. We know that on the same barricades there are Poles fighting for Poland's independence. Fighting shoulder to shoulder for contradictory aims. Not enough, I beg you, just you read - 'we declare solemnly that this battle on the barricades will wipe out the old Polish reactionaries, capitalists and the clergy.' You see? Our common enemy has not yet been destroyed but we already have promises that brothers from the barricades will fight each other."

"I will tell you something, sirs," interrupted Majory. We Poles are really good at unsuccessful uprisings. So many people perish. Oh, Mother of God, what will there be left from our Warsaw which is burning without interruption day and night? And just think about the Jesuit brothers," she continued, crossing herself. "Last night a woman came from Akacia Street. Oh Jesus, Holy Mother what has happened there. She was telling that they ordered all the Jesuits to get completely undressed and then .. and then .. they killed them all, all of them, without pity, and afterwards they killed all the women and children. Those who went to pray on the day of the uprising and were unable to leave. God have mercy on us - to murder clergymen, women and children, and where ... just you think where they were murdered in the house of God, in, a chapel! That is the most devilish and sacrilegious thing that has happened since the world saw the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. All that because of this uprising. Yes, yes ... but I am just talking and talking and the work is waiting." She ran back home.

". . . . and all that because of the uprising! You have heard and her, haven't you?" asked Adam, biting his lips nervously. His hair, as if never combed, fell over his forehead, a long pale face with very regular features made beautiful by large, burning eyes. He was slightly bent and extremely thin. His suit was badly worn and crumpled, his badly knotted tie was always hanging astray like a much used string, as Adam often used to grab, hugging it to his chest. He loved to gesture. Only when gesturing was he in his element. Without gestures Adam could not talk, nor could he think. With his long white fingers he was constantly touching his face, his eyes were full of fire as he developed new ideas. His face twitched and he quite often talked to himself.

The yard called him a fool whereas his intellect was way over the others. He did not understand the others and they did not understand him so they just called him a fool. They were just 'bread-eaters' and he was a thinker. Why should they try to climb intellectual heights? To understand Adam it was much easier to give him a place below and call him a fool.

Taking my bin and returning home I met some Germans. They were smiling and greeting people they met. At our door a neighbour, a doctor from Lublin, stopped me asking me to be his interpreter. He wanted to speak to the Germans. He was concerned about his relatives, an engineer with a wife and two daughters who, during the day of the uprising were making the best of a nice summer day and went to the fields about 500 steps from here and never came back. Five days have passed and he wanted the help of the Germans to be able to bring them back. "What could have happened to them?" he asked the Germans, with me as an interpreter. The Germans explained that about two

hundred civilians who were caught during the beginning of the uprising in the fields of Mokotow were interned in the barracks near the artillery position. The doctor asked the Germans to intervene with their authorities and to release this family. He promised them vodka and cigars.

After breakfast a meeting was called in our forum, in the yard. Our rubbish heap had become a matter of public concern. It had grown out of all proportion and was stinking to high heaven. Being imprisoned in our yard, we were unable to remove the rubbish. A heated discussion developed between the organiser of the meeting who wanted the rubbish burnt and others who thought it should be buried. Many speeches were held. Two parties developed. The party which advocated burning was grouped about the more radical ones and consisted mainly of the younger people. The part of the conservative liberals wanted the rubbish to be buried. Only after a speech which was deeply thought through and delivered in an enrapt manner was a decision reached. This orator delivered his speech in a very picturesque way with flowery words and convincing arguments. At least 40 per cent of the rubbish could not be consumed by fire as it consisted of tins, broken plates and other unburnable goods. The resolution was carried through and the organiser asked for volunteers who owned shovels. The appeal was so successful that we began digging trenches in relays. While one party was digging the other was resting, sitting on benches. The trench became deep. Children played with the wet sand, making fortresses and moats. During the day the wind had increased.

"Maybe the weather will change," said someone digging near me.

"We could do with some rain," said Adam. "It might help with some of the fires in Warsaw." Speaking about the weather made the people look up at the sky and immediately they shouted "Leaflets!" Now everyone was looking up. The strong wind was pushing a white cloud quickly above our roofs. We were very disappointed as none descended to our yard. The wind was chasing them to another suburb, the bulk landing in the fields of Mokotow. One of the leaflets brushed the roof and, reducing speed, started to come towards our yard. Being the tallest in our group, I was lucky to grab it first. Now I had quite a set of "sui generis" (the only one of its kind) documents. According to our yard custom, I had the honour to read it to our forum.

A large group was surrounding me so I stepped on the bench and, opening the rather large leaflet, began reading the words of the 'manifest':

Prime Minister Mikolajczyk held a conference with Stalin and pledged mutual co-operation with the Red Army. The same Red Army which had murdered the soldiers of the National Army in Wilno and brought the Ukrainian thugs into Lwow and Lublin where thousands of our countrymen perished for their unshakable belief in the final victory of a great and independent Poland. The German occupier was unable to break the proud Polish spirit. All his shrewd methods, trying to destroy the heroic Polish nation were for nothing. The Soviet brutality is also doomed to failure. The Russian Government has clearly shown its treacherous plans by setting up a Bolshevik government in Chelm. The hostile reaction by the Polish people taught Stalin a lesson that by force only he will be unable to break the Polish people. Now he has returned to the way of deceitful treachery. Prime Minister Mikolajczyk let himself be used for the ignoble plans, probably being afraid of losing his position. The Polish soldier never submitted to his enemy. Prime Minister Mikolajczyk, the Polish Quisling, stained the honour of the Polish soldier who fought for five years and never gave up. Poland's enemies, heavily armed, can occupy our soil but cannot conquer the Polish people. To pave the way, they are now using treachery. The unshakable belief and the self sacrifice of the heroic Polish soldier will never allow the Bolsheviks to destroy the Polish people through treacherous and cowardly politicians. The German occupier is fighting with his last breath. In the West the Americans and the English have broken through the Front and are streaking forward as quick as lightning.

Here, the German occupants are also hurriedly fleeing. But Russia is also at the end of her possibilities. Great and independent Poland will soon appear at the side of our allies, America and England, but never under the German yoke, nor the Soviet whip. Poles, the decisive moment of our heroic battle will require from all of you an unbreakable faith in victory, self-sacrifice for the nation and a strict discipline to the leadership.

I hereby announce the following Order of the Day. The Bolsheviks are near Warsaw and proclaim that they are friends of the Polish nation. This is a treacherous lie. Our borderlands, Wilno and Lublin, are calling to high heaven for revenge. Our Soviet enemy will meet

with exactly the same ruthless fighting which is breaking our German invaders. To act for Russian advantage is treason to our country. The hour for a Polish uprising has not arrived as yet. Orders issued by Soviet servants are null and void.

The commanders of the National Army must stop all acts which are trying to help the Soviets. The Germans are fleeing. On with the battle with the Soviets. Long live free fighting Poland.

(signed) BOR

Chief Commander of the Armed Forces in Poland.

NOTE: All the original leaflets are in the author's possession. The translation tried, where possible, to include spelling and grammatical errors.

I came down from the bench and gave the leaflet to others to read. They were still doubtful and wanted to see with their own eyes, to look at the black on white. "Could it be true that BOR ...? No, it is impossible - it must be a forgery. To start fighting the Soviets now is an absurdity!"

I went to talk with Adam who was leaning on his shovel.

"What do you think about it?" I asked him.

"I can't understand one thing. If one falsifies something, one should do it properly. But all these errors in the leaflet, they jar on one's ears terribly. It is hideous."

We continued digging our trenches for our rubbish.

"You know," Adam started talking, picking at a brick absentmindedly, "this incident with the Jesuits was a great shock to me. I knew these people. Between them were many very valuable individuals, deep minds and insatiable scholars. For instance, the old father professor. I used to visit him often. We would sit on a bench and become immersed in deep conversations. These were such good hours for me. My mind was free to fly to idealistic heights. He was directing my way. At this stage I was deep in the Kantian dialectics, looking for the categorical imperative as the starting point for man's moral position. You would be mistaken in assuring that he was showing the truth only pointing to heaven. He directed me along human tracks, the best method, the method of historical

materialism. He showed me to what people were coming and what they were longing for. He achieved something which seemed impossible to achieve. He set himself free, liberating himself. His body was not necessary to him any more - it was just like the shell of a chick. His soul was fully ripe." He stopped talking, his lips were twitching, his eyes burning. He started digging but then continued:

"... and then comes such a beast, a senseless tom from the Hitler studs who carries a machine gun - and S.S. man - and starts shooting into human skulls like a soulless robot. This bit of lead tears the brain away and all the deep thoughts are extinguished just like a candle flame. You know, one can get mad. It is beyond my comprehension. And, at that, it was only just a small fragment of the horrible tragedy that is surrounding us -WAR. The biggest human cataclysm brought forth by humans. Not one natural catastrophe has claimed as many victims as a war. If we think about earthquakes, floods, erupting volcanoes, tempests - the victims were counted in thousands and maybe tens of thousands but the war claims tens of MILLIONS. When Vesuvius erupted and destroyed Pompeii claiming a few hundred human lives all the world was in mourning. Monuments were erected in memory of this human tragedy. Now a fleet of planes, directed by human hands, can drop bombs on a big city and bury a hundred thousand inhabitants. Natural disasters are like children's toys compared with deathly human inventions. People are killing people. Homo sapient. The primate of their species.

"I often wondered what caused people to fight. Is it something biological, like breeding, or is it sociological, having its roots in co-existence. The materialistic dialectic is pointing to economical conditions but this does not cover wars for non-economical reasons such as religious wars. What economical reason could unite the Christians from Western Europe to fight fanatically the Arabs in their desert steppe of the Middle East? During human history, how many different slogans were written on the war banners? Would a war psychosis be possible if people possess some instinct which, during the thought of war, triggers off some repulsive feelings?

"Could such a Hitler exist with his gospel 'Mein Kampf' if the German nation was a society of conscientious pacifists? All this social doctrine is based on an apotheosis of wars. His first evangelist and high priest, Alfred Rosenberg, squeezed out everything he could from Hegel, Nietzsche and Fichte about the godly fighting spirit and incorporated it in his ideology of National Socialism. All the propaganda was directed to unleash a primitive fighting spirit. To drug the people with a mania of grandeur of the Master race. To tickle

his vanity, to excite his imagination with assured victories. To indoctrinate him with a hatred against other races, other ideals, other nations. The 'Volk' (in the German nation, "people") frenzied by the red rag of the Hitler toreadors, came out to fight. To fight with the West, to fight the East, to fight the capitalists and the communists, to fight the democracies and plutocracies, to fight the Jews, religion, philosophies and literature.

"And the people, you know - just people who are organising, supported by science, this horrible machine of destruction. Engineers are giving their most to create a better bomb which will kill more people simultaneously and destroy more relics which were worshipped with piety for generations. The best brains are competing to create better means to wipe out PEOPLE and their accumulated treasures. In research laboratories, in construction offices, in factories ... they are producing better and better bombs ... two .. four .. six .. toners, air mines, flying fortresses, phosphorescent bombs, V-1, V-2, V-3 ...

"What are the millions of forced labourers and war prisoners in Germany doing if not producing the destructive tools of war?"

"Oh, my God, that is a machinery of the devil. I lack the words. Do you think that all this, all the organisation for total war, will be satisfied with this only? Certainly not" - now he was speaking full of irony - "there will still be some living people behind the Front and some who survived in the bombed cities, some who survived concentration camps and those who survived the 'liberation' of their country from independence, and some Jews - a nation of the doomed. Today's war is a total war – bellum omnium contra omnes (war of all against all). Those who are not killing others or are not helping in killing others - oh, what irony - are enemies of the country. Those who dared to be born Jews are criminals. Those are the laws of total war. The organised system is for total destruction of defenceless people, those people which the Front missed. The concentration camps are growing to the size of cities. Organised armies of dog-catchers are performing round-ups. They are chasing the people in the streets, squares and yards - these dog-catchers of the total war system are chasing these hunted people. They are thrown like dogs into trucks and afterwards behind the barbed wire of camps. To hang or to shoot simultaneously tens of people would be simple but hundreds of thousands is a costly problem. Therefore a cheaper and 'more productive' system to exterminate people was organised, helped by science. Phase one - choking people in gas chambers, phase two - mass burning in crematoriums. The last product - fertiliser from human bones - not damaging to the totalitarian system, even desirable for growing cabbages," he yelled, his face distorted with a

painful smile. He touched his brow, he was tired. His face was twitching nervously and he was biting his lips. But then he continued, not as loudly, stopping between words.

“The totalitarian system is not only destroying the living person with its creative mind, but also his previous thoughts contained in books and his masterpieces in art and literature. The totalitarian system, irrespective of whether they are red, white or brown, are astonishingly united and exceptionally conceited. They will not tolerate anything that is not proclaimed by them as truth. Take, for instance, literature. Sometimes they prosecute the author and sometimes the books. What will be left of literature if sometimes the creators and sometimes the creation is being destroyed by the totalitarian system? Take the German poet, Heine - his books are suddenly removed from all shelves because he had a mother, or was it a grandmother, who was a Jewess. Einstein's theory of relativity is being expunged because its author is a Jew. But again, if a pure Aryan, Zessing, wrote 'Nathan the Wise', only his book was burnt as it is not acceptable for a Jew to be wise and to be a deep thinker. How many such examples one could quote.”

I interrupted - "Adam, this reminds me of some incidents in a library in Kaunas. Then, in 1940, Lithuania became a Soviet republic, the Soviets ordered the removal from the library of all books written by the so-called reactionaries, that is Poles, and also books written by Russian emigrants. A year later came the Germans - they in turn ordered the removal of all books by Soviet authors and the translations of other Russian authors. In this way, during a year the library became short of books as it was mainly stocked with books from her neighbouring countries written in Polish, Russian and German.”

"There, you are”. Adam was speaking again full of emotion, "this total war destroys all and everything. It seems absurd but the enemy armies are working together. The armies which are in the offensive are destroying and bombing the hinterland - they are destroying the railways, factories and towns. Armies on the defensive, when retreating, destroy bridges and burn everything possible so that the enemy is unable to use anything which they had not previously destroyed. The same applies with people. The retreating army is killing all its political enemies. The offensive one is killing all the adherents of its enemy. I ask you, isn't it the perfect co-operation for total destruction of life and goods?

"I hate war, I hate it with all my nerves, with all feelings, right to my marrow. But I do realise that I am helpless in hatred like a child who is blowing into the wind to stop it blowing on the child's face. I don't even know if it is an infectious

illness or an inherent one in all people. If I could find this 'baccillus belli' (war virus), I would be the first to start fighting it."

I interrupted, smiling - "There you are, now you have also caught this infection. You are ready to start fighting."

We were interrupted by the loud voice of the doctor from Lublin. "Enough digging, the second shift is due now. The first shift will now start emptying the rubbish heap as the trench is nearly finished."

Adam climbed on top of the heap but his work was not progressing as he was trampling on a tin, muttering to himself and biting his lips.

That afternoon when German soldiers again came to our yard our women surrounded them, asking them to allow the gathering of some potatoes which were growing in the field of Diokotow. The women explained that bread had gone long ago and the food supplies were finished in most of the families. After talking between themselves, the German soldiers told our women to gather in the yard and, under the protection of the soldiers, they would be allowed to go to the fields. It was only a small group with Marushka amongst those ready to go. As we still distrusted the Germans, we followed them to the gate. They were the first to be permitted to go outside after six days imprisonment in our yard.

They returned triumphantly after an hour. Marushka brought her potatoes in a scarf and apron tied around her waist. She was shot at while digging and had to dive between the plants but we all enjoyed our meal very much. Marushka told us that, during the digging, she had a good look at the chapel of the Jesuits. The building was mostly ruined and smoke was still coming from it. All around was empty and quiet and heaps of bricks and glass covered the lawn. The reason for destruction as given to her by the soldiers was that there was a search in the monastery of the Jesuits and the Prior was asked if there were arms on the premises which he denied. But after a thorough search, including a personal search of the priests, arms were found and even Polish officers in hiding. According to the soldiers, there was even a colonel with the officers. Not only rifles but also a lot of ammunition was found. Therefore the German officer in charge issued the order that everyone should be shot, including all civilians who were there during the church service. The house was burnt.

The thought of the Jesuits was still very much on all our minds. They were all well known here. Some were even from our block that went that day to the church service, the day of the uprising. Nobody had heard from them. There was now no hope left as three days had already passed since the chapel was burnt. We had to believe the Germans that everyone perished.

That afternoon the Germans who came to our block announced that the German Army authority had issued a truce period for our block from noon to 2 p.m. to enable the women to leave the block and go into the streets which were controlled by the Germans. Men were excluded from this truce.

After the Germans had left, unbelievable news spread through our yard. A few Jesuits from the burnt chapel were hiding in our yard. During the night two Jesuits and a little boy had arrived in our yard completely exhausted, wounded, half-starved and utterly dejected. They were given civilian clothing and were now sheltering in one of the flats.

In the evening when the gates were locked for the night and our yard illuminated by the fires of burning of Warsaw, most of us, as usual, came down to the yard to share the latest news. The three survivors from the chapel came down too. All our crowd surrounded them. We wanted to know the truth of the tragedy in the chapel. The two young men, very pale and emaciated, had short cropped hair and wore civilian suits. One had a bandage around his head and one hand in a splint, the other a dressing on a badly swollen face. The third, a teenage boy, was very thin and pale. On the day of the uprising he was helping during mass services.

When I was near the group, I heard someone asking "Did the Germans start shooting immediately they forced their entry?" The Jesuit with the bandaged head, feeling uncomfortable in civilian clothes, dropped his head and said; "No, they did not. After entering the chapel, the Germans called the Prior and asked him about arms. We were rounded up and pushed down to the basement. Two S.S. men were left to guard the door. After a while we were ordered to go into the doorkeeper's room. It was a small room next to the basement."

"Excuse me," somebody interrupted, "were there also others besides brothers and priests?"

"There were over a dozen women with their children who had stayed with us from the day of the uprising. In the doorkeeper's room there were about twenty priests. In don't know where the rest were, nor where the Prior was. We were crammed together in this room not knowing what they wanted from us. Time passed. One of our guards Went outside the door and spoke with someone and then closed our door. Suddenly the door burst open, framed in the door stood a young S.S. man with a hand grenade. He screamed some words in German at us and then, to our horror, he pulled out the pin and hurled the grenade into our crowd.

"Jesus," prayed a woman next to me. In the crowd there was a deep sighing of 'Holy Mother', 'Oh, my Jesus Christ' . . ." The priest wiped his sweating face with his arm and continued "It is hard for me to tell in true order what happened next. We were all deafened by the noise. Pushed by others, I fell on the bed near the wall. I only knew that I was still alive and that nothing was hurting me. The same noise came for the second time and then a third ... I felt a sharp pain in my head. I opened my eyes and saw people trying to climb up the walls. I saw many bodies and blood on the floor. For a second I also saw some soldiers standing at the door, pointing their rifles into the room. Sour-smelling smoke stung my eyes. Screams, again some shots. I felt something heavy pressing on me. That was all. What happened afterwards I don't know. When I was conscious again the room was deathly quiet. Something was still pressing, me down. It was the dead body of one of my brothers. When I moved my elbow hurt badly," he pointed to the splint, "and my head was hurting too. I sat up. It was already dawn. My God Father, I am unable to describe the sight. Bodies covered in blood, bodies of my brothers, of women and children. Opposite me were sitting two human forms. One, his head hanging down, was the body of Father Martin, the second one was Brother Joseph here with us. His face was very swollen and his eyes and face covered with blood. He looked dead and this saved him. The S.S. men did not finish him off, assuming him dead." We all looked at father Joseph whose face was distorted by swelling and covered with dressings.

The Jesuit continued "Leaving the dead behind, we pushed our way towards the door to the passage where we noticed a smell of singeing. The chapel was burning. We reached the yard and hid behind a stack of coal. Close to us German soldiers were patrolling the street. Crawling, We reached the barn where coal is kept and there, hiding in the darkest corner, we found our young companion," he smiled tenderly at the boy. "We were afraid of the Germans and kept hiding in the coal. On the third night the hunger drove us to you, my dear people. God Almighty only spared our three lives." He finished speaking, bending his head.

Next morning, in one of the flats, the priests celebrated Holy Mass for the memory of all those who perished so tragically in the chapel. Most of the inhabitants of our block attended this Mass.

At noon the time came for the promised truce. It was a very great event in our imprisoned life. Women with white handkerchiefs in their hands rushed out. Some went to dig potatoes, others to visit neighbouring houses where they had friends and relatives. Our yard was visited by women from other blocks. It

was very lively in the yard with greetings, kisses and hugging between friends and relatives. People from further away also came. There were some hand-pushed carts, fully loaded, there were women and children and also some men in torn clothing and covered with soot and some were wounded. Of course we started to ask questions. They were evacuees from the avenue of Niepodleglosc (Independence). A few days before there had been very heavy fighting. The Germans were attacking from Rakowiecka Street.

There was bombing, including incendiary bombs. The fires were so fierce that it was impossible to stay. Taking their meagre possessions they left for neighbouring streets and, using yards only, had arrived here. The insurgents were still fighting from some houses in Niepodleglosc Avenue.

Opposite the first aid station a young man was lying on the grass. His face looked greyish-green and he was covered with sweat. Sometimes he was grabbed by cramps. Next to him knelt a woman, crying silently and bathing his face with a wet rag. Sometimes his eyes rolled up and he seemed to be only semiconscious and in great pain. He did not seem to be wounded and had only a small dressing on his hand. Two hours later when I passed him again he was covered with a white sheet and the young woman was sobbing. He was dead.

The doctor standing nearby told me the cause of his death - it was tetanus. The dead man's wife told him that a bullet had slightly grazed her husband's hand but they had to crawl through the potato fields because they were being shot at. His hand became dirty which probably caused the tetanus. Alas, there were no injections against tetanus available at this first aid station and he was condemned to death. Death for him was inevitable. Now it had claimed him.

In the evening we were alarmed by heaving shooting from the direction of Okecie (Warsaw's suburb). We were alarmed as, until now, there had never been fighting from this direction. Sore boys brought news of houses burning in the fields of Mokotow. We felt even more uneasy. We were expecting an attack by the partisans. Some rumour also reached us that the Russians had broken through the Front in East Warsaw. When it became dark we could see a few fires from the fields of Mokotow. Single houses were burning. Germans in full battle dress rushed into our yard and told us to go down to the basement as a battle was going to start near us. They rushed through the yard and disappeared through the opposite gate.

It was once again a night full of anxiety. Shooting had intensified a lot. The German machine guns were alongside our block. They were shooting non-stop in the direction of the burning single houses. Some soldiers were moving

forwards, protected by the walls. Wounded soldiers were brought to our first aid station. We were all gathered in the basement as bullets were even whipping through the yard.

Everything quietened down in the morning. After a few hours' sleep I came down to the yard. It was a sunny morning, children were playing in the sand pits and elderly gentlemen were sitting on benches getting, some sun and warmth after a night in the cold and smelly basement. Even the pigeons were flying trouble-free among us. In front of the First Aid Post were field beds for the slightly wounded. What I saw was rather unusual considering the circumstances we lived in. On the grass, lying side by side, were Polish insurgents and uniformed German soldiers. Polish nurses were helping them, full of concern and attention, giving one and all their friendly smiles. This picture brought a pleasant warm feeling. It was like an unexpected ray of sun breaking through dark thunderous clouds, a ray of humanism, a human approach to humans. Those who only a short while ago were ready to kill each other were now lying close together, not enemies any more but suffering human beings.

Unexpectedly an armoured car stopped before the gate. A German officer with some soldiers came towards the First Aid Post. In terse sentences he asked for a surgeon who had to go with him immediately to operate on a seriously wounded German officer of higher rank. Professor Loth, a famous Polish surgeon, lived in our block. He was called down. We all watched full of anxiety as our professor in his white coat followed the German to the car. His wife was crying and begging the German to let her husband return after the operation and to protect him against German bullets. We were all worried and anxious to have him back. Having the good fortune to have this surgeon in our block, we did not want to lose him.

On one of the benches an old woman was sitting and crying silently. Her old face was deeply lined and her hands were kneading a wet handkerchief.

"Why are you so upset?" I asked her, thinking that she was upset because the professor had to leave.

"My poor little son is probably already dead," she said and began to sob.

"Where is your little son?"

"He worked for the Jesuits. You know, where this terrible thing happened, where all were killed. Oh my God, he will never return to me. I came here from Kielecka Street looking for him when I heard that the chapel was burnt down.

And here I was told that all were killed by the cursed pagans. I wish to give him a Christian funeral but they do not allow me to even look for his body."

"How old was your little boy?" I asked her, thinking that maybe the boy who had survived could be her son.

"I think he would now be sixty-nine." Astonished, I looked at her. She continued "He was not young any more, my son, but he was the only one I had. He was the only solace in my old age. My husband died fifty years ago. I brought him up alone. He was not married - he was not of this world. He worked for the Jesuits as a cabinet maker. And now this terrible misfortune. And now this divine scourge. Now I am quite alone"

There were no words which I could use to comfort this unhappy woman.

Coming home, I met Czeslaw at the door. "Goodbye, Zygmunt, I am leaving. I am going to join the insurgents. I should have done it a long time ago." For the first time his voice was quite firm. He had decided.

"Wait, let us talk. How are you going to find them? Our suburb is completely in the hands of the Germans. You might be caught even before you ..." He interrupted;

"All last night I was thinking. I have decided. I will sneak through the yards and I will avoid all streets. And anyway I am free and not responsible to anyone."

I understood. Nothing I could say would stop him - just the opposite. An argument now would make him less cautious and impetuous. We were so different in our outlooks. I took his hand and wished him all the luck to achieve his aim. He rushed down the stairs and disappeared from view.

Just after Czeslaw left an insurgent group of medical and first aid staff arrived in our yard. A young doctor and four nurses were carrying stretchers. The doctor was carrying a white handkerchief in his hand as it was the truce hour. We surrounded them immediately, asking for news. They came from the suburb of Czerniakowo. Fighting still continued there and their hospital was overcrowded and conditions of work extremely hard due to lack of medical supplies. Wounded had to be operated on without anaesthetics and without painkilling drugs. Fighting in the streets made it very hard to find and bring in the wounded. Quite often the wounded were lying for days in empty flats, behind gateposts, in ruined basements or just among the ruins. As they were left untreated for so long, their condition become so bad that only amputation remained. The insurgents had no organised resistance until the Place of Unia

Lubelks where there were the first barricades. We were also told about some news of the war in Europe. The German front lines in France were broken and the allies were advancing quickly. Nobody knew how the situation was developing on the Soviet front. This was all the news we received.

As Marushka was not in the yard, I went home to share the latest news with her. I found her ill in bed. In the morning she had not been feeling well but now she was worse. Her temperature was rising above forty. I felt desperate. Marushka was showing signs of blood poisoning in the leg which was injured. We were lucky as an injection of prontosyl was brought for her during the night by a young schoolgirl with long blonde plaits. As our First Aid Post had no injections, one could get them only from somewhere near the centre of Warsaw from a medical store. This schoolgirl was our liaison officer - the connecting link. She was small, nimble and agile 'like a little field mouse. By squeezing through holes in yard fences, through basements, she was able to reach the medical store bringing the needed supplies requested by our doctor. This time it was she again who brought to Marushka the badly required medicine. After a while Marushka fell asleep. She was very hot and was muttering something. I was sitting on the bed and watching her. My old auntie who was partly infirm was sleeping in her own room. The old clock was still ticking. I could not sleep - sad thoughts kept invading. What will happen if I lose my most faithful life companion? The extremely high temperature, the swollen groin, spreading dark patches mean trouble. Will I see Czeslaw ever again? Or his sister, Henia, with the baby living in the southern suburbs of Warsaw? And my cousin Marysia who is now a nurse somewhere in Warsaw? And all the other relatives and friends scattered somewhere by the war? In my mind's eye I saw our departure from the house on the hill and the small human form of Jurek whose white cap was only a small dot. I saw Roman giving me his charming smile. I was also hungry as for dinner today we had bread and finished the lot. This bread we bought for 100 zloty from a railway employee living in our block. He still had bread but we had no more zloty left. What will happen now? What in a hundred years? Will there always be war? During wars the research and technique for destruction develops very quickly. Maybe in times to come people will develop a bomb loaded with some such super dynamite that all the earth will blow up and the glorious victor will not even have a place to dictate his terms. This is absurd. But the basis of war is built on the absurd war logic and its pathological justifications.

Marushka was breathing heavily and covered in sweat. I tried to make her more comfortable. Her body was fighting for the right to live. Maybe her blood was fighting a deathly battle with invading bacteria?

Hours dragged on, time stood still. What is time? I was never able to understand the definition of absolute time.

In the morning Czeslaw returned. He was tired and depressed. Crossing various backyards, he was able to reach the Avenue of Niepodleglosc where signs of fierce fighting were visible. In some empty houses insurgents were hiding. They told him that their group, including their leader, were crushed and only a small number were able to retreat to inner suburbs. The avenue was under complete control of the Germans who could shoot from different positions. It was quite impossible to reach the other side of the street. The few left had no ammunition and were in hiding between the labyrinth of the ruins. Very disappointed, Czeslaw had returned.

This day the family of the Lublin doctor also returned. The two soldiers had kept their promise and escorted his family back to him. The young engineer and his family looked tired, dirty, covered in torn rags. The daughter had bleeding feet, torn by barbed wire. The first days of the uprising were spent in one of the gazebos. They were eating fruit and salads. It was cold at night, as they had nothing to cover themselves with. In the first days, being afraid of ambush, the Germans would not leave their reinforced positions. After a few days, having a large range of covering fire, they started to dominate this area, pushing the insurgents out. The engineer's wife told us that when the first patrols reached the fields everyone was very astonished to see among the S.S. men many Ukrainers, Kazbeks and Azerbaijanians. They, more than the S.S. men, became a terror to the people. Those primitive, undisciplined Asiatic men in German service, morally dull beyond any comprehension, let loose all their beastly instincts. When drunk they started hunting people, raping women and grabbing valuables. The frustrated engineer told us that when he was trying to rescue his teenage daughter he was thrown to the ground and beaten unmercifully and, of course, his watch and other valuables were taken. His daughter was lucky to run away from a completely drunk soldier. All night she hid in the potato field. All looted things such as watches, earrings, rings, cigarette cases, the soldiers put into stockings. It became impossible to keep hiding. Of their own free will, the people started to go to the nearby German barracks which were close to the artillery. There were about two hundred people. The women were employed to dig potatoes, the men to polish the cannons until they were shining. This way they lived for ten days without being able to wash or to undress.

This night I was on guard duty. Nothing special had happened. As usual, Warsaw's fires were lighting the sky. Shooting was only far away. We walked around the quiet yard. Some people, as usual, were sleeping in the basement.

I was thinking about the story Marushka told me. A schoolgirl with the long, blonde plats, accompanied by her mother, came to visit Marushka. Marushka was thanking the girl and feeling very guilty towards the mother, having endangered the girl's life. The mother, speaking with a sad smile, told her the following tale. Her teenage girl, being of small build and very agile, was going most nights into the city for medical supplies needed by the First Aid Post. They both considered it their duty to help people as best they could. Mother would gladly have gone instead of letting the girl go but only a child was able to squeeze through the only available narrow openings through damaged brick walls and sewer grilles. Marushka was deeply touched by this attitude of a loving mother, understanding how terribly hard it must be to let the child face additional danger in bringing help to others. To Marushka, this mother was the real heroine.

Next morning I got up and was shaving when I heard some commotion in the yard, some yelling, some running. I looked out through the bathroom window. People were forming groups and then quickly running somewhere else, women were wringing their hands and rushing back into the flats. All these activities were so nervous that I wiped the soap from my face and ran to the yard. On the stairs I met our neighbour.

"What happened?"

"A few minutes ago Germans came and ordered everyone, without exception, to vacate the house. In fifteen minutes all the houses will be burnt down."

His wife was terribly distressed. "What shall we do? How can we save our property? We can't take all our things with us." There was no time to lose. I rushed back home. Marushka was still very weak and lying in bed. Although the crisis had passed and the infection gone, she was still very tired from the high temperature. Bad luck. I told her to get dressed quickly. We decided to take to the basement the more valuable things belonging to my auntie. If the house burned down, maybe something in the basement would survive. We made big bundles from sheets, emptying wardrobes and drawers, and hurried to the basement. The stairs were crammed with people rushing up and down. Taking only the most essential things, especially the remaining food, we

locked the door and, accompanied by auntie and Czeslaw, went down to the yard.

Many were already gathered in the yard. Some were still bringing down their belongings, others were digging holes in the lawn to hide some of their things. It was crowded and hectic beyond description. Trunks, suitcases and bundles made walking very hard. The Germans were speeding us along. Nobody knew where we were supposed to be going.

Hesitating, waiting for others, people were stopping before the gates. Nobody wanted to go outside as there was still shooting in the streets. From the direction of the Union Square came the sound of heavy firing from cannons. We could not stop here - the pressure from behind was too strong and one by one people came into the street and into the yard of the next building. Someone had started in that direction and the rest just followed. It was a long chain of people, burdened with their possessions. We went through other yards, through holes in fences, through empty building blocks, passing different rubbish heaps. If we had to cross a street we did it carefully, looking to all sides and then rushing as quickly as possible to the other side. Sometimes the well-trodden road led through empty basements, boiler rooms and laundries - everywhere the doors were open. This was the line of communication of fighting Warsaw. The track was well-trodden by the insurgents, evacuees and liaison officers. We reached Kielecka Street. My other cousin, a doctor, lived here. We thought we might stop there. But here was the same picture. This block had also to be vacated and burnt and my cousin had already left. The same chaos, the same laments. Tired women, crying children and rushing men looking for some way out of this trap. What to do? Where to flee? Did they intend to burn all Warsaw down? Yards and streets were full of people and their belongings. From a side street German soldiers rushed out waving their guns at us and telling us to look for shelter as in ten minutes German planes would bomb the neighbouring street where there was still resistance from the partisans. The coming bombs should crush them. Everyone rushed to the basement. Some left their things behind whilst others were trying to take them to the shelter. The crush was unbelievable. People were tripping over the bundles which were obstructing the way on the narrow and dark stairs. Some were cursing, others were praying and children, pushed from all sides, were crying. Suddenly all became quiet as the first loud detonation shook the walls. The doors were left open. As I could not make my way downstairs, I stood on the stairs observing the sky. The air raid had begun. More than ten bombers of the Luftwaffe were circling like hungry vultures looking for their prey. For the first time I saw quite clearly the falling

bombs. Clouds of dust were rising above the houses. Each plane was dropping its prescribed ration. The suburb was all in flames. Heavy detonations were shaking the walls of our basement. From the depths of the basement came the sound of collective praying. From above the hungry bombers, flying very low after all the bombs were gone, started shooting with machine guns into the streets. This all took place in ten short minutes. That was all. The planes turned back leaving behind the agony of a suburb smouldering and covered in a mourning pall of black smoke.

After leaving the basement, the S.S. men directed us to the other side of Rakowiecka Street. Helping the old aunt, we tried to cross the street as quickly as possible. A few German armoured vehicles were in the street and further down were the remnants of barricades and barbed wire entanglements. After a few short rests, we reached the park which surrounded the officers' casino near Rakowiecka Street. Here we took a deep breath. Big, old trees, many shrubs and lawns were like a 'tonic. There were no houses nearby. We liked it here. Among the bushes I found some old club chairs, deep and comfortable. We chose a cluster of shrubs, brought the club chairs and, with our things near us, we felt we were in a natural wild summerhouse surrounded on all sides by shrubs and trees.

Night was approaching. More and more evacuees were coming to the park looking for a place to spend the night. Our block of flats was still untouched. We decided to await new developments. Covered with coats and a blanket for auntie, we slept in our chairs. The night passed.

The cold morning woke us at dawn. In the park birds were singing and in the Mokotow fields bullets were whistling. Leaving auntie with our things, Czeslaw, Marushka and I went to look for some hot food. Czeslaw, after his unsuccessful attempt to join the partisans, stayed with us. Near a dried-out pond we saw a large wooden building which was the officers' club. A few people were already around. Some were washing themselves under the hydrant. The inside of the club was packed with people and their suitcases, children were sleeping on tables, others slept on chairs and benches, leaning against walls. We met many people from our yard. In the large kitchen women were cooking for their families. Various pots and pans were standing on the hot stove. We brought our meagre supplies and Marushka started to cook. It was good to have some warm food. Looking around we saw S.S. men among the evacuees. Marushka went to ask if we could return home as our home was still standing. Maybe the order to burn had been cancelled?

"No, the order stays. It is only postponed for a short while. I don't advise you to go home," replied the soldier.

"We would like to bring a few more things and it is so near to here. There is even some vodka left," Marushka said, looking him straight in the eyes.

He became interested. After a short hesitation, he told us that he would escort us. We went, the soldier leading, behind him Marushka with a white handkerchief in her hand and, behind her, Czeslaw and myself. Only a few people were furtively walking about. We walked along our block where the footpath was covered with bricks and broken glass. In many places there were big holes made by artillery shells. We entered our yard where we found a few people who were unable to leave their belongings behind and had decided to stay in the block. Entering the flat I immediately got the vodka and offered it to the soldier and then we started to do some more packing. The soldier, drinking from the bottle and in a happy and friendly mood, was trying to help us. He admired Marushka's bracelet so much that she had to give it to him. When the packing was done I went out to the balcony to have a last look at our yard. How different it looked. Gone was our forum and I did not see people, only rabbits that were left behind and were now playing on the lawn. At this time of the day the yard had usually been pulsating with life but now it seemed dead, the balconies and windows empty. I looked at the flats that would shortly be consumed by flames. Glancing around, my eyes stopped at the second floor opposite us. Sitting on the windowsill was Adam. The window was open and he was looking at the window reflection of himself. His face looked distorted by an odd and tragic grimace. He was biting his lower lip and it seemed that he was speaking to his mirror image. His hair was falling over his brow and his long, thin fingers were drawing something on the window pane. When we were in the yard going back to the park I called out to him. He looked down at me, smiling sadly.

"Adam, why haven't you left? Staying here might cost you your life."

"Life is now very cheap at the stock exchange of war. There is no possibility that I will overpay." After a few seconds of silence he continued. "Then I was a kid and saw boys burning nests I thought them wicked but now when people are burning people I simply don't want to be a man. I would rather be a bird and fly to the world of winged ghosts."

Adam will stay in my memory for a long time. Were his shaking fingers crossing out his own image? Did he look for the last time at his own reflection?

I don't know, but I never saw him again. I was told soon after that he committed suicide by jumping out of a window.

We returned to the park. From everywhere new refugees, thrown out of their houses, were coming. The place in front of the casino was swarming with people and hand-pushed carts. Families were camping on the lawns. I also saw a group of people who looked a lot worse than the rest. They were emaciated, their clothing dirty and torn. They were the people who, on the day of the uprising, at about 5 p.m., were passing through Niepodleglosci Avenue. When the uprising began with shooting from all directions they hid in one block that was under construction. They could neither go back nor forward. There they spent eleven long days without food and long nights in the cold. In the street I saw a group of insurgent prisoners who, under the guard of some S.S. men, were laying mines across Niepodleglosci Avenue.

When we were in the kitchen trying to prepare some warm food, we heard that houses in Rakowiecka Street were being burnt. We all rushed out to look at the street to see with our own eyes the new crime committed by our occupiers. Until the last moment we did not want to believe that the Germans would do it to a suburb which was completely under their control. We assumed that the threat to burn all the houses down was only meant as a threat which would bring all the people outside and then they would be herded together, taken prisoner or to internment and, in the meantime, the soldiers could do some looting.

Reality proved us wrong. The vandalism committed by the 'bearers of culture' was witnessed by thousands of people who were watching behind the railings of the park.

In, the middle of the street there came a group of fully armed S. S. men, their guns at the ready. Behind them came the fire lighters with their equipment - a hand-drawn cart with a barrel of petrol and bags full of flock. First, hand grenades were thrown in, damaging windows and doors, then tufts of flock soaked in petrol, lit and tossed into the houses through the openings. And so they walked along from window to window, from door to door, from house to house, covering the whole street, leaving behind burning fires and clouds of smoke. First the lighter furniture and drapes burned, then the fire licked along the wallpapered walls, pictures fell down and bookcases collapsed, giving the fires more strength. The flames became brighter and spread quickly through the houses, creeping to beds where the smoke became more acrid. Full of encouragement, the fires started licking the outside walls and flames growing

bigger reached the higher floors. Nothing disturbed them as the S.S. men made sure that nobody could try to put out the fires. All this was watched by a crowd of people from the other side of the street. Although the street was very wide, the heat of the fires reached us. Some people had tears in their eyes. We were watching the destruction of our homes, our belongings and our relics so dear to our hearts. Our capital city, Warsaw, was being destroyed.

When the Germans were farther away and the flames were engulfing houses, some people couldn't stand it any longer. Breaking fences, some people ran to their homes. The crowd still waited but when the first people started to return carrying on their backs their possessions the crowd surged forward. People were throwing things out of the burning houses, others carried their belongings over the road into the park. The people were working frantically, carrying their burdens on their backs just like ants rushing to and fro around their disturbed anthill.

The German soldiers did not interfere. They only made sure that nobody put the fires out. When one elderly man grabbed the hose and directed the water towards the house, he was shot down on the spot without any warning. The water continued to flow from the hose along the street and the people fled. The body of the man who had dared to fight the fires in his own home remained in the street.

The fires were spreading higher and higher. The breaking windows were falling to the street. The heat made it impossible to go near the houses. Less and less people, at the risk of their own lives, tried to reach the flats. Some people, crying, their skin and hair badly singed, tumbled out of houses. Watching the fires, we did not notice dark thundery clouds gathering over Warsaw. Only when the first drops began falling, a great rush started to find some shelter against the rain. The casino was overcrowded, as were all the outbuildings, including the hothouses. Completely soaked through, we found an unfinished garden shed. It had neither windows nor doors nor floors but it had a roof which was the most important thing. The room was crowded and no floor space was available but the porch was still free. I put the easy chair which I had brought over from our previous place along the wall for my aunt. Late in the evening the rain stopped. Marushka went to the kitchen to boil up some hot water while Czeslaw and I started to prepare our shelter for the night. Under the roof we found some straw mats which were used for the hothouse windows. We put some on the floor and we used one to cover the door opening.

The shed stood opposite the burning houses and not far from the street. Although the rain, had damped down the fires, they were again burning fiercely. In some houses the fires had reached the roofs. The crumbling walls and ceilings were bursting into myriads of sparks. The noise of the raging fires continued, the heat was reaching us and the smoke completely covered the sky. We did not notice when the evening became night. It was so light in the park that one could read without trouble and it was hot. Exhausted people were trying to seek rest and sleep on benches, under trees and on lawns. From the city the sound of battle continued as usual but nobody took much notice. It was like back ground music coming from our fighting Warsaw. The whole park created an impression of a huge railway station where travellers with luggage were waiting for a train - destination unknown.

After midnight the air was torn by a thunderous roar. In seconds the dozing people were up looking for shelter, not knowing what the new menace was. Hanging on to their remaining property, they tried to hide behind buildings, trees and shrubs. Frightened children screamed and mothers clutched them tightly.

Adjacent to the park was German heavy artillery, camouflaged by the shrubs. The noise of the shooting was deafening, hurting the eardrums and accompanied by a loud screeching sound and the jarring of gunshots. The onslaught was directed against the centre of the city. The park and the scared faces of the people were covered with a red glow. Thousands of sparks were flying over the park. The houses were covered by heavy smoke. It was a gloomy night. The twelfth night of the Warsaw uprising.

In the morning when the sun's rays, with great difficulty, penetrated the smoke clouds everything looked dirty and cheerless. The tired people of Warsaw were emerging from their dark and musty lairs where they had spent another sleepless night. The people were exhausted and depressed - some were apathetic.

How dreary was this September morning. The lawns were covered with ashes. The sooty, heavy leaves resembled artificial cemetery flowers, hanging deathly quiet over the trodden down earth. The twitter of the birds was missing. Even the doves, Warsaw's faithful friends, had left this town of fires and smoke. Only people remained - grey people, homeless people, herded into this park. The guns were quiet when I went outside. It was a strange sight. Everything was covered with leaflets - lawns, shrubs and even on tree branches hung leaflets. Some were still falling down slowly.

## ULTIMATUM

To the people of Warsaw." This heading was looking at us from everywhere. The leaflets were adorned with the German black eagle resting, on the Hakenkreuz.

## ULTIMATUM

To the people of Warsaw:

The German High Command wants to avoid unnecessary bloodshed which will mainly affect innocent women and children and therefore has issued the following appeal:

1. The population should leave Warsaw in a western direction, carrying white kerchiefs in their hands.
2. The German High Command guarantees that no-one who leaves Warsaw of their own free will, will come to harm.
3. All men and women who are able to work will receive work and bread.
4. People unable to work will be accommodated in the western district of Warsaw's province. Food will be supplied.
5. All who are ill as well as old people, women and children needing care, will receive accommodation and medical care.
6. The Polish people know that the German Army is fighting Bolshevism only. Anyone who continues to be used by them as a Bolshevik's tool, irrespective of which slogan he might follow, will be held responsible and prosecuted without scruples. This ultimatum is for a limited time only.

## COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

A few hours later we saw the first evacuees leaving Warsaw. They walked in groups in the middle of the street. They were just as dirty and haggard as we were. They walked with heavy, tired steps, wiping their sweating faces. They walked bent under the load of their bundles. Everyone was holding a white

handkerchief. Leading the group was a woman in a grey coat with a knapsack. In her hand was a stick with a white handkerchief tied to it. Next to her was a young boy leading a goat on a string.

"Where are you going?"

"To the west, we are leaving Warsaw," came the replies.

"Where are you from?"

"From Polawska Street, from Kazimierzowska Street, from Czerniakow suburb," the evacuees replied.

"Were you driven out by force?"

"Yes, the ultimatum," others answered. "What else could we do? Everything, was burnt down."

They passed us, but others followed - from Lakotow, Aleja Szuha, Polna, Pulawy, etc., etc. From behind the fence we looked on, undecided.

"They are right, what are we waiting for? Soon we will be forced to leave. Isn't it better too now?" people were asking each other, looking for advice. Some started packing their things onto handcarts whilst others, still undecided, were seeking other opinions. We decided that Marushka should go outside and try to get some information. She was gone for over an hour. She went to the military offices near our park and, from there, even to a nearby Gestapo office. The news she brought was not good. In both places she was told that the groups of people who did not willingly leave Warsaw would be forced to leave but first the men would be separated from the group. Coming back, she saw near our park a big group of people where men were being separated from their families. Under no circumstances did we want to be separated and so, taking my aunt, Czeslaw and all our things. We went into the street. We saw that our block was still standing undamaged. The brigades starting the fires had not reached our house yet. Only a few people were in the yard. Our flat was undamaged. Auntie's eldest daughter and grandson were alive and would look after her so she decided to stay in her flat. She did not want to follow us into the unknown. What would Marysia, her youngest, think when coming back from the uprising she found the flat empty? She did not realise how hopeless the situation was, or perhaps she did not want to face it? She had raised her family here and she wanted to stay here with her memories as each thing in the flat was familiar and connected with her family. The future did not interest her any more. She would sit here, near the window, in her favourite rocking chair and wait for her children to come home. They had all gone to the war but would return back

home to mother. We were unable to shake her decision. In her quiet way she was quite determined. We went to advise her daughter and then we three started on our way to the west.

Marushka was leading with a stick on which was a white serviette upon which previously had stood a samovar. This white serviette was now a sign of surrender. Czeslaw came next and I followed with a suitcase and a rucksack.

We entered Mokotow fields, going towards Wola. In the bushes were hidden some tanks, their barrels showing above shrubs. The soldiers were picking apples from the nearby trees. In the city the fighting continued - here in the fields only occasional bullets whizzed past. In the nearby trenches, German soldiers were standing at their machine guns. We felt uneasy. When we passed the orchards we saw a river of people flowing towards the west. They were coming from all directions of Warsaw. Some went in a single file following some tracks, others in groups cutting through the fields. Near Okecie all the groups joined into one large river of humans. It was an odd procession, formed by the evacuees who were leaving their town to total destruction.

There were women and children, old and young men. Most were carrying or dragging their possessions but some had carts which were dragged along or pushed from behind. We saw exhausted single women who, unable to carry their things, were towing them along attached to a length of rope. We saw wounded and burnt people who came away with only their lives. We saw a dead Woman on the road to our right, lying on the ground. A small girl and her little brother were trying to drag their mother by the hands while the crying girl kept repeating "Mum, come on .. Mum, come on" We also saw old folks who did not carry anything. They had left in the clothes in which they stood - it was burden enough to carry themselves along. They were walking slowly, stopping and breathing deeply. In front of us were three such old ones. Two thin old men were helping an old crippled woman to walk. As she was partly paralysed she walked very slowly, stepping over the uneven stones. People were passing them, just like a river current passes moss covered stones along its banks.

After one of the bends, the crowd divided. Some continued straight ahead, the others turned towards the right, following a narrow track. We stopped. Where were we going? It was time to think. To the west - the meaning was too vague. To leave the town? Yes, but by which way? Would the Germans let all go? This was the question that everyone was asking. Why were some turning to the left? Where would we end up if we continued straight ahead?

"Don't go straight ahead, the people from neighbouring houses said. "There the Germans are locking everyone up in camps. The narrow lane to the right leads to EKD (a small electric railway line). There is a chance to catch a train there but the Ukrainians are guarding it," the locals informed. The Ukrainians were a terror to all of us - it was better to avoid them so the majority continued straight ahead. We did the same.

The locals were sitting, on benches in front of their houses, This part of the city was not included in the uprising. They looked at us with compassion. From the windows we were given apples - at the gates, tomatoes. In the streets women were distributing milk. They also had plenty of buckets of drinking water.

We all tried to avoid large, through-roads, keeping to shall side streets. Turning into one of these streets, we suddenly heard rifle shots. The procession stopped and immediately dispersed being fences and buildings. We were from Warsaw and accustomed to shooting in streets. After a few moments we saw a crowd of people running back. The first reached us.

"Run, the Ukrainians are shooting and hitting people with rifle butts, herding all to the highways," the fleeing people yelled. We started to run - towards the highway. Behind us the shooting continued - screams and curses and yells in Ukrainian. Reaching the highway, we had to stop. We could not run any further with our luggage. Many left all their things and escaped with their lives. Those who did not run were beaten mercilessly. Bleeding people were climbing the high embankment. Many hands and faces were torn, their clothes were covered with blood. Women were not spared either. Some were lying on the embankment - they were massacred in a horrible way. These degenerate Ukrainians stopped at the highway shouting obscenities and waving their rifles. These servants of the 'master race' dressed in S.S. uniforms, these hunting dogs of Himmler were now dividing between each other the loot left behind by the fleeing evacuees which was there for the taking.

We continued on our way. Depressed and apathetic, we kept on the highway, being afraid of the side streets. At the end of the town we were stopped by a German patrol.

"Halt: It is prohibited to go further."

We were all directed into the yard of a sawmill. On the street corner stood German S.S. men, ready to shoot. There was no way out. In the large yard there was already a very big crowd. Nurses from the Red Cross were dressing the wounded. In the yard were some German officers.

Tired, we sat down on some planks awaiting our fate. We were caught - we could not even return. There were rumours that the Germans would separate the men from the rest. It seemed very likely. There was a large percentage of young, able-bodied men in the crowd. The Germans could easily assume that these men were insurgents and, in the best event, treat them as prisoners of war. After resting for a while, our energy started to return and we decided to try something and not just wait. During the five years we had been together, I could not now imagine wandering alone separated from Marushka. Holding hands, we had survived many critical moments together. We would not loosen our grip. Holding Marushka's hand tightly, I had an idea. "What about our travel order which we received in Lithuania? Couldn't we make some use of it now? The destination was stated Modlin. You could say that you were on your way to your formation through Warsaw, being the nearest route, when the uprising stopped us in Warsaw."

Marushka went to the two officers standing near a car. They talked for a few minutes. Marushka showed them our documents. After a while they waved to us to come nearer. The officer holding the documents asked "Which one is Kruszewski?" Marushka pointed to me. The officer, still holding the documents, ordered us to get into the car without giving any explanation. This took us by surprise. We were staggered. We started to explain that our relative, Czeslaw, was with us, that he too was from Lithuania and that he had to stay with us. The officer refused. We were ordered to get into the car immediately as he was in a hurry. We hesitated, trying to think of something to say. A soldier standing beside the officer took Marushka's suitcase and put it in the car, telling her to hurry. We sat down in the car, the soldier next to us, the officer at the steering wheel and next to him another soldier with a short automatic gun. There was no time even for a farewell from Czeslaw, nor time to take our remaining things from him. The car passed the gate and turned towards Wolska Street. We passed a cordon of soldiers who were guarding the evacuees. The streets were empty. In the fields were Ukrainian patrols.

We started to feel very uneasy. It was all so unexpected. Where were they taking us? And in a car guarded by two soldiers. What could be behind all this? We looked at each other, full of questions. We were afraid to speak to each other. Maybe they thought us German? After a few minutes we were in Wolska Street where the car was stopped by military police. They were standing around a truck which was blocking the road. The officer of our car got out, telling us to do the same. Taking our things from the car, we intended to thank him very nicely and to disappear. But he had other intentions. He gave our documents to

some noncom and told us to jump into the truck where some soldiers were already sitting.

"You will go to Modlin," he informed us and returned to his car. Soon our truck was also on its way. Now we were even more worried. Why were they treating us like prisoners? Why didn't they return our documents? What would happen if they started checking on us and our false statements? We didn't know anything about Modlin. We had concocted a string of lies and now we were caught in the net.

When we came to the boundary of Great Warsaw, our car was stopped at a military check point. An officer of the "Reichswehr" checked our documents very thoroughly and asked Marushka about particulars regarding the travel pass being issued for Modlin. She replied with further, very plausible lies. We passed the check successfully. The truck was on its way again. The highway was wide and on both sides large chestnut trees gave deep shade. The wind was warm - it smelled of fresh fields. Our eyes rested on ripening crops waving in the light wind. On the horizon was dark smoke from burning Warsaw.

# Modlin

We passed the long iron bridge over the Vistula, In front of us were the deep, red walls and dungeons of the Modlin fortress. At the crossroads were signboards, taking up at least two metres. The signs pointed in many directions showing many details of the interiors of the fortress. On the road was a military patrol stopping without exception all cars coming from Warsaw. After inspection of documents and a thorough search of the truck, it was directed to the road leading towards the fortress. We passed over another long, iron bridge, this time over the River Bug. Again there were guards at the gates and documents were checked. The dirty red fortress was sitting like a spider between the rivers Vistula and Bug, the roads protected with barbed wire and field mines. Mines were already attached to the bridge. The bunkers were covered with grass, spiked with barrels from the anti-aircraft guns. Soldiers in swim trunks were cleaning cannons. The wire entanglement surrounded the bridge, crept down into the water and up again over the opposite embankment. Notices were nailed to trees and posts:

Attention! Danger!  
Entry forbidden!  
Swimming forbidden!  
Mines!

As well as the words, a skull and crossbones was pictured making the meaning quite clear. There were only a few civilians about and they were walking furtively like insects near cobwebs of preying spiders. Passing the bridge, our truck turned sharply to the left and I noisily entered the narrow-necked entrance of the fortress gate. Shivers ran down our spines. We felt swallowed by the fortress. What would they do to us? More controls, more checkpoints - the little streets were like a maze. We passed some stores, railway lines, offices, barracks, trenches, more gates. Soldiers were everywhere, also military cars. At last our truck stopped in front of some magazines. Our driver dismounted.

"Everyone out!" called the noncom. Throwing down their rucksacks, the soldiers jumped down from the high truck. We did the same and were standing amid the soldiers. The noncom gave some orders to the soldiers and turned towards us.

"What should I do with you?" he sounded worried. "Here, have your documents and go to the 'Zersprentgensammelstelle'. Here in the fortress is such an office which assembles all the lost souls and sends them on to their appropriate units." He was even smiling, handing us the travel orders. He seemed quite satisfied with himself being able to get rid of all his passengers. He quickly returned to the car and left. The soldiers, putting on their rucksacks, left too. Only we were standing on the road, undecided.

We never expected anything like this to happen. We expected to be handed over to some 'other hands' for further orders. Nobody could possibly know us here nor why we were here. We again had a little freedom; we could try to improvise and show some initiative. Our aim was quite simple - to leave this place as soon as possible but how to achieve it was not so simple. We were in a place unknown to us, in a fortress guarded at the gates by fully armed soldiers. As we had already seen, the entry and exits were thoroughly checked. How to justify that we had to leave when here were all the offices and administration buildings to which we, as the 'array followers', belonged. Our travel order which helped us to leave Warsaw expired right here. We were now in Modlin where our supposed formation was located. We remembered another document which we obtained in Kaunas from the employment office. We obtained this document without giving it much value at that time, simply to have an additional document just in case. It was an order to report to the employment office in Modlin. At that time we thought it might turn out to be advantageous to have something official which may enable us to reach "Warsaw via Modlin which was close to Warsaw. Now it was just the opposite. We came from Warsaw looking for some place in Modlin which was now a stepping stone on our war wanderings.

We were informed that the employment office was just outside the fortress walls. When we reached one of the gates we saw the guard checking documents of a working gang leaving the fortress. Men and women had to open their parcels and empty their pockets. We felt a bit uneasy as we were burdened with a heavy rucksack and, in addition, I carried a suitcase. We had learned from previous experiences that it is always better to speak with the man in charge rather than with his underlings. Therefore we approached the soldier who was supervising the control. The private arrangements between Marushka and myself were quite clear. I, as a man of military age, was always the most suspect. I was to show him documents and, speaking in broken German, try to explain something. Marushka, catching the line of my thought, was to interrupt and continue in perfect, fluent German, which always had a very good effect.

This happened on this occasion. After I had murmured just a few sentences, she interrupted, building up our fictitious story with precise sentences - that we were from far away Lithuania, coming to work in the 'Reich', that we were allocated to Modlin, that polite army men had given us a lift by car to the Modlin fortress, that we discovered only here that the employment office was located outside the fortress where we were told to report without delay. Could he, the man in charge of the guard, let us pass without the proper pass from the fortress authorities.

"Are you really from Lithuania?" he asked.

"Yes, we are" Marushka replied, putting her documents back into her handbag.

He went towards the other guard and called out, "Let these two pass."

In this simple way we left the fortress. We took a deep breath and went ahead along the narrow, old streets of Modlin.

The sun was already low and, on the fields, the mist was gathering. A pleasant smell reached us from chimneys of houses - people were cooking dinner. We were tired and hungry, the rucksacks seemed heavy, the straps cutting our shoulders. We were again homeless. Through some freak chance we had landed in this unknown corner. What to do now? Where to go? How to live and keep free? Those were the questions to be answered later - just now we wanted only to rest. Those days, in Warsaw with sleepless nights and empty stomachs had made us weak. We decided to look for a sleeping place in Modlin. We knocked at many well-to-do houses quite unsuccessfully until at last one of the poorest accepted us. The owner was a labourer living on the outskirts of Modlin next to the fields. These friendly people led us and let us rest on the floor of their warm kitchen which was so small that I was unable to stretch out my legs. Resting our heads on the rucksacks, we slept undisturbed and deeply. This was our first night outside Warsaw.

In the morning the house and all the township seemed to tremble from the noise of tanks. Through the narrow streets passed a whole division of them, hurrying towards the most threatened point of the Front - the fork between the Narwa and Bug rivers. The huge tanks were tearing the pavements, leaving big holes. The miserable, poor huts barely as high as the tanks, were trembling and windows were shattering. Even the houses seemed to be frightened. Behind the tanks followed armoured vehicles, huge trucks on caterpillar tracks, then again the tanks and so on.

The atmosphere was decidedly of the nearing Front. By now we really had had it all. We wanted some quiet, peaceful corner where we could not hear either tanks or cannonades, where machine guns were not shooting at anyone, neither from the land nor the sky. By now we hated this noise of war which tore at the brains and nerve centres.

Early in the morning we thanked our friendly host and left in the direction of Nowy Dwor. We wanted to gather some news and try to find a permanent place to stay. Again bridges, check-points, dusty roads. After a few kilometres we reached a little town. A large yellow board reminded us that we were in the Great German Reich. It read 'Bugmiulde, Kreis Cichenau' which was a translation into German from the Polish name. The true German character of the town was obvious only in the recently painted signs, like 'Polizei', 'Burgermeisteramt', 'Sparkasse' and 'Frontbuchhandlung' (bookshop). In the shop windows were old numbers of the Signal and Berliner Illustrated. Propaganda placards, official orders posted on the walls and German military police completed the German Bugmundel.

In the side street I saw a scribbled sign on the wall - 'Long Live Poland'. It was the only sign written in Polish. We wanted to meet some of the educated people, white collar workers, and ask them about the conditions and regulations which governed this odd Germany, now called South-west Prussia. A Wozian told us that in the nearby hospital a few Polish doctors were working. Going there we were stopped by military police. We probably looked suspicious. They checked the documents very carefully. Marushka had trouble in supporting her story as by now we were able to show only the travel order but at last they let us go. In the one-storey hospital building were also doctor's surgeries. On the door was a list of doctors. We picked a name which sounded safe. He was a general practitioner and, after paying 3 DM, we were allowed to enter. He was an elderly gentleman in a white coat. Taking his stethoscope he looked inquiringly at us.

"Are you both ill?"

"Not ill, doctor, but just tired. We arrived only last night from Warsaw," I told him honestly.

"From the uprising?" he asked quietly, looking around as though afraid that somebody might overhear.

I explained why we had come to see him.

"You should not stay here in Nowy Dwor," he advised. "Firstly, we are all under very strict supervision and, secondly, it is very hard to get any food. We are cut off from the country. To cross the Bug is hard as the river is heavily patrolled and there are constant checks. Food smugglers are caught and the food was confiscated. The road to Warsaw is closed. The boundaries of the General Government are watched by the army. All the villages in the direction of Puazeza Kempinkowska are in the hands of the partisans. A few kilometres from the bridge the Germans are building something like a second front, guarding against attacks on bridges and the fortress. Many people are leaving Nowy Dwor and going to the country. Only those who have to work here are left. I would advise you to try the country - the best chance would be the other side of the River Hug. It is still quiet down there."

He also examined Marushka who had lost 17 kilos which was probably the reason why she felt so tired.

The doctor continued - "Good food and peaceful, surroundings would be the best medicine for you."

"I am afraid this might be the hardest medicine to receive today," I answered, thanking him for his advice.

We left and went towards the River Bug. The road led beside the fortress bunkers, climbing up higher and then, again through a large valley. After the last hill we had a large open view to the far horizon of arable fields, ending at a dark line of forest. It had the true country smell of earth and growth. It was a hot day and the heat of the air was vibrating over the ripening fields. Cows were standing in the shade of bushes, switching their tails lazily.

Our backs were soaking wet from carrying the heavy rucksacks. At the crossroad we sat down, wiping our faces. There were three roads in front of us, each leading in a different direction. Which one should we take? There was no-one to ask. We were simply travelling to the country behind the River Bug. We were on the banks of the Bug and the roads cut a line through fields, going towards small villages. Each road was as good as the other. Each one seemed attractive with its rural scenery. I remembered that somebody had told us to go towards Janow, that it was far away from highways and that people there were still rich in food.

"Maybe we will go to Janow. What do you think Marushka?" "I don't care as long as it is not too far. I simply do not have much strength left and, in addition, it is so hot. Don't count on me walking for a long distance."

She spoke lying on the dusty grass, her head resting on the rucksack. Her eyes looked indifferently at the clouds moving high in the sky.

I remembered Sarny. There she was also near the end of her strength but then she was going home to her family. Her parents were awaiting her, her open house was waiting, our own rooms, friendly, smiling faces. Those thoughts at that time gave us encouragement and energy.

And now? My God, how much had changed since then. Five long years of war. Today we were going sway from our home to an unknown, homeless future. We left our families, we left our nest with our two little nestlings. The longing for them was so very strong now. To remember the house hurt more now than five years ago. Maybe at this very moment the grandmothers were hugging the children, speaking about their parents who were being tossed around by the war. But soon, very soon, they would return. They were probably saying that Daddy would bring some red trucks and Mother a big horse. Trying to make the children happy, they were probably wiping away tears from their own eyes. Both grandmothers assumed us to be in Warsaw. They knew that Warsaw was engulfed by fires and was bleeding.

The moving clouds cast a shadow over us. Marushka was crying silently. I knew that she was thinking about home. At this crossroad she must have vividly remembered our departure.

"Will we ever return to them?" she whispered. I could only shrug my shoulders.

The clouds passed. The hot sun again covered the fields. On one of the roads a man on a pushbike appeared.

He stopped beside us and, wiping the sweat from his face, he asked

"Where are you from? From far away?"

"We are from Warsaw," I replied.

"From Warsaw? Really? What is happening there? Oh my God, how good that I met you. My wife is in Warsaw. She had a haberdashery shop in Czerniakowo Street. I don't know what is happening there. Is she still alive? Some terrible rumours have reached us. Every night we see the fires over Warsaw. It is weeks since I had the last news. Are there still some people alive?"

We talked at length. His name was Sylvester Niewiadomski and he was a ladies' hairdresser in Nowy Dwor. After hearing that we were homeless, he immediately offered to take us to his place.

He was very talkative and explained "I don't live in Nowy Dwor. Life is very expensive there and also not safe - you know, just like in all towns. I live in a hamlet with Grandmother Wojciechowska in Kosewo which is not far from here. I have a room there and a kitchen because Mrs. Reszko, a midwife and a friend of my wife, has left to join her parents. There is plenty of room you know so don't look for anything else. You must be very tired aren't you?"

We were very grateful to Sylvester and, without hesitation, accepted his offer.

Marushka was unable to carry her rucksack any more so we put it on the bike with Sylvester. He looked very pleasant a young man with greying temples and a pink face with regular features, with a smile too sweet. All his movements were soft and he was very polite as his profession would require him to be.

The road went along an airfield. The large, even fields were used by the Germans for a military airfield. The arable fields were now covered with grass and long cement runways cut a white band across the green fields. Red lamps showed the boundaries of the airfield. We did not see hangars. The planes were either covered with sheeting or hidden behind shrubs. Some were standing between the uncut high wheat like large scarecrows. On the right side of the airfield was anti-aircraft artillery. Long barrels protruded from the turrets and machine guns pointed towards the sky. Alongside were bunkers dug in the potato field. Soldiers without shirts were sitting at tables playing cards. Some were sunbaking in the sweet-smelling clover field. An observer with binoculars was watching the sky. The sky was light blue and moving clouds were leaving dark patches on the airfield. At the end of the field we turned into a narrow track. Above the wheat we soon saw thatch-covered roofs nestling among green orchards. This was Kosewo.

We stopped at a small hut with stone steps. Ripe cherries hung above the roofs and vines covered small curtained windows. In the garden grew fruit trees, beans climbed up a broken fence and there were also some flowers which looked lost between the high weeds. Next to the cottage was a little old barn and, added to it, was a tiny pigsty. The last of the buildings was an outside toilet covered with rotting planks. This was the property of Grandmother Wojciechowska where we had the great fortune to find shelter thanks to the friendly Sylvester. Grandmother Wojciechowska accepted us very hospitably.

This lonely old woman had a golden heart. She made us immediately feel welcome.

"My dear God, how much road you have covered. What is the war doing? Oh Holy Mother, our Protectress. I also was once in Warsaw with my late husband, Stanislaw, during the time of the Tsar. Such a beautiful town and now all the beauty is burning." She was chatting animatedly as she asked us into the kitchen. In the small kitchen was an iron bed, some stools under the window and a shelf for pots. The stove, which was not in use, was covered with old newspaper. Grandmother brought from her dower chest a large pillow embroidered with red sweet peas and put it on the bed for our use.

When we were in bed we could hear mooing of cows returning for milking from the pasture and crickets playing outside the window in the bushes, a soothing, peaceful feeling came over us - only in our dreams were we pursued by memories of fighting Warsaw.

During the next few days we had one wish only - to have a few days of peace and food in this charming, hospitable hamlet. Let the Front stay for a week where it was at present.

With half of our remaining money we bought a goose. What a feast that was. We finished the lot in one sitting, adding plenty of new potatoes. Happy and replete, we went to sleep on the grass in the shade of the ripening cherry tree.

In the evening, when the sun was setting behind the river, we climbed up the cherry tree and stuffed ourselves full with the sweet fruit. Grandmother Wojciechowska used to come and sit on the stone steps and murmur her evening prayers. Hens and chickens came into the kitchen to look for crumbs. A peaceful dusk covered the village. At this time of the evening one could already see the big red glow of burning Warsaw. The day ended, Grandmother, leaning on a cane, closed her little barn and pigsty. Coming back she looked at the red glow in the sky and, crossing herself, sighed deeply and murmured "I was there at the time of the Tsar. Such a beautiful city. Oh my God, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The days passed quickly. The wheat was already reaped, the cherries gone. The first days of September 1944 came. Five years of a long war.

Next morning, the army arrived in the village. Near the draw-well a kitchen was assembled, surrounded by trucks of provisions. Tired soldiers were billeted in the local houses. Two German noncoms were billeted in our house in Sylvester's room.

They talked little and avoided speaking about the Front. We only learned from them that a larger strength of the Soviet Army was forcing its way through north of Warsaw. They had no detailed news - the German papers did not reach that far, Polish newspapers did not exist and no-one had a radio in the village. Everything was based on rumours. But something must have been happening. At night we could hear louder than usual detonations from the direction of Warsaw. (from the highway the sound of tanks was continuous. Next day the village elders announced that all adults had to go digging trenches four kilometres away near Szczypiozna village.

In the evening Sylvester brought news that all the people in Nowy Dwor had also received orders to dig trenches near the fortress. It was rumoured that the Russians had forced the Front and were advancing towards Modlin. There was no end to all the rumours, mostly full of panic. Some people ran away to the forests but days passed and the Front did not come nearer. The military police became more persistent - they were making round-ups, checking houses. Every morning at dawn men were herded together and sent to dig trenches. Each day I found it harder to stay in hiding but we did not want to leave this village. It was good to be there - we already knew most of the inhabitants, we had a roof over our heads and enough food. Our intention was to stay until the Front passed us and then return back home. We were certain that it could not last long - perhaps a few weeks at the most. We even decided what we would do. When the Front came to Modlin we would hide in the forests until the German Army retreated and then start on the way back home. Again a few days passed. The heavy cannonade had stopped. The airplanes were again covered and the soldiers left the village. It became quiet again. People were disappointed - it seemed that the war would never finish. Only the military police were as busy as before and the digging of trenches continued. Through pressure from above, the police became more active, hunting people more and more. I could not keep on hiding much longer. We had to think of something. If there was no way out of work, at least I must find work which paid something. Digging trenches was not paid, not even food was provided.

Our nearest neighbour was Marysia who worked as a cook in the kitchen near the airport. She told us about the conditions of work and advised us "Put your names down for work at the airport. You will be paid and the food provided as well and those who work at the airfield are exempt from digging trenches."

The next day we went to the barracks at the airfield. Marysia was just preparing dinner for the working force. The rich cooking smell was very

pleasing. Thanks to her we were introduced to the chef. As it happened he was a Pole which made it a lot easier. Mr. Cwiczkowicz, called the chef, was strictly speaking an overseer of the working force and, at the same time, looking after the provisions. As I learned later, he was a Polish officer who became a P.O.W. where he enrolled on lists of the 'Volksdeutsch' (Poles who could claim that any of their ancestors were of German origin) and was discharged as a P.O.W. thanks to a long dead German grandmother.

Our ambitions were very modest. My wife asked to be employed in the kitchen, helping peel potatoes. I said that my general knowledge qualified me for the work of an 'unqualified' labourer. But thanks to the friendly Mr. Cwiczkowicz we got very good positions. Marushka was to be employed in the office as an interpreter and clerk/typiste and I became a leading hand.

The firm for which we were now going to work was called grandly Strasseribau-Ovander-Fliegerhorst Modlin. In reality it was a sub-contractor attached to works at the airfield but thoroughly supervised by the army. Our main boss was a fat, redheaded corporal. We had already met him the first day. He talked without ever removing his cigar. His gloomy face was covered with freckles, he had small piercing eyes and looked unpleasant. Our second boss was the quartermaster. When his name was mentioned the female staff usually had grins on their faces as he was known as the Don Juan, as in old movies. He was young, clean-shaven, smelled of shaving lotion and always followed by his faithful dog, a large full-bred Alsatian. For a German, he was very polite and well mannered, ready to smile at everyone.

The commandant of the fortress was a major. We never saw him close up. The moment somebody spotted his cart, drawn by two Arab horses, they would yell "Attention: The major is coming." The labourers pretended to work extremely hard, the soldiers jumped to the position of full attention, saluting smartly. The cart drawn by full-breds passed us quickly, giving just a glimpse of the major. Only the two rumps of the white arab horses were visible for a long time on the outskirts of the airfield. This was our major.

The labourers were assembled near the kitchen barracks on the opposite side of the airfield near Modlin fortress. We had to work twelve hours on week days but only seven on Sundays and public holidays. Each day we had to cover three kilometres, going by the road through the airfield. Marushka and I had to leave home before dawn to be on time. We assembled before the kitchen. There were one hundred and twenty labourers. Unshaven, in torn clothing with holes in shoes, or barefoot, people lined up in two rows. It was an odd gathering. We

looked like scarecrows or vagabonds from an operetta. Some had on their heads very crumpled hats which they probably used instead of pillows, a sad reminder of good times gone by. Some had their jackets pulled over their bare chests as their shirts were gone. A few youths had long Austrian army coats reaching to their bare feet, their legs covered in old drill slacks. Behind them stood a draughtsman from Warsaw clad in a long rubber overcoat and high boots of a Reichwehr officer. Behind him, a shopkeeper from Rembertow wore dirty canvas runners and had hairy white legs. Another one had huge, torn rubber boots on his feet but compensated for these with a beautiful Tyrol hat, complete with a feather. Everyone had a haversack over their shoulder and from the waist hung a mess tin which was usually an old tin from canned goods. We were a herd of people driven together by the war, mostly from nearby villages and small townships near the approaching Front: Tluszcz, Rembertow, Wawer, Wlochy, Wyszkw were their home places.

The chief divided us into separate working gangs.

"Cabinet makers, carpenters - come forward. Go to the railway ramp - you will unload bombs.

"You there, you will be digging trenches near the old town beside the airfield.

"You five will be laying mines. Ready, go.

"You four from the major gang, you will go to Warsaw for a grand piano for the major. What is wrong with you lot? You are sick? You think you are not feeling well? You need an enema. You were gorging yourselves last night I bet. My God, I will assign you to the bomb gangs. I bet your sickness will be cured immediately.

"Who is there still left? Oh, yes, the fire brigade - how many are there - thirty? Good - out, hurry to your work."

My group and I were assigned to building a shed for the fire brigade on the airfield. It was about 1 km. away. We were all well trained and managed to cover this distance in an hour. To say that we walked at a snail's pace would be an understatement. The work was also conducted in the slowest possible way. Being the leading hand of this gang, I kept reminding them that our twelve hours would not run away. While digging, our shovels held no more earth than a spoonful. My main function was to keep watch for approaching bosses. My work was made easier as, sitting on the high embankment, I had an uninterrupted view to three sides. Only one side was covered by shrubs growing

in the fortress park and the cemetery and here it would be easy to sneak up on us unexpectedly. Part of the gang played cards in the shade of the trees and listened carefully - they were our guards.

During this time the airfield was quiet. There were no more than a few observation planes taking off daily, the rest of the planes stood hidden behind the shrubs. The pilots were playing cards all day long. The maintenance men were resting in the shade of the wings. The shortage of petrol was very noticeable. If the Soviet planes did not show a greater activity in this part of the Front, the German Stukas would rest undisturbed on the field like large stuffed birds.

By the end of September, the S.S. men brought many new people to the fortress - evacuees from Warsaw and her neighbouring areas. The villages around Modlin received orders to feed the evacuees and to give them some place to sleep. Village elders had to organise the feeding and accommodation. The eager and friendly hospitality of the local inhabitants was beyond description. In Kosewo, in the middle of the village, large barrels full of cabbages were brought and the peasant women also provided soup, milk, bread and tomatoes. Every day another village supplied "the food. Fully loaded carts went daily to the fortress.

Germans developed a frenzy for digging trenches and manholes. Everyone had to dig, the local peasants, evacuees, 'O.T.', 'R.A.D.' (para-military working units), even the army. The poor earth was dug sideways and lengthwise for tens of kilometres. Trenches were dug for riflemen, anti-air raid-trenches, bunkers, sheltering hillocks for tanks, for mines and I don't know what else. The peasant was quite often unable to bring his wheat from the fields.

One day all the sky was covered with leaflets. German aeroplanes tossed masses of them over the town, villages and fields.

It was an appeal by the German Chief Command to the "conscience of the Polish people," "they should check their ill-advised actions," ... "they should guard against becoming pawns in the hands of foreign interests" ... "they should report to the nearest German offices should they notice anyone ready to 'act ill advisedly' because piles of innocent women, children and men covering the streets of Warsaw are an example of what incautious acts like riots might lead to. The German Chief Command expects from the Polish people a firm stand, supported by commonsense and reason, against starting ill-advised actions."

The children of the village were very happy. They were making birds and kites, happy to receive a present which fell down from heaven.

One day Mrs. Grzeszkowa, with her two children, returned and occupied her previous room. The house became crowded. She was a natural blonde with plenty of curves. She had one main and two minor problems and she loved talking about them. Her main problem was her husband who, one grey morning, deserted the German Army and arrived in civilian clothes back home to his wife telling her that he had had the war and intended staying home. It was fine to have a husband back home but to shelter a deserter was quite another matter. She was in a panic. A month passed and the war still continued. The deserter got fed up with hiding in the barn behind some hay and began coming to the house. She became so scared that she was shaking and just kept looking through the window. When he started to even go outside, her nerves could not stand it any longer and, taking her two children, she left. One of her minor problems was a 'political' one. "What will the Soviets do with us? Will they kill us all? Or deport us to Siberia?" Her second minor problem was a rather delicate matter of conscience. At a certain stage of the war she weakened and enrolled as 'Volksdeutsche'.

"What could I have done?" she explained. "My husband was taken into the German Army, the children were told to go to a German school and here, in Kosewo, is a hospital where I worked as a midwife, you know, and I was threatened with deportation to a labour camp into Germany. Should I refuse to become a 'Volksdeutsche'.

Sylvester interrupted - "Don't forget to mention your ration card and coupons."

"What are coupons, Selek. I could earn enough to live being a midwife you know. I just wanted peace that is all."

"And didn't you take coupons not only for food but also for clothing, shoes - don't forget the butter and sugar."

"We did not receive even a fraction of those," explained Sylvester.

"You, Selek, don't you pretend to be any better. Look who is speaking. Didn't you go to Lodz, didn't you try there to be accepted into the 'race', only they would not have you, you fart."

Sylvester became indignant, threw a tomato on the table and, choosing his words carefully, turned towards her. "Whether I went to Lodz for the 'race' or not is not your bloody business. The fact is I am not a Volksdeutsche, neither a first class, nor second, nor third. But you, Mrs. Grzeszkowa, I beg your pardon you shit higher than your arse! You don't speak German but you were showing

off your being Volksdeutsche in the whole township." Pouting his lips, Sylvester was mimicking in a high voice "Heil Hitler: A kilo of Polish sausage please." "Didn't you speak like this at the butcher's in Nowy Dwor? Didn't you?"

"You are a dumb fart, you shit you ..." she jumped up from the table and rushed out, slamming the door.

We felt embarrassed, but not Sylvester. After a few seconds of quiet, he continued;

"I am a true Pole and suffered for it. I was caught in a round-up in Modlin and taken to forced labour into East Prussia. Just in the clothes I was standing. I did not even have a change of shirt. I caught lice which were biting me. You know? I am a person of strict hygiene. I couldn't stand it and ran away but was caught by the military police and put in a labour camp in Dzialdowo. Oh, heavens, you should have seen this terrible place. We were beaten and tortured and had no normal lives. We all looked like skeletons. After one month I was sent to a sawmill in Ostorode. There were many French prisoners of war. The Germans put a letter 'P' on my back." (Polish forced labour had the letter 'P' on their clothes). "I had to clean the sawdust from the saw and the dust made breathing so hard. I worked there one and a half years. I could have choked there but I am not such a stupid bastard as some might think. I used to loosen a screw in the saw frame and when the screw fell out the saw stopped. While others were repairing it, I could not only catch up with my work but rest as well. Later on, friends taught me to water the belt. That was really a beaut thing for all concerned you know? It took so long to repair that we could even go and have a smoke in hiding. Yes, my God, one and a half years. If it were not for the parcels from home I would have perished there on their food. And now this stupid woman starts pushing the 'race' into my face - me, a Polish patriot, when one could say that I suffered for my Polish beliefs."

Next morning we left at dawn for work as usual. The morning was pleasant although rather cold and the sun was just clearing the morning mist. Some planes were noisily revving up, others stood quietly covered in droplets from the night mist. The wind blew cold from the airfield. We started walking faster as I had no overcoat. In the kitchen we got some hot tea. Marushka went to work in her 'cage'. One could not call it anything else. Behind the kitchen was a square metre of door space with a table, a chair and a field bed for the chef. This was the office where Marushka was typing lists and lists for the paymaster while I went with my gang to work. The ginger corporal told me to shift the

toilet to another spot. Ten people were assigned to this job and the boss left. We threw the toilet on its side and, sitting on, it, started to roll our smokes. Suddenly one of the men pointed towards the western horizon. In the sky we could see many shiny dots flying in a large key formation.

"Probably German ones." The rest of the working gang did not pay any attention to them - we were all used to planes. So many were here on the airport. We always recognised the Soviet planes quickly. Firstly they never came in large groups but mostly only in threes - occasionally there were six. Usually they came from the direction of Warsaw, diving low when flying above the fortress. This time it was quite different. After a very short while other formations appeared in the sky. By now the whole sky and air were trembling from these strong monotonous vibrations. It was certainly some thing unusual.

"I don't think they are German planes."

"Just look, masses of them." To have a better look we even climbed on top of the embankment.

"Oh, heavens, there will be at least three hundred of them," commented the shopkeeper from Rembertow, trying to count them. "Jesus Christ! Look there, just to your left." We all tried to count. Someone made it three hundred and fifty. Suddenly our airfield came alive. An alert was sounded. Some German aeroplanes started to leave the field in a great hurry. Pilots rushed to their planes. In the meantime the first squadron was near the airfield. They were flying majestically - they looked so large. Their large aluminium wings were shining in the sun. They looked like flying tanks. They were four-engine American fortresses. The German anti-air raid artillery opened fire. The air was vibrating even more with this added noise of heavy guns. A hail of small shrapnel fell in the sand near the bunker as if someone had thrown a handful of pebbles in the sand. Those who could started running away from the airfield. We barely had time to jump into the unfinished trench where we hugged the walls tightly. "That will be the end of us," said someone to cheer us up. "The Americans don't joke." We were waiting, full of tension, for the first bombs to come. But the first squadron flew over us. Wave after wave they were passing us, flying to the east. Although the flak was still falling, we had to raise our heads and look. The whole sky was covered with tiny white clouds of exploding shells. Above them and through them were planes flying majestically in their prescribed spacings. They were flying unconcerned, evenly and, it seemed, slowly, like cranes leaving in the autumn.

"Oh, Jesus Christ! Just look what is happening," someone called out, rising out of the trench. Our emotions were running very high when we saw what was happening. The planes, which had already crossed Vistula, started to toss out small white dots which opened up like big umbrellas.

"Parachutes!" people were shouting, laughing and pounding on the grass. "The Americans have come to help us" The joy was indescribable. At this stage we were unaware that Churchill wanted to send help, that planes and crew were made available, but that Stalin would not permit the allied planes to land and refuel on Russian soil. Therefore many planes with all their crew, mainly Poles, were lost. Later on Churchill forbade these flights.

On the airfield the Germans called an alert against parachutists. The soldiers put on their helmets, ammunition belts and took their repeater guns. Over the field passed armoured cars full of armed soldiers. Motor bikes hurried along. Full alert continued. Minutes passed and the planes disappeared beyond the horizon. Shooting ceased and the parachutes were lost from sight behind the Vistula. The 'All Clear' sounded and we were told to go back to work. As the chef was not around, we were sitting or lying around, the spades in the grass. I was lying on some planks, smoking. Suddenly, like lightning from a clear sky, appeared the ginger corporal. We all jumped up but it was already too late to pretend that we were working very hard. Bad luck, we were caught.

Full of rage, he turned towards me. I hoped he would have a stroke. He was red and choking with rage. The last straw was when he saw the toilet lying on its side. In the meantime everyone sneaked out to their shovels. I thought he was going to kill me on the spot. I was left alone with a raving maniac. Nothing happened - I was only degraded in my duties which suited me admirably. At last I was free from the unpleasant duty of a leading hand, actually an overseer.

Next morning the chef advised me that I was to start work as an ordinary labourer. I had to join the worst labour gang - transporting of bombs. Under the supervision of the soldiers we had to unload half-ton and quarter-ton bombs from the train, take them to the embankment and then load them into trucks. It was heavy, primitive work - there were no forklifts. Everything had to be done by hand and muscle power. These rounded, smooth and hellishly heavy things sometimes slipped, crushing fingers and feet. When the truck was loaded, we travelled to the airfield where, if there were no air raids, it was a time to rest.

On the airfield we had to deliver the bombs to planes which were ready to take off. The soldiers hooked these large eggs to the undercarriage of the planes. The pilots put on their helmets and earpieces and climbed into the cockpits.

Three planes, revving furiously, began to move to the runway, leaving dusty clouds in their wake. Taxiing awkwardly and moving along the bumpy surface like ducks, they started to rise, taking their place in the formation, circling over the airfield and going to the east.

"You f . . . bloody bastards, you are going to Warsaw," some of the gang were swearing.

"Screw you," added another one standing on the steps of the truck. "And just to think that with my two hands," he stretched his hands out, "I had to help load bombs which will be dropped over my own town." He spat on the ground, sat down and let his head drop.

"Hurry up, quicker, get a move on," the driver yelled.

We were on our way back again for a new load of bombs.

Next day I was lucky to be assigned to another group. I was one in a group of ten who had to bring back a broken-down truck with building material. The truck broke down coming back from Warsaw. When we were leaving in a military car with a trailer, others looked at us enviously. "See you later, we are going to Warsaw," we shouted, waving our hats.

After many checkpoints around the fortress we passed the bridge over the River Bug and, after a few minutes, crossed the iron bridge over the Vistula and turned into the highway to Warsaw, leaving Puszcza Kempinska behind.

The nearer we came to Warsaw, the more army traffic. Each village, each house along the road was full of army men. On the highway were transport and supply columns. In the fields, from the direction of Legjonowo, were long columns of evacuees crossing the highway. They continued in a westerly direction. Everyone was bent, carrying a load on his back. Men, women, children, old and young. The sounds of shooting and fighting intensified. In Lzodowo we saw a large evacuee camp. On a large sports ground near the street heavy loaded carts, hand carts, pushbikes and prams were standing. Tired people were sitting next to their belongings or leaning against the fence. S.S. men were prowling the fields, lanes and shrubs, herding everyone to the camp.

We travelled another ten kilometres and were now close to the city. Near Bielany the houses stood empty. There were no civilians left and most of the houses were in ruins. The army was in position in nearby fields. On both sides of the highway were trenches from which protruded the dark barrels of guns. All soldiers were wearing helmets. From a little hill near the woods German artillery was firing. One could even hear the whistling of the flying bullets and

the heavier sounds of the cannon shells. At last our car stopped alongside a broken-down truck loaded with building material. The back of the truck was smashed by bullets.

We started the unloading. This time we really worked quickly, speeded up by the thought that the Soviets could start shooting at any minute and air raids could come unannounced. We worked on the open highway. In the field near us was a burnt-out Russian plane, part of the red star still visible. On our return journey a group of Russian war prisoners was told to board our car. They were guarded by two young S.S. men. We started talking with them. They had been taken prisoner only the day before behind the Vistula. They told us that Warsaw's suburb, Praga, was in Soviet hands and that our Red Polish Army was also fighting there.

We were hungry when we arrived back at our barracks in the evening we received some soup, already cold, and our daily rations: 300 gr. of bread, 20 gr. marmalade and three cigarettes. The cook told us that a new German boss had arrived. He was a civilian and we should expect some changes. The cook was right. New people were brought, the working gangs were divided differently and a store for tools was organised. Because I could speak some German and also write it, I was told to make a list of tools. I even got a rise in pay - the hourly pay, was now 47 pf. instead of the previous 35 pf. The best of this arrangement was that the store was near the kitchen and the offices and I could see Marushka often and get extra food from the cook who liked me.

The store was in a bunker with cement walls and a roof made out of planks covered with earth on which grass and even some bushes were growing. The entry was through a narrow door and steps led to a long dark passage. On both sides of the passage were large cement cells without windows, smelling of dampness and mould. In these cells was my tool store. In the first one was stored potatoes and beets, in the second shovels and picks, in the third dirt, tins and nails and in the fourth, broken window frames.

The fifth was empty of stores but was occupied by a beautiful weasel with a white belly and bushy tail. She became my inseparable companion, sharing the loneliness. Blinking her eyes, she used to glance at the bright light of the bulb hanging day and night from the ceiling. Moving her whiskers, she would look straight into my eyes, nodding her little head graciously. She liked to keep her distance and when I was moving around she used to go to a darker corner. My office was in the passage under the electric light globe.

I made myself a rough sort of table, got myself an old stool and started my 'office work'. One of my goods was rather odd four half-tonner French bombs which were stored along one wall of the passage. As in all other bunkers and magazines in the fortress, the French bombs were put there in readiness for destruction if the army had to retreat. In the beginning I had an unpleasant feeling looking at them. They were packed with explosives and I did not like their shiny fuses and detonators, especially during Soviet air raids. With time I got used to it. When Marushka was able to sneak out of her cage she would come to visit me and sit on these bombs and smoke our cigarettes. They provided the only sitting accommodation for visitors. My work did not take much of my time. I had to issue the tools in the morning and then sit around all the day in case somebody would require additional nails, wires, etc. To sit for twelve hours each day in the damp cell without anything to do was driving me mad and there was nothing to read. I knew that I was becoming morbidly depressed and ready to collapse.

As there was no reading matter, I decided to write. A man driven to despair is ready to grab at any straw. I started to write my recollections of the war.

From this moment I stopped noticing the mouldy walls of the bunker and I did not feel the musty air. My thoughts wandered among the streets of Warsaw in September, 1939, among the hills in Krzemienice. In my mind I was again covering the trail down the River Horyn. I remembered Karmelowo and the streets in Kaunas, my small Jurek and little Roman, my mother, Marushka's parents. Hours flew by unnoticed. Only the noise of the shovels and the loud talk inside the kitchen when the labourers returned reminded me that a whole day had passed. Only then did I close my notebook and hide it under my shirt. I checked the returned tools, received my ration in the kitchen and, together with Marushka, went home to Grandmother Wojciechowska. The days settled in to this routine.

The red corporal who still disliked me must have noticed something. One day he burst into the bunker. "What are you writing there? - I think you have too much time" - and I was landed with two extra jobs; to sweep the yard and sharpen the tools. From then on I had less time for writing but could sit in the yard, leaning against the wall enjoying the sun whilst sharpening the blunt saws.

A few days after we had seen the large number of American planes our trucks brought parts of two broken-down flying fortresses. During the work break everyone came to have a look at the huge wings, the broken fuselage and motors. We were all impressed with their size. A wheel was as high as a man.

They were the four-cylinder models, type B-17. A large group gathered around one motor.

An excited youth called "Look, he was killed here. You can see the blood and his flesh." Coming nearer, I could see between the broken fuselage torn bits of human flesh, in the twisted cabin was a boot with part of a leg. That was all that was left of the pilot who was destroyed together with his machine. Who was this American pilot who was torn to bits in the air? Had he come from far-away America, never stepping on Polish soil but where he had left his foot? Human desire for life interrupted my thoughts about the death. From the blood-covered fuselage people began to tear out metal pipes and wires.

"Look what a fine piece. It will be just right for moonshine making," someone was proudly displaying his treasure. Others, lying on the ground, were cutting the rubber tyres while some were cutting pieces from the petrol tank which would be very useful for repairing shoes. In a few days the plane was plucked clean.

By mid-October the situation at the Front again became tenser although the news from Headquarters was still the same. The situation between the Rivers Bug and Narew and around Warsaw is still unchanged. But we, living just behind the Front line, could feel every twitch at the Front, The Soviet artillery intensified their firing - the small window in the house where we lived shook. In the evening new fires appeared in the sky. Again skyrockets and tracers appeared in the sky and searchlights cut through the darkness. People standing around their houses watched the changing sky. The sky over Warsaw was illuminated as if there were some great festival. Next morning the evacuees arrived, this time from Legionowo and surrounding places. Once more long columns of women and children and of old people, all looking miserable and tired. Goats on a rope dragging along pushbikes, hand-pushed carts loaded to the top, even sometimes cows, also looking like skeletons. Again this human river was flowing to the west. These people were ordered to leave Legionowo and the surrounding villages. And anyway how could they stay there any longer? Shells were exploding amongst their homes.

In the evening new S.S. soldiers, this time in black uniforms, came to our village again. They were from the Panzer divisions of the Vikings. In the orchards, breaking fences and trees, tanks arrived. In the open places and yards were armoured vehicles. Frightened cows ran in panic and the peasants tried to catch them, dogs barked and tore at their chains, chickens and geese flew over fences looking for a safe hiding place. Many were billeted to the village and we

had to make space. Into our kitchen came three Soviet women who were cooking and doing the laundry for the soldiers.

Now six people were living in this small kitchen Mrs. Grzeszkowa who had come back with her two children, Sylvester and we two. Marushka and I slept under the table as otherwise no-one could reach the bed.

After a sleepless night, next morning at dawn we again went to work. We met only small groups of evacuees. The cannonade from the Front persisted unchanged. The airfield was humming with activity. The famous Molber squadron had arrived. Engines were revving up. Some aeroplanes were already starting from the middle of the field, others were getting ready at the sides of the field. The Soviets must be pressing harder - once again we were filled with hope. The atmosphere in the barracks was full of excitement. In the afternoon when I was sitting in the bunker Soviet airplanes appeared in the sky. I barely had time to go up the stairs for a good look when people started to tumble down into my bunker. All the kitchen personnel, Marushka and some soldiers and the red corporal tried to find a place. When I was able to look at the sky I understood their panic. The Soviet planes were flying very low, shooting at everything with machine guns. The whistling bullets were hitting barracks and earth, biting at anything they met like angry hornets. Just for luck a few bombs were dropped as well and the alert was over. We went outside. Near the bunker lay one of our men who had not made the shelter. Some fires were burning on the field; German planes were burning.

Going back home we found on the field some scattered newspaper, 'The New Warsaw Keujer'. A special issue - No. 105. On the front page was a photo of civilians carrying their belongings as they were entering a German army car. Below was printed: "Fleeing from the heavy street fighting and fires, the Warsaw civilians are coming to the German powers for protection, full of trust." Another article was headed: "Who is to blame?" and below it a sub-heading "On the periphery of human misery."

When we had finished reading I asked Marushka "What do you think, who is to blame?"

"Do you mean in the opinion of the author?"

"Yes."

"I think the author is trying to blame London."

"Not only London but also Moscow. Funny, if the Soviets would now toss us some leaflets they would blame Berlin and London. The cautious London

Times would probably blame only the Germans. Each of these powers have their own reason of state and they are looking at the Warsaw uprising in their own light. What a pity that there is no universal common policy of state which would firstly think about the rights of human beings, who would prevent the burning of a city with a population of millions, who would stop the murder of its people, who would prevent the homeless, hungry wanderings of masses. Why look for the guilty ones? There are none, there are only the victims. Every side which was added to this entire holocaust is responsible but they were acting according to the reason of their state therefore they are blameless. The crimes committed are sanctioned in the name of reason and the murderers might be called heroes. The Warsaw uprising is not an isolated case to be looked at as though in a laboratory. It is closely connected with all of the world war, its fighting, and with the political aspirations of each separate power."

Coming home, there was no place in the kitchen. Mrs. Grzeczkowa and the children were sitting at the table eating dinner, Sylvester was shaving the Vikings and on the bed sat a neighbour. We went out to sit under the cherry tree. The sun was setting, behind the dark line of forests. From the Front the thundering sound was strong and gloomy. Over Warsaw, as usual, were many great fires. When some of the people left and we could return to the kitchen, I found a German newspaper left by the Vikings. It was the 'Zischenauer Zeitung' from the previous day. At last! Some written, recent news from the Front. I learned about the recent Panzer battle ... near Paris. About bombing of the Philippines, about the far east. "Between Bug and Narew and north of Warsaw the position is unchanged ..." and our windows were rattling more strongly. I continued my reading. A large article by Goebbels justifying the closing down of theatres and other places of entertainment as well as hairdressing and beauty salons throughout Germany. On the last page were different notices. One caught my eye. "Mister Michael Gutkowski, a department head in the employment office in Mlawy, announced that his name is hereby changed to Mr. Guth." In small print it was reported that a farmer from Prussia refused to contribute to the army winter fund, declaring himself a pacifist. He was sentenced to death by hanging. The sentence had been carried out.

Our candle was burning low - it was time to bed down under the table. In the village, drunken soldiers were singing in a mixture of German/Polish and Russian words.

During the night we were awakened by the sound of very heavy artillery fire coming from the north. The beastly roar shook the whole house. I got dressed and went outside. It was a clear night full of stars and the moon looked pale in

the light of the burning fires over Warsaw. Searchlights were gliding over the sky and tracers were bursting like little stars. The Front seemed full of movement.

Next morning the evacuation of the German civilians and the 'Volksdeutsche' from Modlin and its surrounding areas started. The first to leave was the German schoolteacher, leaving her un-Germanised children behind. German peasant, imported here before as future master-race, were hurriedly packing their carts harnessed to two strong horses. The rest of their meat which they did not take with them was quickly sold. They were cursing the order to evacuate, they were cursing the war in general and Hitler in particular. The noise of butchered pigs and frightened sheep was everywhere whilst scared geese, holding their necks high and snapping at everyone, added to the confusion. The rich butchers were loading their goods and departing. There was nothing to be bought with coupons. The locals looked on in dismay. In the afternoon the occupants of the offices started to move out. The Modlin employment offices were packing their files on trucks. The locals were happy to see them go. We were all full of hope. The Poles were smiling, looking at the hasty packing and departure of the Germans. We were not quite free as yet. The army and military police were still there. The old peasants in Kosewo were shaking their heads doubtfully.

"It has already happened once," an old peasant leaning against the fence told us. "It was when the 'Russek' was coming near Warsaw. The Germans were running like hares. Everyone fled, not only the employment offices but also the military police and even part of the army. The fortress was quite empty, like a barn before the new season. We were certain that it was the end of the war. It lasted two days. The 'Russek' did not come and Germans started to return. First the army, then the military police and, after them, all their offices. Who knows, it might happen once again. I'll wait and see," said the old peasant.

The work at the airfield continued. The digging of bunkers and trenches had to be finished, this time in earnest. The Germans brought some Soviet war prisoners to speed up digging. When I was giving out shovels, I was astonished to hear them speak Polish between themselves. They explained that they were taken into the army just at the beginning of the war when the Soviets had occupied east Poland. After only a few hours of training they were pushed to fight at the front and later on they were taken prisoners by the Germans. They showed me the new Polish currency which I had not seen as yet.

The roar along the Front continued. In the sky we saw more often Russian planes diving into the German hinterland. None of the German planes were taking off from our field. They were sitting around just like stuffed birds. They had no petrol, but the Front was definitely coming nearer. Sometimes the firing seemed to come from quite close by. Our labourers were climbing up the bank for a better look but the forests along the River Bug obstructed the view. During lunchtime the rumour was that the Soviets had taken Warsaw and were now advancing towards Nowy Dwor. We were all very happy as we were fed up with this hopeless situation. At last we could expect a change - at last the Front seemed to move.

In the evening, going home through the airfield, we saw many hurried movements on the airfield. The soldiers were leaving their bunkers, donning their helmets and taking up positions. Some were already sitting beside their guns, moving the barrels towards the sky. All observers were at their posts. We knew what to expect. We were still half a kilometre from the end of the airfield. We started running as fast as we could. In a very short while planes were above the airfield, turning and diving. We fell to the ground, crawling towards the nearest trench. The German artillery opened fire. The diving planes were shooting non-stop from their machine guns. I have only one memory from this raid-scared cows with their tails high up running around the field and the cowherd chasing them, trying to push them towards some shrubs, or home.

After the air raid Marushka came out of the trench irritable and angry. "I've had it. I can't stand it any longer. All this damned war, the planes, the bombs. I don't want to sit here any longer. It is beyond my strength. Zyg I can't - let us go away:" I started to explain that we had both decided to wait here until the Front passed us, that only then would we be able to go home, that coming to Poland had been hard enough but, if we left now, all we had been through would be for nothing.

"But I simply can't take it any more. We have been here nearly two months now. Every day is horrible and I can't see any end to it. My nerves can't take any more. I know I am going to pieces, being hysterical, but please understand - I can't take it any more" I tried to explain that the end was now quite near, that today I had been able to listen to the radio while in the locksmith's workshop. The Soviets had brought four new divisions to our part of the Front and they were trying to force the front along the Harew River. "Be patient, my darling, you have to face up to it just once more."

In the village we were met with more news. From some wounded Vikings we learned that the front was barely 25 kilometre away. Not only tank men arrived in our village, but also the infantry. Many tanks were smashed and the new ones had not arrived as yet. Now we were really full of hope. At last the end seemed near.

Unfortunately Marushka became ill. Maybe it was yesterday's raid when she, after running and being hot, was lying in the wet trenches. Her temperature was rising. By evening I could tell that she was seriously ill and in pain. Her temperature reached 40 degrees and was climbing. Worried, I went to the next village to ask for the doctor. The field hospital was already partly evacuated. I asked and begged the doctor to come but he refused as he had wounded soldiers who needed his immediate attention. I rushed back home and found Marushka worse. In desperation, I got her dressed and half-dragging, half-carrying, took her to the field hospital which was over 1 1/2 km away. The doctor agreed to see her. He thought it could be rheumatic fever and gave us a handful of quinine. It was the best he could do.

Marushka was reeling and swaying as we returned and I carried her most of the way. There was more room in the kitchen as the three women had left.

It was one of the gloomiest nights of my life. A cold autumn rain was falling outside. Marushka was lying on the straw-covered bed, the room was full of cooking steam, children played noisily beside her bed and she was moaning in pain. At the table sat some drunken soldiers waiting their turn for a haircut by Sylvester. Every time the door was opened the cold air filled the kitchen. I covered Marushka as best I could but damp cold air was even coming from the floor. It was late at night when at last we were left alone. Giving Marushka another dose of quinine, I sat at her feet. The firing from the front was nearer and louder.

At two in the morning even the earth started to tremble. The heavy concentration of the artillery fire seemed to tear the air apart. The wet windows were shaking and the door banged loudly with each new ear-shattering blast.

Marushka was breathing heavily, her eyes were shut, she was in pain and she did not reply to my questions.

I was seized by a hopeless despair. Gloomy thoughts entirely filled my mind. It was dark outside, the kitchen was dark, my thoughts were dark. The clock was ticking evenly. Odd how in times of dreary thoughts, in times of distress, I usually heard the measuring of time. I tried to push the thought away, the

thought which was insistent, which was haunting me like a phantom in a dark night ... maybe Marushka ... no, I didn't want to think this word.

It sent cold shivers down my spine. I fell into a half-sleep, I started to drowse and my mind became numb, deadening my thoughts. I opened my eyes once again, looking through the window with unseeing eyes into the darkness, into the gloomy, hopeless night ... a dream ... a nightmare ... She is lying on the straw with a red rose between her white lips. A black Viking is twisting his skull in a dance full of frenzy, roaring a drunken song, flying bombs are changing into colourful fireworks, all heaven is ringing with the song of peace - a happy day is now to begin ... firework are bursting, standing between the dancing Vikings is their chaplain, also in black ... he is lifting a black cross and, instead of Christ, there is a large red star. Pending over the deathly pale Marushka, the chaplain is blessing ... PAX VOBISCUM ... PAX VOBISCUM ... REST IN PEACE ... REQUIESCAT IN PACE ... the choir joined in ... pacifist ... pacifist ... pacifist ... the Vikings were dancing around the black chaplain.

I woke up leaning against the bed - the grey morning mist was visible through the window. I bent over Marushka. Her face was covered in sweat, her damp hair covered part of her face, she was breathing more evenly and her sleep seemed very deep. The rain had stopped and the first golden sunrays were reaching the window, drying the droplets. The sounds from the Front were not so loud. Life was once again smiling at me.

A few more days passed and there was still no breakthrough at the Front. More and more army men arrived in the village. On the other side of Kosewo, near the airfield, the artillery was digging itself in. Every building was occupied by the army. We were now just behind the front lines.

Quinine was helping Marushka. She was still in pain, still very pale and weak but her eyes were shining again. If the weather was warm when I returned from work, I made her go outside and we would sit under the trees and make plans for the future. Marushka felt very strongly against waiting here for the Front to break. She had no faith in her strength. After the unsuccessful effort by the Soviet Army to break through on our front lines, we now had reasonably quiet days. The artillery was silent.

One day Soviet airplanes came. "They were flying slowly and very low. We wanted to run, but where to? There were no shelters. The airfield, full of planes, was very close, behind the orchard was the German artillery, tanks were standing in all the yards and the village was full of soldiers. We were leaning

against the barn, its roof covered with straw. The first bombs started falling - clouds of dust rose. Marushka, frightened, grabbed my hand and we rushed back into the house. Everyone was leaning against the stove, the children were lying on the ground and Grandmother Wojciechowska was praying loudly. When the noise of the angry motors was straight overhead we hid our faces on each other's shoulders, a creepy feeling in the back. Maybe now? Marushka was holding my arm tightly, her fingers twitched nervously, her legs began to shake, her teeth rattled as in a fever. At last I understood that she would be unable to sit here and wait as she was heading for a breakdown. When from the flight-deck the machine guns started cutting down the leaves and branches of our cherry tree, we all fell to the ground. Seconds and minutes passed, the detonations receded, the raid was over. In our village many were killed and wounded.

Next morning many new evacuees arrived in our village. Among them were relatives of Grandmother. They arrived from the other side of the Bug River - the peasants from that village had decided to flee with all their possessions without waiting for any orders. The Front once again became so active that there was no hope of crossing the front lines. We were now very crowded. In the small kitchen there now lived eighteen people. There was no seating space left. As Marushka wanted to talk with me, we went into the barn which was empty. While I was at work she had spoken with one of the soldiers, Mr. Oswald Goch. He was German but brought up in Poland, in Poznan. His parents became Volksdeutsche and were now living in a small town in Wurttemberg, Germany near the Swiss border. He told Marushka how beautiful and quiet this place of his parents was the beauty of the hilly scenery near the Swiss Alps, far away from all war activities.

He tried to talk Marushka into going there. He was prepared to write a letter to his parents recommending us - to his father who had influential connections. Other Poles, were already working there.

When Marushka had finished, we both fell quiet. I stretched out on the hay, looking at the roof.

“Zyg”

"What?"

"Are we going?"

"Where?"

“There.”

"Why, what is waiting for us there?"

"Peace, hills, the Bodensee."

"And hard work too."

"Don't we work here, even worse, under bombing and shelling."

"Do you really want to go very much?" "Very much! I can't stay here, I'll go really mad." "OK. Maybe you are right, if we go it might be better to go as far as possible away from this hell. Alright, we will go" "Truly? We will really go away?" Marushka jumped to her feet, her eyes shining as she hugged me, hanging on my neck. The decision was taken.

To realise her wish was not so easy. Free travel was long ago suspended in Germany. There was only one way left - to again get some fictitious documents, some travel orders directing IDs to that particular part of Germany. The only person who would be able to do this was Captain Bueller. He was a soft-hearted man and easily influenced by females. Marushka could achieve it and, in addition, her fluent German language would be of considerable help. We decided to tell him the truth.

Next evening we went to the, barracks where he had his offices. He was away and we were told to wait. It got dark and started to rain. His batman, with a lantern in his hand, was going to feed the cows. Looking for protection against the rain, we followed him to the barn. In the long barn were only five cows. The batman went to the opposite wall and put his lantern on ... a grand piano! Seeing our astonishment, he explained that the captain had brought this concert piano from an empty house in Warsaw. Being short of space, the piano was kept here.

"They are taking everything away from Warsaw," said the batman who was German by birth but brought up in Poland. "They not only take pianos - I would not even want such a thing, it only takes up a lot of space - they are bringing beautiful things. They are going through Warsaw with large trucks, looting stores, homes, basements. Once they took me to help. Heavens, what a variety of things we brought back. A lot of very good vodka, liqueurs, boots and ladies shoes, lovely silks. I tell you, just looking one felt like finger-licking. Many bags of sugar, three tons of flour, white as snow. One of them even found a whole big bag of Italian walnuts."

Seeing Marushka lovingly patting the shining piano, he laughed - "Go ahead, play us some modern pieces."

I pushed an empty box nearer to her. She sat down, opening the piano lid. Spotless, white keys were smiling at her. She placed her hands on the keys ... and from the dark barn came floating the music of Chopin. Chopin's ghost freed by music. The melody was very tender, masterly impressive, inspired by a magic charm of Chopin's bewitched soul. My heaven how he freed it, how his magic wand liberated those feelings. Leaning against the wall of the barn, I was listening to a ballade. Looking at the walls covered with cobwebs, my thoughts began wandering, trying to remember the story which inspired Chopin. Through the melody I see a young girl playing with her long plaits, charming two young men, both in love with her. She charms them both, distributing her smiles equally. The music is light, happy and frivolous but love desires to possess and now come the first jarring sounds. The music is changing, the smile disappears, and there is disharmony. Then the big ball interrupts. The ballade takes us now to the gilded ballrooms, full of glittering lights, the frocks are rustling. There is a lot of light laughter, the fans are opening and closing flirtatiously, deep bows, and pairs are assembling for the leading dance. The orchestra starts up with the opening bars. Gay dancing music, the pairs are swirling in a round dance.

Absorbed in the music, I let my eyes wander. My God, cows are in the ballroom. No, that is a mistake, Chopin came to the barn. Manure in a ballroom?" Or is the ballroom in the manure? Wet cows mouths instead of smiling faces.

The nearest cow could even hit the piano with its dirty tail and there was a fly-speckled lantern on the beautiful grand piano. I took my eyes away, looking now at the darkest corner of the barn. The music and the charming ballade engulfed me again. I was back at the ball, back again to the girl with her flighty smiles, those two youths now rivals. Only one at a time can dance with her. The other is standing with a gloomy face, leaning against the wall, his eyes burning with jealousy, he feels hatred building up in him. The music is still gay dancing music but more disharmonious sounds are included - the music becomes dismal. Something must have happened. I listened, full of attention. Both rivals leave the ballroom, rushing out into the dark night towards the cliff. They close up, locked in each other's arms like two stags in season. Now they are near the precipice - one's leg is slipping over. The sound of the music increases, the tone gets harder, then full of fighting frenzy. The fight is now in earnest, without rules, when suddenly.. a second of emptiness, dead silence and then .. just an echo which is drowning, a rock thrown down the cliff into the emptiness. Both

youths, in a mortal embrace, hurtle down to the vast ocean. The ballade finished.

"Not a bad piece," called out the batman, "but perhaps you could now play a fashionable tango?"

The captain did not return that evening. Only next day was Marushka able to receive the travel orders. It even went easily. Our travel orders were for Isny. With some difficulty, we found it on the map. It was a thousand kilometres away, right through all Germany, at the foot of the Alps. Once again a crucial moment in our war wanderings had arrived.

We were ready to leave next morning at dawn. Our rucksacks were again heavy. We were promised a lift by a military truck as no trains were leaving Modlin - the railway line near Plonsk was destroyed. The truck was to leave from the main barracks, going to Torun. It was sad to part from these kind and friendly people. Grandmother Wojciechowska gave us her blessings for the long road. For the last time we went along the well-trodden lanes, through the potato field.

Our truck left much later than expected as the driver was waiting for some soldiers. We took our places, sitting on our rucksacks under the canvas roof. Late at night, frozen to the bone, we arrived at Torun. We went straight to the station which was shrouded in darkness and fairly empty. There were a few military policemen walking about. From the railway maps on the station, I made notes of the towns through which we would travel. The road led through Poznan, Dresden, Nuremberg, Augsburg and Memmingen. As the train for Dresden was leaving at two a.m., we had enough time to have a look at Torun. A lot of things are possible during war but to see a town at night is not one of them. The darkness was so complete that we had trouble in walking. I was mainly interested in seeing its people as I knew the town from before the war. The town, once Polish, was now a German town, indistinguishable from other towns in Prussia. I did not hear the Polish language. In the streets, cafes, beer-houses, everywhere, were only Germans, civilians and soldiers and Hitler Youth in their uniforms. Even the waiters were German. I was amazed - it seemed unbelievable that this town only five years ago was a Polish town. Why should I be so astonished by the living Torun locals when even Kapernicus after his death was made a Volksdeutsche? Mister Rosenberg accepted him into the master-race, even giving him the honour of citizenship because now the earth is rotating around the sun thanks to the German genius.

After a few hours walking we returned to the station. There, in the public toilets, I heard the first Polish words from the half-open door of the cleaner's cubicle came the sound of Polish talk. I wanted to wash my hands and entered after mocking. A Railway employee in uniform, the waiter from the station and the cleaner stepped talking immediately.

The cleaner turned to me and asked in the official tongue "What do you want, please?"

I replied in Polish "I would like to wash my hands." They looked at me distrustfully. The cleaner, after some hesitation, gave me a towel and replied in German - "Help yourself." Their conversation continued in German.

I started to wash. Unexpectedly the door was pushed open and a porter entered, speaking in pure Polish "This is where our club is hiding today ..." He stopped, noticing the signs given by the cleaner pointing in my direction. The talk continued in German.

I had walked for two hours around Torun but found here, in the toilet, its true face. Returning to the station I started imagining, overdoing it. It seemed that all the travellers and the station staff, including the police and the stationmaster, were all wearing a mask, that they all did speak Polish only when it was safe to do so.

Our train left on time. The first large town was Poznan (also a Polish town before the war). The platform was crowded with German evacuees, bombed out during the recent raid over Koenigsberg. Most of them were trying to go to Saksoni. The crowd was storming the train. Police were guarding compartments reserved for the army.

Packed full, we continued towards Dresden., People were sitting on their bundles in the passages. They were mainly from East Prussia. In addition there were soldiers, sisters from the Red Cross, RAD and others.

The windows were tightly shut and blinds drawn. Military controls checked everyone's documents. At dawn we were already travelling through true Germany, not former Poland.

## In The Third Reich

Whistling loudly our train entered the Dresden station. At most of the platforms trains were belching smoke. There were crowds on all platforms. The first impression was of noise, hurrying people, yelling, calling to each other, loud signals and penetrating voices from various loudspeakers. The light was dim everywhere. Globes were covered with something blue, giving only a little light which shone feebly on the masses of people.

Carried along by the crowd we reached the street. Small cream-coloured Dresden trams were ringing their bells non-stop trying to avoid hitting the people. We were looking for an address given us a long time ago. Near the station in one of the lesser known streets, we found the bookshop we were looking for. In its windows, as in all German bookshops, was displayed the book which was read by hardly anyone - 'Mein Kampf' by Adolf Hitler. The book was propped up by a wilting pot plant. It was quiet in the bookshop. The shop was full of books with shelves reaching to the ceiling. Behind these shelves in a narrow darkish room Alma was sitting, typing. We had been looking for her for many reasons. Firstly, she was the only person we knew in Dresden. She was Marushka's friend from Lithuania and for the last few years had worked in Germany and would be able to give us valuable information and tell us the score.

Alma was a rather unusual woman. I never could discover her nationality which was quite indifferent to me. She considered herself a *civis orbium terrarum* (citizen of the world) and went her own ways. I never knew if or where she had a family. Alma was a woman, I think, who did not love anyone deeply. Because of her love of books she had come to Germany to work in this bookshop. In addition, she was an employee of the cultural society of German-Turkestan Friendly Relations. I could never find out what the society was about, especially in-times when Goebbels liquidated all cultural life. Many schools were closed besides universities, theatres, libraries and other places of education and cultural entertainment but the cultural society for German-Turkestan relationship still existed, even employing quite a few people.

As Alma asked us to stay with her, we decided to spend a few days in Dresden. After a good rest, we went to see the capital city of 'Soksofony' which Lithuanian labourers called Saxoni. There were many Lithuanians there as the German employment office in Kaunas sent many transports of forced labour to

Saxoni. There was also a large group of educated Lithuanians who, fleeing the Front, came to Dresden - people from the theatre in Kaunas, employees from different administration offices and even some divisions of the Lithuanian Army. In the streets one heard many different tongues and saw different features. People from the 'Ostland' were easily distinguishable. Ukrainers, White Russian and Lithuanian women wore bright, multi-coloured scarves and long skirts. Their menfolk wore clean but crumpled tunic shirts and high boots. Being Sunday, the streets were crowded with masses of gaping people. All these people from the captured East had sewn on their clothes a blue patch with a stamp 'OST'. These three letters covered a multitude of people. They included not only the Russians in their red and white berets but also people from Ukraine, White Russia, Baltic countries and also the dark Georgians, the slant-eyed Tartars, the Azerbaijanians with flat Mongolic faces and sly-looking eyes. They were all imported into Germany for slave labour, the labourer marked 'made in the East'. In this crowd were some dressed worse than others, even in torn clothing. They could not ever afford a Sunday best - those were the Poles. They were excluded from the general 'OST' - they did not belong to the East nor to the West but the newly formed German oddity 'General Gubcrasatian'. God alone might have known what their position would be in the 'New Europe' of Messrs. Goebbels and Rosenberg. Now they were required by the Third Reich for the hardest jobs. On their chests was a yellow sign well-known to all in Germany - a yellow rhomboid with a purple letter 'P'.

Walking along the streets of Dresden we heard many more languages, some completely foreign to us. The Germans, taking over foreign countries, at the same time decreased their own population as the foreign countries taken by force had to be peopled by the Germans. This was the Fuehrer's law - he was the master of New Europe. At this time Dresden was one of the few German cities still untouched by mass bombing. There were hardly any traces of bombing. The most beautiful part of the city was spread along the River Elbe, still in all its beauty. It was dominated by the famous 'Zwinger', the beautiful arena of ancient jousting Knights which was surrounded by a ring of ornate galleries, balconies and terraces. The fine old baroque was fully displayed amidst the flowers and the greenery. Among the fantastically arched galleries were miniature palaces built on different levels. Large greenhouses with huge windows seemed to catch all the sunrays. There was a superior world, beyond temptation, beyond understanding of the gaping crowd. From there, arched galleries led to the king's chambers. Only tops of the trees planted on lower levels could reach them. Golden leaves were falling on the marble balustrades where, long ago, crowned heads and princesses watched the knights.

All this was a long time ago. The shining armour was put on wooden models, the exquisite gowns of the princesses were displayed in glass cabinets in the museums and the mansions were taken over by Dresden rich commoners. The rattling sound of the armour was replaced by the rich, soft sound of music. The Dresden symphony concerts received here their true sanctuary.

Further down we looked at the banks of the River Elbe. Large, sloping terraces led to the 'Zwinger', the place of ancient entertainment and tournaments. The open grounds over the Elbe were joined by bridges like clamping buckles. The other side glittered with the mosaic of many coloured houses. To the left of the open space stood the Dresden Opera House, its entrance enclosed with winding colonnades. To the right was the king's church - a beautiful Gothic, its proud tower rising straight to the sky, its wall nearly touching the king's castle. Over the narrow street was suspended an arcade in the shape of a state coach joining the church with the castle, the king's salon with the altar. A large painted gate led to the king's yard.

Further on were the boulevards along the river. In their shade were the buildings of the art academy and the museums. Now they were quite empty like tombs in a cemetery covered by autumn leaves. They were declared closed by orders of the Fuehrer. Objects of art were buried in the ground and people loving and living for art were fighting for a worse future. Only empty halls, galleries and auditoriums remained. Buildings by famous architects, these sanctuaries of beauty, culture and truth were awaiting in the empty stillness the uncertain tomorrow. Would they survive? Would the war respect them?

The street loudspeakers were calling "Attention! Attention! Large formations of enemy bombers have crossed the frontiers of the Reich. Stay tuned in - in a few moments a new announcement from the airways force will follow, they proceed ..." and soon followed names of towns in central Germany. We rushed to the shelters. Had Dresden's last hour come? No.

Soon the 'All Clear' sounded. The planes had turned to the north - this time Berlin was hit. "A large force of enemy flying-fortresses is attacking our capital city. Churches and hospitals are being hit. The civilian population received many losses... headquarters announced the next day.

It was time for us to leave. I went to the station for information about possible connections for our travel.

At the information office travellers were constantly asking and pleading with the officer about the safety of different lines. They wanted some kind of guarantee. The old gentleman in a railway uniform was shrugging his shoulders

and occasionally addressed everyone, saying 'I can't promise you anything. Trains going to the north are being shot at. If you don't want to take risks, go during the night.' People from the crowd replied "But that would mean sitting for long times at different railway stations waiting for connections and we all know that stations are being bombed frequently." A woman going to Duisburg was very worried. The officer again shrugged his shoulders and said, "I can only inform you which lines are temporarily closed due to damaged and bombed railway lines. I can't tell you which lines will, or will not, be bombed in the future." Smiling, he added, "Even I, the information centre, am unable to say. If you are frightened, the best idea would be not to travel at all. As it is our trains are overcrowded." "I have to go. My son is seriously wounded," she said, showing him the wire received from her son. "He is in Duisburg hospital". At last I reached the window with my travel order for Isny.

"You can have two connections," the officer said in a tired voice. "One through Munich, the other through Augsburg." Not waiting for my question, he continued, "I would advise you to go through Augsburg as lately Munich has had more air raids." I agreed without any further question and he wrote out the tickets: Nuremberg, Augsburg, Memmingen - departure at 22.30.

The same evening we arrived with our rucksacks at the station. The long platforms were poorly lit by a blue light, giving everything a deathly pallor. The top platforms were shrouded in darkness. Sometimes sparks from the noisy engines flickered down onto the platform.

Unexpectedly all lights went out. Only red and green regulation lights and lighted signs showing the way to the shelter stayed alight. A thundering voice from the loudspeaker informed us "Enemy planes are over Germany. This is a warning. Keep calm and orderly. Further progress of the planes will be announced shortly."

Marushka got frightened and, grabbing my hand, she begged me to run away. But the crowd did not move - they looked indifferent. We knew that announcements would follow advising the path of progress. Germany is large and there are many towns to be bombed. A warning did not frighten anyone. Our train soon arrived and there was a rush to the doors. Marushka hesitated and entered the train distrustfully. We had to find our places in darkness. None of the travellers would part with their luggage. One had to be ready just in case any minute the real alarm might come and then ... The unpleasant minutes of waiting continued. Here and there people were lighting matches to look at their watches and count the minutes until departure. Seven minutes to go ... now only

five ... now three... If only the time would hurry on, if we could leave this station more quickly, these heavy metal constructions, the ghosts of a permanent tomb. Again the voice from the loudspeaker ... "All Clear."

The lights came on, a loud whistle blew and the train started moving. We passed a few suburban stations. It was very stuffy in the train and I opened the window. A beautiful night with a full moon. We were travelling through the Saxonian Alps. The train often entered tunnels cut through deep cliffs, oddly shaped and covered with shrubs. The cliffs seemed to stretch up to the sky, blotting out the view and bringing complete darkness. Then again the cliffs were falling away leaving only boulders covered with a pale glow of the moon. It could be a beautiful country viewed during the day but at night it gave an eerie feeling as if God Himself in an angry mood had tossed down the heavy boulders, breaking them into oddly shaped humps. Now covered with shrubs they made a phantom landscape.

The day was full of nervous tension - the compartments became empty. We were leaving one Front behind and approaching another, this time from the west. Everyone knew or had heard about the flying fortresses and preferred to travel by night.

In Nuremberg we saw many ruins and sooty remnants of previous buildings and many ruins around the station. This town was already deeply scarred but still alive and working fully because the Fuehrer had so decreed. We continued without interruption - hours passed. We were coming nearer to the 'Blue Danube'. The train was rumbling over a bridge. Through the window we saw an unsightly narrow river full of sandbanks. In the middle of the river stood a boy, his trouser legs turned high up, holding a fishing rod. This was the Danube, the 'wide, blue Danube', which had its beginning somewhere here in the Black Forest (Schwarz Wald).

In Augsburg we had a long wait so we went to sleep. When I woke up the sun was already setting. The train was standing at a small station smelling of freshly cut hay. We could hear the gentle sound of bells coming somewhere from the field as if flowers were tinkling softly in the breeze in this meadow between the hills. Enraptured, we looked at the scenery near the alps, smelled the forgotten clean air and listened to the tranquil, melodious sounds. The high fir trees were cutting a straight line dividing the well kept fields. The colourful houses of the 'Bauer' (farmer) nestled against the hills. The walls of the houses were brightly painted with the shutters painted in another colour and masses of bright flowers made an enchanting view like a fairy tale. From the nearby hill

cows were coming home - all alike, dark brown, wide in the shoulders, with a leather collar and a hanging bell. Even the young calves were ringing their bells as they romped around. Now we understood the origin of the ringing which had reached us from the meadows. There were many herds in the wide valley of Bavaria. For the first time we felt the calming influence of a peaceful atmosphere. The melody of the bells which the breeze, rich in scents of mown grass, was bringing nearer, was like a balm for our nerves. Nerves which were stretched tightly during tracking through the highways of war. We had the feeling that we were entering a land that had been left behind the main events of a total war. A land steeped in peace. The land of south Bavaria. In Kempton we had to change trains and continued our travel on a small local puffing train (Bummelzug). This little train with only a few small carriages puffed heavily, climbing the hills and whistling madly at each twist of its track. It went happily down the hills but panted heavily and whistled loudly going uphill. On each station stood the funny looking 'Schwabs', locals dressed in shorts like children back home. The farmers on the platforms had very hairy legs, long pipes clenched between their teeth and were dressed in short leather pants supported by embroidered braces, a Tyrol hat with a fancy feather and a bright checked shirt. They were the Swabians. Their women looked just as unusual in short pleated skirts with an apron, also with braces, bright embroidered blouses, hats with a feather, and white socks. Their throaty talk and their slang seemed quite incomprehensible and one had to listen carefully to pick up German words.

After a sharp bend we saw hills covered with snow. High peaks reaching the sky. On the far horizon was the chain of the Swiss Alps.

We were coming to the Algaue Alps, the regions situated at the foot of the Alpen hills. Gone were the arable fields. Now there were forests and meadows in which cows were grazing. This part of Germany was called 'the land of butter, milk and cheese'.

We were coming to the end of our travels. The train entered a deep valley covered by evening mists. The sun disappeared behind the hills, dusk covered the township, the church tower was clearly visible and also some tall houses. Rattling and panting, the train stopped at the station. It was the end of the line. There was a high embankment and a lantern. On the station wall the sign 'ISNY'.

We thought that we had arrived at the end of the world. That night we slept comfortably under eiderdowns in the 'Old Post' hotel.

What would we do now? Through the window we saw a church, rooftops of an unknown town and, on the street, strange people.

Taking our letter of introduction given to us in Kosewo by the German soldier, we went to deliver it to his father. Mr. Herman Gock was very pleased to receive a letter from his son. To our astonishment, he spoke Polish very well. Mr. Gock loved talking, using high-flown words. Proudly he told us that he was working 'in politics' in many organisations. Later, on knowing him better, we discovered that he was poor at writing but made up for it by his orations. By profession he was a roofer but was at that time working in a factory producing airplane parts.

I had trouble stemming the flow to get some information of interest to us. Firstly, the most important person in Isny was the 'Burgermeister' (Mayor). He registered the newcomers, he allocated rooms and work, also food coupons, and he could also lock them in prison. He was a Party member and the leader of this town.

There were many Poles and other foreigners in Isny. Everyone had to work, strictly supervised by industrial police. The work was firstly in the factory of Mr. Heim, producing parts for planes, secondly a large hospital-sanatorium for wounded soldiers, a silk factory, many cheese factories and, lastly, the farmers.

From the complicated explanation of Mr. Gock I gathered that without work you could not have any accommodation, without accommodation one could not receive food coupons and that without coupons one could not live in Germany. As we wanted to keep on living, we went to the Mayor's office.

The talk was short. We were given work for the right to buy food. After checking our documents, we were allocated to the plane factory of Air. Heim. Marushka looked very skinny and ill. It did not require much of my persuasion for the boss to agree to give her a rest for two weeks. He was probably sure that she was not a good physical worker. I was enrolled immediately.

I never knew that a labourer so low in the hierarchy of the German Reich had to fill in so many forms and sign so many declarations. Some of the questions went back three generations. First I had to sign a declaration that I was not a Jew and that none of my genealogical branches had produced any undesirable offspring during the last three generations. I had to enrol in the 'Workfront' and immediately pay some fees, also sign documents for employment offices, insurances, sick benefits, permits for accommodation and many more which I was unable even to memorise. After the last signature, my Lithuanian passport and four pictures were taken. I stopped being an individual

and became a cog in the huge working force of the Third Reich. I was allocated to the production line at Ru-Helfer No. 350. Le 1590. In this way I became one of the fifteen million labourers who were employed in the production of tools for murder, direct or indirect. Day factory was No. 161.

In return I received from the Third Reich-

- 1) the right to live;
- 2) the right to buy two saucepans;
- 3) coupons for food;
- 4) a room in the attic with two beds;
- 5) a small wrought-iron stove with one burner;
- 6) half a cubic metre of wood for all winter;
- 7) 75 pfennig per hour from which 30 per cent was deducted for social, war and Party dues;
- 8) additional ration cards for hard work: 400 grams bread, 200 gr. meat and 20 gr. fat – WEEKLY! and
- 9) the right to buy (when available) two cigarettes a day.

The room allocated to us was in the house of a widow, Mrs. Fleck, on the outskirts of the town. She was an old woman, with a wrinkled face and white hair. She lived with her invalid son and a daughter with two children whose husband was somewhere at the Front. Mrs. Trudel was constantly waiting for news from her husband. It was over a year since she had last seen him. Old Mrs. Fleck had eleven children and twenty-three grandchildren. There were seven grown-up sons and many sons-in-law. The Fuehrer took them all, dispersing them through Europe. Only God knew how many of them were still alive. Only the youngest one, as he was a war invalid, did the Fuehrer return. She used to complain bitterly that now when the Fuehrer could not use him any more he was returned to her. But the Fuehrer had not forgotten him and was paying 20 meagre marks monthly for his lost arm.

Our room was in the attic from which a door led to the garret. Two small windows overlooked the valley and small hills behind which the sun used to set. The attic contained two wooden beds with eiderdowns, a small robe and a table made of unpainted pinewood. Over the beds were a few pictures of chubby angels. This was to be our anchorage until the END of the war.

Isny was an ancient town in the Algauer Alps. Surrounded on all sides by hills, it was at the foot of the 'Black Grat', the highest hill in Wuerttemberg. This little town was surrounded by marshy meadows and it nestled along the old

fortress walls. The roofs of the old houses nearly touched each other and the old bell tower of the church rose high above the houses and the old brick town gates. Narrow streets wound between monastery walls overgrown with moss. Cloistered galleries led to the dark arches of the town gates. Nearer, beside the lazy River Arg stood an old watermill, bent with age - nothing was ground here any more. The water rushed undisturbed through the skeletons of the old wheels. The mill remembered the oldest times. It was built in the ninth century by Count Vehringen who was then the possessor of this land. When later on the church became richer, it appropriated this land. The monastery was built in the village and church towers were the symbol of rule. Isny became a monastic town, paying service not so much to God as to the owners. One could still see the old dungeons where the blood flowed from those who did not obey 'the Will of God'. Three hundred years later Isny was proclaimed a free town, its coat of arms a black eagle in the middle of a horseshoe. The town had many happy and free years until it was incorporated into Wuerttemberg.

Instead of the lucky omen of a horseshoe, they now had the black swastika. They were paying their tribute to the Third Reich with cheese and fresh air for the wounded and the consumptive soldiers. They might have been forgotten if it were not for the factory for plane parts. The Minister for Armaments, Mr. Spei, was looking everywhere for new factories. The small factory that was previously producing packaging for its cheese now grew into a big plant. Many large workshops were built, new ramps for the railway and, lastly, slaves were imported from the captured European countries. The town became multi-lingual and the factory started to work. All roads led to Mr. Heim. Wilhelm Heim, a well-to-do local Isny man, was a Party member with influential friends. He received from the Wehrmacht the licence to build and run the factory for war necessities. In a very short time the once small producer of boxes for cheese became a very important man.

In Isny everyone knew who Mr. Heim was. The Mayor treated him as his master, trying to make him more comfortable during the Council meetings. Heim was the undisputed leader, being a Party member and chairman, of many organisations. It was even whispered that he had great friends in the Gestapo and sometimes saw the Gauleiter. Mrs. Heim also seemed to be very important. People in Isny would greet each other with a 'Gruess Gott' (Praise Be God) but they did not greet Mrs. Heim this way as it would have been tactless. She was greeted with 'Heil Hitler' - any other greeting could have been interpreted as being against Hitler. If she was kind enough to accept the greetings, the womenfolk felt happier as this would show that their men would not be sent to

the Front at present but that they were indispensable to the war industry in the factory of Wilhelm Heim.

As I was to start work on Monday, we had time to buy the two saucepans as permitted by the Mayor, and to buy the wood.

I received only a quarter metre of wood which I carried home on my back. Now our housekeeping was complete. The cultural requirements were also shortly completed. We bought two pictures of Isny and, in a very underhand way certainly not suitable for a Pole, I talked the salesgirl into selling me a large map of Europe as at German's highest power. Marushka was fixing the pictures over the beds as I spread out the map, marking Isny with a pin and considered its position to the rest of the world. Like the egocentric German philosopher, Nietzsche - "I and not I," the rest was of no great importance. Geographically, Isny was 32 km from the Swiss border. Hearing the name Switzerland, all homeless war wanderers felt a pleasant and warm sensation. This neutral land, my God - if only one could be there. To the Austrian border it was 30 km and to the Italian one 80 km. As regards the distances to the Front, we measured the map carefully and arrived at the following distances; the western Front was 350 km away, the eastern about 1,000 and the southern further than 1,000. We were not on any war highway. Even from Burgundy, that was historically in the road of moving armies, we were protected by a sharp corner of Switzerland, the Boden See and from the south by the mighty Alps.

I was really happy, being quite certain that no fighting would reach this little corner. It was Sunday, the fifth of November, 1944.

Next morning I had to leave at 4:30 am, and go to work. It was still dark. In the streets were sleepy and tired people, all going to work for Heim. The factory was outside the town under the 'Black Grat'. By the end of the town there was one big procession of Heim's slaves taking lanes through the meadows and along the railway line. People were walking singly or in groups, all mostly quiet. Some were making loud noises stamping in their wooden shoes. It was getting lighter when we reached the factory. At the right side were the long, low workshops, to the left were the stores and barracks for the 'Russkis'. We passed the gate in a single file, calling out our numbers to the watchman sitting in his guard hut. I, being new, was told to wait. Soon the boss, dressed in grey overalls, came and told me to follow him. The noise in the workshop was deafening. Hammers hitting tin sheets, the screeching of files, whining of drills, some explosions, hissing, wheezing and roaring, all joined into one sound, drilling the eardrums, causing pain. We walked along various workbenches

where people were standing or sitting on the stools. Above some were large signs: "Mark only in soft pencils on dur-aluminium". We entered the next hall. On all sides of the hall were lying wings of planes. They were kept in position on the workbenches by a kind of vice. Many men were working around them with some unknown instruments. On some benches sparks from welding flew, from others came a sound like a revolver shooting into a tin plate. I did not understand anything that they were doing here. I was still stunned by the previous noise. Automatically I followed the boss. The men were glancing at me curiously. At the end of the hall the boss stopped at a bench.

"You will work here," he told me and added, pointing to a man standing at the bench - "he will show you what to do. It is not permitted to leave the workbench," and then he left.

The man looked at me searchingly and I at him. He was a young man of about twenty dressed in dirty overalls. He was working alone at the workbench. He asked me something but I did not understand. He repeated it louder. I thought he was speaking in German but was not certain. Slowly, screaming into each other's ears, we understood each other. He was from Holland. No wonder I could not understand him. It is always very hard to understand a Dutchman when he is speaking German as the languages, although related, have quite different pronunciations. A year and a half ago he was taken from Utrecht and deported for work to Heim. His name was Jan Vaal.

Our talk was interrupted by the approaching boss. When the Dutchman saw him coming he pushed a pneumatic drill attached to a long hose into my hand and told me to drill holes in the marked places of the aluminium sheets. After pressing a button, drilling started with a loud wheezing sound, throwing out small aluminium chips of metal. This was my work in the beginning. Standing on a high bench, I was drilling small holes on the four metre long wings. Hours were passing, my head and ears were buzzing. At last the siren sounded for a meal break. All the noise stopped immediately but I could still hear the echo in my head. I had already forgotten that such quiet could exist. Before I realised what was happening, the hall emptied and I caught up with the last labourers going upstairs where the mess room was located. Everyone took their place at the table, taking from their pockets a spoon and a piece of bread. The girls were bringing plates with soup. A watery, thin soup and a few frozen potatoes was our dinner. The conversation was multi-lingual. One table was occupied by French war prisoners dressed in torn military coats. At the next table were Dutchmen. Germans were sitting separately at a table in the far corner. From one of the tables I heard Polish. Around the table sat a few young girls, a few

youths and an older labourer. I came closer. They greeted me in a friendly manner, making a place at their table. Lunchtime was forty minutes. Again the siren. We washed our spoons and plates with hot water and started to go slowly back to work. The foremen were speeding us up. Compressors were connected, the air hissed noisily, all the sounds came back and the hall was once again full of noise. The boss was sitting behind a glass partition between the two rooms, watching constantly. On the walls were the familiar pictures of a civilian in a large-brimmed hat trying to overhear something, beside him a large yellow question mark.

An office girl came to me in the afternoon. She gave me a large, many-paged brochure and I had to sign a promise not to reveal any secrets, either army or industrial ones. The leaflets dealt with high treason, listing many secrets to be kept, each article finishing with the threat of a death sentence. The hall was patrolled by a fully-armed guard who seemed very bored.

When I finished my reading the Dutchman asked me: "Do you need that pamphlet?"

"No."

"Can you give it to me?"

"Of course. Are you interested in the contents?"

"No, God forbid, and anyway I know it by heart. But it is printed on fine paper. Very suitable to roll cigarettes. We all finished smoking our papers a long time ago. It is very hard to get cigarette paper in Isny."

I asked him - "Why are they going to all this fuss over these ordinary flapping wings - that is not a military secret."

"What, you don't know?"

"What don't I know?"

The Dutchman looked around carefully, leaned towards me and yelled: "The other hall is making V 1." (Secret weapon -guided missile used for bombing London).

"I thought that this factory was making parts for planes only."

"Not at all. They say so only to stop people looking. Don't ever repeat it aloud." He looked around again and, deciding it was safe, continued:

"We are making the flaps for the Junker JU 78 and the other room is making missile wings for the V1."

This way the pamphlet finished in the pockets of the Dutchman and I was told about State secrets.

Hours dragged. When it started to get dark the boss told us to put the blinds down, checking himself if they were tight and not letting light through. Extremely bright lights, so unpleasant to the eyes, were everywhere. Night watchmen with their lanterns hanging from their trouser belts came to check and tighten the blinds some more. It was nearly 6 p.m. I felt quite exhausted. My head was bursting from the non-stop noise and my eyes were smarting from the dust. It was nearly twelve hours since I had started work. We started to put rivets in the openings. The Dutchman gave me a tool which looked like a large revolver, like a 'parabellum' whose barrel was red hot. This 'Eksposienkolbe' as it was called (explosion barrel) was heated through an electric cable. Pressing the red-hot barrel to the rivet heads caused an explosion. The rivets bursting forth noisily were welding the seams of the aluminium sheet. This way the job to the spine of the wings was finished. Later we had to rivet thirty-six ribs to the wings and then pass the flap to another workbench. There the ribs were covered with plates, again some riveting, then grinding and polishing and so on over twenty-five workbenches until it came to the paint shop where numbers and identification marks were given. The work was repeated the whole time all over again. This day the number written was 50317.

At last the thirteenth and last hour was coming nearer. My head was bursting, my legs from a day of standing were hurting and my eyes were sore and watering. We all looked more often at the clock. The first bell was at five minutes to seven. Everyone grabbed brooms as the benches had to be cleaned every day. Some were brushing, the others putting the tools away while the boss was pointing out dirty places. At last the long-awaited siren. Everyone rushed to the doors. It was already quite dark outside. Calling our numbers to the watchman, we left through the gate of the factory. The town was in complete darkness and we had to grope about looking for the way.

Day did not exist for me. We left the house at dark and returned at dark - no sun was shining for us. I felt utterly exhausted and tomorrow would be a repetition of today.

A few weeks passed. The wind became freezing. The cowbells stopped ringing. The phantom of winter was creeping down the snowy Alpine hills. Our room in the attic was very cold. The bucket of water was covered with ice in

the morning and I had to break the ice before we could pour the water into the large dish for our morning wash. The quarter cubic meter (about 100 lbs.) of wood for which I still had the coupons was not available. What should I do? Marushka was coughing more and more. She was getting more restless. At night in her sleep she would jump out of bed and start running, looking for our children and wind up, when colliding with the table, in our small room. I put her back to bed alongside the wall and slept next to her to prevent her jumping out. Neither of us had much sleep. The cold and hunger were depressing. I had to get us at least some warmth in the evenings. I began stealing coal briquettes from the factory, carrying them home in my pockets. Stealing was punishable by death. So what? Death was around the corner anyway. After a hot drink at night, Marushka coughed less and we both had a few hours sleep.

The Eastern Front had still not moved - every day the news was still the same: 'The Front between Bug and Narew is stable - all Soviet attacks are repelled.' I remembered Modlin with its evacuees, its peasants, bundles packed and waiting, the constant fires over Warsaw, the air raids, the heavy shelling. We expected the Front would break any day. More weeks passed. It was now one and a half months since we left Modlin. And again we heard: "From Fuehrer's Headquarters .... all Soviet attacks between Bug and Narew were repelled with heavy losses for the enemy."

In the factory the mood was apathetic. One stopped being interested in the Eastern Front. Only occasionally someone would ask:

"Do you think that the Germans, where you live, would let you listen to the radio?"

"Yes, they would."

"Did you listen yesterday?"

"Yes, I did."

"Something new?"

"Nothing. Blast them. The bloody war seems to go on forever,"

"It'll finish, it will."

"When the S.A. and S.S. will send to the USA. an S.O.S.?"

At home we had only time left to sleep and the toilet in the factory became our recreation room. Here was the centre of the intellectual life of the foreigners employed by Heim. In addition, we were forbidden to meet people in our

homes. Here were the political discussions, social talks and our trading post. We smoked here, although smoking was strictly forbidden. Here our ears got some rest from the terrible noise. Here came those who worked all day outside to get some warmth. Best of all, one could sit down for a while and rest. To sit on the toilet seat was one of the rare pleasures of the day. Even the boss left us alone. The few locked toilets were always occupied and so you had to wait your turn until you could sit down on the comfortable seat like in a club chair. In the back were the pipes of the steam heating. What a blissful state - the legs were resting and one could have a smoke. "Dolce far niente" (pleasant idleness). One did not even pull the trousers down. What for? One was standing for 13 hours daily how could one do without a rest?

Sometimes the boss rushed in. Our smokes were then hidden in our sleeves and we rushed back to the halls. He would be cursing and screaming but those sitting locked in the toilets were safe. They now had the privilege to stop even the foreman as the sign on the door read clearly 'Engaged'.

With difficulty, I was able to count all the nationalities in the factory - there were fourteen. The largest group were the Dutchmen who were mainly young people deported through their employment offices. They lived in barracks and usually stuck together. The next group were the Frenchmen who were civilians and prisoners of war. Their group was adorned by a beautiful young girl from Marseilles who was very much in love with a Dutchman. The Polish group needs some explanation as it had two kinds of people - the Poles with a letter 'P' and the so-called 'Volksdeutsche' who, according to Mr. Rosenberg's theory of race administration, could later on qualify to become true Germans, What an odd anthropological distinction between the foreigner, the non-German and the under-German. Some of them were also called the 'race-people' which annoyed the true Germans from the real 'master-race'. Let Mr. Fabian speak about the 'true race science' of Mr. Rosenberg and his followers

Mr. Fabian was a quiet, timid baker from Lodz. He came under the 'race' and was brought to Isny. Now he was working at the V1. Until then he did not know what honour was bestowed upon him, becoming all of a sudden 'pure of race'. Once in the toilet he told us his story: "I had a small business, a bakery in a village near Lodz. I am a master baker. My wife is the daughter of a farmer. She was a Miss Pietrzak. We lived not badly. Until the day the military police came and screamed - 'OUT!' Just you try to imagine - in twenty minutes we had all left. All the business, furniture, house, everything went to the devil. Only what we grabbed in a hurry was ours. I heard later that my place was given to a Volksdeutsche from Russia. We were taken by force and deported from Lodz.

We were put into a camp that was terribly crowded. Nobody knew what would happen to us all. Life was bad. We finished all our food. After two weeks came a commission with top S.S. men, doctors and educated people - you know, professors. We were all put in a line and they started to divide us into 'P' and 'Race'.

"Crying and screaming started. Everyone was afraid to be put for the 'race' especially the young girls. We heard that those who look pretty belong to the race but who knows, later on they might be sending these girls to the Front for the soldiers, brothels, pardon me. But nobody would listen. We were divided into separate groups and that was the end of it. Those with the letter 'P' were sent immediately to another camp and we were to come under the 'Race'.

I interrupted: "How were you divided?" According to what?"

"On the looks of course. They looked to see if the bones were solid if the face was alright and, in general on the clothing too. Those who were dirty and in rags went under the letter 'P'. To tell you the truth they somehow did not take many into the race. You see none were well dressed because who would dress well for travelling? A few days passed and we were all very frightened. You see, we all knew what to expect with the letter 'P' - Poles but here with this 'Race', that was different. None of us spoke German and we could not find out anything. Everyone was thinking, all right, a race is a race but what do they want from us? Some said that it was a good thing; that we would be given better ration cards for food and clothing. The others said that we were all to be taken into the army because all Germans belong to the race and once we are of pure breed we would have to fight for their country. I am telling you my head was bursting with all this thinking. Then we were all called to the true commission - they even had scientific tools. My God, what they did with us!!! They looked at our teeth like we do with horses. They pawed our anatomy they measured our faces and bones with tools and looked into our eyes. I was told immediately that I have the race but my God, they stopped my wife. You understand they did not want to let her through the race, saying she was not suitable, that her bones and her anatomy are not true. I explained to them that she is the daughter of a good farmer, not a girl born under a fence, but they only say 'No'. I lost my temper. I told them she is my wife, I will not part from my family take me out from the race and put me into 'P'. They talked between themselves and said 'Gut' and granted her the race. They gave us German papers and sent us to Isny. They call us here Volksdeutsche but in reality we are the racial people. We will not change our Polish religion. We are working the same as the 'P' but it is true

that we have better coupons and don't have to live in camps,” concluded Mr. Fabian.

In Isny there were many like Mr. Fabian 'people of the race'. I loved talking with them about the 'race'. I became a lover of the race question, an anthropologist!

During power failures when we had to wait for repairs we could sit down. What a heavenly opportunity for tired feet. I used to sit near someone from the 'race', asking them for their stories. One girl from Lodz who went through the scientific race business in Litzmanstadt as the Germans had renamed Lodz. She was telling me about a song which was born in the First World War and the words were made up now in the race camps called the song the Ballad of the Race:

During a dark night  
The police knocked once at the gate.  
A Polish lass was sleeping here  
And she was quickly taken out.  
She had to go to Arbeitsamt  
And from there to Lakowo.<sup>4</sup>  
And in a short three hours time  
this maiden was of Pure Race.

The Commission of the Third Reich for the Strengthening of Germanism was throwing its nets into far seas, trying to catch some fry among the Slavonic masses. It had to populate its ponds for the future Germanisation of the conquered countries. The all powerful Chancellor Hitler already had these dreams long ago. After taking Sudetenland, Memel-land and other 'lands', he was dreaming about Donau, Dnieper- and Wolga-land. The names of these countries were taken from the rivers and hills and not from the people which populated them. Everywhere were potential Volksdeutsche ready for production according to the science of the Third Reich. The theory of race came into being supported by biological laws justifying the proper selection based on the philosophy of 'be or not to be'. When this myth was dressed up scientifically, according to the need of the twentieth century, the selection came into operation. On top of the hierarchy of the pyramid was HE - the highest, the Untouchable, the Total. He was resting on the shoulders of his Party members and below those were the 'Reichsdeutscher' - citizens with full rights then

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<sup>4</sup> Lakowo the street name where the camps for 'race' were situated

followed the four classes of the Volksdeutsche. The last group consisted of those who could be candidates for the Volksdeutsche who, with time coming, might develop into true Germans, The rest was a mob of slaves and villains, good only for manual labour. Jews and Gypsies had no right to life. They were converted to fertilisers, soap and other useful materials such as stuffing for mattresses made from human hair, lampshades made from human skin.

Coming back to our group at Heims. There was a group of Soviets, numerically next to the Poles. They had to live at the factory and were just the livestock, as the horses were. They were even harnessed to carts to bring wood to the factory. Some of them worked with us. They consisted of different nationalities; Russians, Ukrainers, White Russians and Armenians. The majority of them were young girls and boys deported for labour, the rest were war prisoners allocated to the factory. There was also a small group of Jugoslavs, Belgians, Italians, Estonians and Lithuanians. According to the administration, I belonged to the latter as my only personal document was a Lithuanian passport. I had nothing against it from an opportunistic point of view. As I did not qualify for the 'race' or Volksdeutsche, there was only the letter 'P' left which meant that we had to live in barracks which were dirty, full of lice and even colder than our room. The thought frightened us. Marushka was not well - we suspected tuberculosis and such living would be a death sentence for her. The passport issued in Lithuania saved us. Our small group was generally treated better than the OST. We even had a Swiss man with us. I was never able to discover what made him leave the quiet, neutral, beautiful Switzerland and come here to work for the German Army.

The last were the Germans. They had all the leading positions or worked in the offices. Only a few Germans worked as ordinary labourers. They were a few old men, a couple of dwarfs and a few invalids. The administration personnel was enormous, amounting to twenty per cent of the working force. All those who were bombed out were doing their utmost to be employed by the war Industry as this gave them better living conditions and here they were able to live in considerable peace away from big towns. One was employed for issuing coupons, another one for additional coupons, a third one for checking coupons, and so on. Every German, whatever his position, had at least a few German offsidiers who usually had nothing to do. They hid behind shelves or in dark corners to read love stories from sheer boredom. Every few workbenches had a German controller.

In addition to those mentioned we also had the factory police, hated the most by all labourers. They were like a special Gestapo working for Mr. Heim. Being

all Party Members, the range of their work was extremely wide. Their powers seemed to be unlimited, not only concerning work - they had the last say about the right to life and death for the civilian labourers. They spied and were allowed to beat and torture. They made sure that people stayed at the workbenches, they prevented talk and the forming of groups. They threw us out of the toilets, they were permitted to confiscate our ration cards, they checked the barracks, they searched private rooms. We especially hated one of our 'guardian angels', the 'black' one was a real sadist. He ferreted for his prey. In the darkest corners and nosed about everywhere. The proprietor of the factory could sleep peacefully in his villa on the hill near the forest for he had his henchmen who controlled his workers.

In the beginning of December I was transferred to another workbench. Here worked an old Swabian who had a pleasant face, Mr. Lange. I was to help him. Our job was to rivet the heavy flaps with the pneumatic press machine and to file them down to smoothness. Lange was a friendly mate. He taught me my job, how to do it more easily, and he never pushed the hardest job onto me as he was fully entitled to do, being a German. He had only two faults. He had received a stomach wound at the Russian Front which healed not badly but he constantly spoiled the air and I felt as though I were gassed. As the table was only four metres long, I could not very well avoid the smell. His second fault was his constant adoring talk about Hitler. To him Hitler was the Ultimate God and 'Mein Kampf' was his bible. He believed implicitly, without reservations. It would have been alright if he had not tried to convert me to his beliefs. This non-stop talk amid the putrid smell became a nightmare. Because of the noise in the workshop, he would come near me and scream in my ear, explaining the providential genius of the Fuehrer. His honest face would touch me and from his mouth came the pungent smell of rotting bile. I would grab a tool and go to the other side of the bench but he would follow me, yelling about the genius and his achievements in war strategy. He stopped only with a new spasm of pain, becoming pale and sweating. In those moments I was truly sorry for him. I used to help him to the sick room and, returning, had to work for both of us.

On the 13th of December we heard that the Germans had started a great counter-offensive at the western Front. The German headquarters announced details of the victorious march, how the German Army was able to recapture in a few short days lands which had been previously captured. Goebbels in the paper 'Reich' was speaking about the new reborn power of the German Army. He even recalled the Hannibal losses at Rome's gates when the reborn power

of Rome's legions were able to destroy Carthage. The plutocrats had to leave. London, just like a Carthage of the twentieth century, would lie in ruins.

The polite English gentlemen were thanking Goebbels by radio for his educatory lessons and the suggestive analogy between Hannibal and ... Hitler.

But facts remained facts. It was true that the German Army was advancing in the west, clearing the Siegfried fields.

We became very depressed - we were losing hope in the Allied victory. Goebbels was encouraging his Germans, promising them a Merry Christmas.

Lange was of course very happy and triumphant. Measuring the German advance and calculating something on the wings of the planes, he informed me that by the New Year the German Army would reach the Channel.

At last Christmas came and, with it, two days of rest. The evening was cold and clear, the sky covered with stars. Our room was very cold. The stove, heated only for very short times, could not even melt the ice which covered one wall. When on Christmas Eve the bells were pealing over Isny, sitting in our room a deep sorrow and longing filled us. On the table we had our saved-up food: some bread, a few teaspoonsful of marmalade and a few tablets of saccharine. With whom could we share this evening? Our family was thousands of miles away, our landlady was not friendly. We went to the Guesthouse where the people were also lonely, away from their families. We felt better with them.

Next morning I went with Marushka up into the hills. We were climbing up the Black Grat, now quite white, covered deep with snow. The higher we climbed, the harder it became. On one of the humps of the Grat stood a farmhouse.

The large wooden patio overhanging the cliff was the pride of the farmer. From here one could see the Bodensee from which the Rhine was feeding its stream. Looking down, above the firs one could see the blue of the sea, separated by a line of the Alps from the blue of the sky. In the north the open valley seemed to be without horizons and the earth and sky appeared to join each other. The uneven and hilly scenery changed to gentle slopes which farther down became quite even and smooth, receding from the sky.

The back of the house was hidden from the world by the Black Grat, overgrown with snow-covered firs., We stood at its foot but its towering top was tempting. I decided to try and reach it. Asking the farmer how long it might take, he replied laughingly: "In summer it shouldn't take more than half an hour but I doubt if you could make it in five hours without skis."

I wanted to go but Marushka did not. I went alone. Going along the track near the farm buildings it seemed child's play. The farm buildings finished, a sign for tourists pointed to the left. The going became harder. I was falling up to my knees into the snow. It was not pleasant but quite bearable. I reached a clearing. A bit further away I saw some firs sticking out of the snow. I thought they would be new seedlings and continued. Within seconds I was in snow above my waist. When I tried to free one leg the other fell even deeper. What I took to be seedlings were fir trees about my height. Looking up I could see only tops of trees and understood my mistake, When in Isny the wet snow was falling and melting immediately, here the same snow was cut by wind and frost and built up harder surfaces on which later new snow was packing. When in the meadows of Isny the snow barely reached thirty centimetres, here it was over 11 metres deep. Moving in a slow crawl, using hands and feet, I managed to creep free. An hour later, wet and tired, I returned to the farm without even covering one-fifth of the distance. The farmer was right and I had learned my lesson.

Coming back down the valley it was becoming dark. White smoke was playing about the snow-covered roofs that looked pink in the last sunrays. It was a landscape like paintings on sale at fairs. Nature loves the sweet, cheap showoffs.

After Christmas the factory police became quite persistent that Marushka should start work in the factory. They were yelling that now it was time for work and not for holidays, health reasons or not. No talk helped. We had to think of something as Marushka would certainly not survive any length of time in the factory and its thirteen hours hard work. Marushka heard that the guesthouse, 'The Stag', was looking for a waitress. She applied and was accepted. She got her working card, signed by the employment office. In this way, instead of being a factory worker she became a waitress.

Now we were leading a truly proletarian life. After work I hurried to The Stag for a bowl of soup. Marushka, in white apron, was already serving, carrying plates and large beer mugs. She greeted me with a knowing smile, placing a bowl of soup in front of me. Not for nothing was I the husband of a waitress. Soup could be served without ration cards. After tea, when all the guests had left and the rooms tidied up we returned home. There she would toss her bag on the table and count her tips. She had changed since she began work. In the beginning she would not accept any tips, then only reluctantly, but now she was counting the small change happily.

"Look, Zyg, these two marks I received from the Estonian. He never takes the change due to him. Ten, twelve, fourteen! That is twice as much as you are earning in the factory. Just look what I can do." She was proud and happy, hugging me. When the lights were out and we were nearly falling asleep, I heard her murmuring: "If only foreigners would come to The Stag I would receive probably twenty marks. The Germans are rather careful with tipping. Just a few lousy pfennigs."

There was an extra bonus at her work. When cleaning all the rooms, she carefully gathered all the usable butts of cigarettes and cigars and we had some smokes at home, shredding the tobacco and rolling it in newspapers.

The Allies intensified their air raids over Germany, more towns were bombed. The bombed-out people were fleeing to the hills. The population of Isny increased from day to day. All hotels were overcrowded. The people came not only from nearby Munchen, Nurenberg and Stuttgart, but also from Berlin, Cologne, Koblenz and Essen.

The German counter-offensive, so blown up by Goebbels, started to fade. Although the news from headquarters was still speaking about some hard-to-describe success and about hundreds of airplanes being destroyed on the ground, the number of evacuees kept increasing. Some people started to realise that all this loud talk of the counter-offensive was just hogwash.

The cold January of 1945 arrived. The narrow streets were covered with snow, sometimes reaching the windows. It was impossible to go outside the town without skis. This was quite normal for the Allgau. Near Isny stood a pole with various markings and dates. In 1907 the snow was three metres deep.

One morning, going to work, I looked at the thermometer of the chemist, near the cloister. It was 25 centigrade below freezing point and a cold wind was blowing from the hills, stinging the eyes. People walking to work had their collars up and were clapping their hands together. The group of French war prisoners walking through this snowstorm were a sorry lot, trying to push their heads into the narrow collars of their loose coats like Napoleon's grenadiers returning from Moscow. The first and the last of the prisoners carried a lantern, shining feebly on the ground. Behind them walked a German guard with a machine gun. I passed this sad procession. For the first time I thought with pleasure about the factory. It would at least be warm there.

The day started normally. The people were still warming their hands on the pipes of the heating units after first hanging their mittens and socks on them. The hammering and boring began and the everyday noises filled the workshops.

The wings went from bench to bench, covered with pictures and short aphorisms, full of longing and love sighs. Those wings going, from bench to bench were like an album full of sad literature in many languages. Wala, a young Ukrainian girl from Czerniakow, wearing a red beret, had the most poetic soul. She worked at the bench next to mine. She covered the sheet with long poems - parts were from Russian poets, parts she wrote herself. When the next flap arrived at our bench old Lange, pointing the finger at the writing, asked me if it was in Polish. On the flap, in an uneducated handwriting, was written in Russian:

Goodbye my unwashed Russia  
The land of slaves and farmers  
And you my navy uniforms  
And you my obedient people.

I was astonished by the topic that could equally apply to a farewell by a grandfather as well as by his grandson. I did not know who put it there nor the thought behind it but it sure was the grandson. This day the 'Black' beat up three boys at their benches. Two Poles and a Yugoslav. He also dragged by force a sick Ukrainian girl from her barracks to the workshop. Our mood was gloomy. Luckily, in the evening someone brought news that the Russians had started a great offensive in Poland. The talk was about a large concentration of the army on the Vistula River and a constant shelling by the artillery. Everyone was excited. The news was whispered (shouted) from ear to ear in all languages. Next day the news was even better. There was a breakthrough on the eastern front. Once again we all got interested in war news. This news was partly confirmed by the German Headquarters and the official German Press. Some of our people had the possibility to listen to the news from other countries although listening to the radio of the allies and spreading the news was punishable by death. In spite of this we received, through hidden channels, the news from London, Switzerland and Moscow. The news became distorted by the different translations from one language to another. The Dutchmen told it to the Russians in German, the Russians repeated it in Russian to the Poles and the Poles to the French in German. The communication between the groups was sometimes really funny. The 'international' language was German but the majority could hardly speak it, using a few known slang words learned from the Swabians. If those few known words supported by a sign language were not enough, an interpreter was called, but there was no-one who could speak so many languages fluently. It was done in what we called 'by chain'. I'll give an example. If a Ukrainian wanted to say something to the Frenchman he would

call me. It did not mean that I could speak French. I, in turn, would call an Estonian and translate it to him in German. This Estonia had a friend who could speak French fluently but did not know either Ukrainian or Russian. When the Estonian finished translating the meaning, the Frenchman would turn to the first source and say "Gut, gut, verstanded." Of course there were many combinations, depending who wanted to speak with whom. The ordinary, everyday conversation was quite often transacted without any interpreters. The spreading of news from the Front was not hard at all. Our international language was greatly simplified by calling out names of cities lost by the Germans.

At the end of February, Czeslaw arrived quite unexpectedly in Isny. By chance he met Alma in Dresden and she told him that we were heading for Isny. We were very happy to see him and very anxious to know what had happened to him since we parted in Warsaw. If chance had not intervened, our ways would be the same as his.

After we left Czeslaw, all the evacuees under guard were taken aboard a train. Nobody knew where the train was going. When his train was passing another train going in the opposite direction, for some unknown reason both trains stopped beside each other. Czeslaw and others from his transport started to jump over to the other train. Before the Germans realised what was happening, the train started to move in -the direction of Warsaw, taking some of the evacuees and Czeslaw with it. It was rumoured that the stopping was an organised job. On one of the small stations Czeslaw changed trains and finished in Prushkow where he stayed in hiding for a few months at his friend's place.

After the fall of Warsaw he met some more of his friends. As he had to live and also to earn money, he and his friends decided to organise a fictitious company supposedly supplying goods to the German Army. There were many such companies. They started this business by chance. Going along the streets they saw a death notice of a German, a Mr. Metz. On the bottom of this notice was the name of the printer and his address. They went there and ordered one hundred letterheads with a nice name: 'Johann Metz and Co. - Eisenwarengesellschaft (Metalwork Co.)', including the address of the firm, telephone numbers and bank accounts. The best part was that the head offices were shown in a street in central Warsaw and the agencies in small towns of Poland at the time occupied by the Soviets. The story continued: this firm had now been evacuated and the directors, Czeslaw and his friend, had full authority for transactions. The authority empowerment papers were on beautiful paper, signed by the dead Johann Metz. They then started to go to different offices asking for different travel orders, different official permits to

facilitate their work as, according to their story, they had to complete the evacuation and save their costly goods which were so needed by the army. In order to supply the army, they must start their activities in a new place. One official document, one rubber stamp created the way for others - at last they were able to travel anywhere, even using military vehicles, bringing to Wien and Krakow and the Czech Prague cigarettes and taking from them ladies' wear selling it in different towns. The business was prospering until Prague was taken by the Soviets. After hearing that we were in Isny, Czeslaw wrote a special travel order for his firm dealing in such important goods as metal and came to Isny to see what the prospects were there. This time the document certified that he was dealing in hydraulic brakes.

He showed us all his documents, all duly stamped and certified by high military offices. All, except the first one, fully authentic. It seemed incredible that all this business was just the work of imagination.

He spent a few days with us. Before leaving, he went to the 'Burgermeister' asking him to prepare storage place for his brakes and of course received additional coupons for food and cigarettes as the Burgermeister was quite impressed with this important businessman.

He returned to his headquarters to continue his business of Johann Metz and Co.

The news from the Front was fabulous - the tempo of the Soviet offensive was incredible.

When the Soviet Army stopped on the line of Odra, encircling the German armies in East Prussia, we were certain that the long-awaited finish of the war was near. The mood in the factory was a happy one. Nobody hid his or her happiness. The labourers talked animatedly, pounding each other on the shoulders.

This war news had a shattering effect on the Germans. The average locals, the bombed-out, the Party members had been brainwashed for a long time. Through speeches, Press and radio they were made to believe in the mighty Thousand Year Reich, in their Fuehrer who could never err, confirmed by all the war propaganda. They were stunned when they learned that the enemy crossed the frontiers of their own country, their Heimat, that Oberslesia was taken, that Pomerania was attacked, that Saxoni was threatened, that their own citizens were fleeing in panic from East and West Prussia. That the Russians who should have been crushed long ago were rushing now with impetus towards Berlin.

Of course it was hard for an average German to comprehend what was happening but he had to understand as even his own government could not hide any more the seriousness of their situation. The papers were writing 'Our country is in danger.' Goebbels coined a new slogan: "There is now no boundary between the country and the Front. The Front is our country and the country is our Front. Every German is now a soldier. 'Volkssturm' go ahead."

A great campaign started in Allgau for the 'Volkssturm'. To the last the human war material was squeezed out, from the farmers, the factories. The old and very young, the deaf and cripples, the war invalids who could walk, were organised in battalions of the 'Volkssturm'. Our chief boss appealed to all the Volksdeutsche, the 'race people' and other Germans to join voluntarily but his appeal was a total failure. Only a few came forward to join the Battalions. Heim still tried. He asked the people, singly, to his office; he explained and persuaded and ... got three more volunteers. Where the pressure was not great enough, the human self-protection won.

"Why should I join a business which is going bankrupt?" they were saying amongst themselves. "Why should I risk my skin? Why should I fight? We are not even true Germans."

Many of those who refused were sent to dig trenches near the Rhine which was being bombed by the English.

One day a party of German airmen arrived at the factory. They were pilots and mechanics. To our astonishment they were put to work on the production line just like ordinary labourers. They were all young men from the Soviet front. To our questions as to what they were doing here, they explained laughingly: "All our planes are 'kaput' so we came to help build new ones but before we finish all Germany will be 'kaput!' They did not hide their opinions. They did not care about anything. They were laughing at the 'Volkssturm', they could not care less about the 'race' and they quarrelled with the foremen who did not know how to treat the airmen. They hated the Party members and were rude to the work police. This mood started to infect the labourers. The production, never high, fell markedly and people were forming groups around the benches, talking. Although they returned to their workbenches on arrival of the foremen, they did it very slowly. The bosses tried to avoid real quarrels with the labourers - they looked the other way when something which was forbidden was being done. Some even tried to become friendly with the foreigners. Only one Party Member, Mr. Altenbach, did not change; he remained as he was before, a mad dog ready to bite.

The boss valued him and soon he became the boss' right hand because he could hold a labourer with his left hand and hit him strongly in the face with his right. We were afraid of him, which increased his authority. I must admit he was the only one left who tried to hold the factory together by his cruel power. Luckily he was not in our department. He was the tyrant in the wood shop where the majority of Frenchmen were working. One day the 'Black' once again dragged a sick Ukrainian girl to the workbench, pushing her hard. It was the same girl he had dragged out the previous time. She had tuberculosis. Pale and weak, she started to cry, and our first riot started. We told him that if he kept her at the bench we would all stop work, we were successful. After a short talk with his boss, he let her go back.

In the evening the foreman came to me telling me to follow him to the big boss. I was worried - what could Heim want from me? He did not even know me. From behind the desk rose the fat Heim. I had never met anyone so resembling the Soviet caricature of the typical capitalist. He was exactly like an old picture from an old forgotten Bolshevik newspaper: pink face, reddish blond hair, a big belly, small fat fingers, a treble chin, a red thick neck and a cigar in his mouth.

He rose heavily from behind the desk, pointing to us to sit down in low, comfortable chairs. Whew we were seated, he took from the cabinet a bottle of brandy and three glasses. He filled them, took a packet of cigarettes and, offering them to us, sat down heavily, all in complete silence. Raising his glass, he indicated that we were to join him. The foreman followed his example. I felt confused with all this. What would he ask of me? However I emptied my glass. Heim immediately refilled the glasses and, lighting his cigar, said:

"You are friendly with the family Naumow?"

"To a certain extent, only," I answered carefully, "as I have only met them here in the factory, helping once to interpret. We sometimes speak at the mess table."

"Have you visited them at the barracks?"

"A few times as engineer Naumow loves playing chess and so do I."

"Do you speak Russian?"

"Yes."

"Is Mrs. Naumow a Russian or a Ukrainian?"

"I think she is a Russian from Smolenks."

"Is Mrs. Naumow often in the barracks of the Ukrainians?"

"I don't know as I don't live there."

"Do you know that Mrs. Naumow is agitating the Ukrainians and Russians to sabotage my factory?" He looked searchingly at me.

"No," I replied immediately and thought to myself, is that where it hurts you?

Inhaling deeply and playing with his fat fingers along the table, he asked me:

"Did you volunteer to come to Germany?"

"No."

"After the end of the war do you intend to go back to your country?"

"Yes."

Heim again looked at me searchingly. Our eyes met. This was the moment when he gave up trying to enlist me as his factory informer. He got up and said, raising his voice:

"I am warning you, if there is an act of sabotage or a riot like today in which you were also active, I will have to inform the proper authorities. Who they take from here will depend entirely on me. I know my people and today I got to know you. You do understand?"

"Entirely."

"Don't forget it and also inform the Naumow family." He finished speaking, crushed his cigar in the ashtray, full of passion. With his finger he gave the sign to the foreman to take me away. This was my first and last talk with Heim.

Something wrong was happening to the electrical power in our district. 'Gaulieter' (county boss) issued many orders restricting the use of electric power. Thanks to him our working day was shortened from 13 to 11 hours. We had to stop work when it got too dark. But this did not last long either. One day all the power stopped. Everything stopped - the compressors, the pneumatic drills - without electricity the factory was dead. The blessed silence: Soon news came that the factory would be closed as the power was cut for "an indefinite period." All the labourers were happy.

We were allowed to go home earlier. All women except Russians, Ukrainians and Poles with the letter 'P' received leave until further notice. All men, including 'OST' labourers, were told to report for work next morning. Next

morning we were divided into many labour gangs for various jobs. The management was determined to keep us working so that we would not eat the German bread while idle. The women had to clean the yard and roofs of snow whilst older women sorted rivets. The Dutchmen were sent into the forest to cut wood, the Frenchmen were cleaning all metal parts of rust, a few Soviets and I were sent to the cabinetmakers to make new shelves for the stores. Now for a change I became a cabinetmaker. The worst part of this assignment was that our boss was the hated Altman whom I mentioned before. Already on the first day he had screamed at me when I was lying on a shelf although I was hammering in nails. He did not like my comfortable position. Red in the face, his hand waving madly, he started screaming at me. I thought he would hit me on the head with a tool but luckily my head was hard to reach, being pressed deep between two shelves. It ended with me only listening to his most vulgar swearing, half of which I could not understand anyway as it was delivered in Swabian slang. From that day on he picked on me constantly. Everything I did was wrong. He might have been right because, as a solicitor by profession, I was not much good as a cabinetmaker. But he was also sadistic. Once, after the bells had sounded and we were all ready to go home, he kept me back, making me clean the hall. I began to hate him in earnest. I don't know how it would have finished but new orders were issued. The power was restored under the condition that we would work at night only. I returned to my old bench.

The working hours were now from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. At 1 a.m. we had twenty minutes break. For the first few days it was hard to fight sleep. About two in the morning after eating the soup, I simply slept standing at the workbench. Fighting to stay awake in spite of the hellish noise in the hall and the patrolling foreman, the mind became befuddled and a mental blackout occurred. The heavy press tool fell out of my hands landing on my toes. This woke me up, gasping with pain. It was worse when this state of sleepy paralysis came to my knees because then, as if cut down, I fell to the floor amongst the laughter of my mates. To my inner discomfort, I did not notice these states happening to my mates. Something was probably wrong with me. With time our situation improved, thanks mainly to the recurring air raids.

The Americans became more interested in Wuertenberg and Bavaria, the region of south-west Germany. When the planes were proceeding in our direction, the factory was advised by phone. All lights had to be switched off and we could stop work. In seconds all tools were thrown down and, using our coats as pillows, we lay down. Sometimes we were lucky and the alert lasted two hours but mostly it was less than half an hour. It happened sometimes that

the squadrons were flying over Isny in which case we were told to leave the factory. We had to walk through corridors built in a zigzag fashion over half a kilometre to a large shelter built under the forest. This shelter had been built in case the factory had to be moved underground. We walked around the forest and it usually took a long time before we were back at the workbench. I did not like these 'Full Alerts' as we had to carry the more valuable equipment to the shelter. My duty was to carry a large typewriter in a wooden box through the narrow, muddy passage. I definitely preferred to sleep in the factory.

One day the German newspapers announced that a Canadian tank division was moving towards the Rhine. The headquarters added: "No Canadian or English would ever cross the Rhine. The efficient German Command had foreseen the enemy intentions and through the December offensive, by attacking from the east and the west, thwarted their plans. The Soviet attack on the River Oder was stopped and pushed back thanks to the attitude of the German people.

"We will win. The disaster of the year 1918 will never be repeated," wrote Mr. Goebbels. "Germany of 1945 is a monolith under the leadership of the Fuehrer, a man of genius. "What the Soviets received near the Oder River, the Anglo-Saxons would receive at the River Rhine. Neither tanks nor airplanes, but the spirit of the soldier will have the final victory."

In the meantime the 'soulless' tanks were crushing the bunkers along the Siegfried Line. The activities of the Allies were growing in intensity. Army after army was pushing forward, wedging in, causing breaches in the defence lines. The German Army was disintegrating along the Rhine as was the 'monolithic national spirit' behind the lines. Many V.I.P.'s and builders of the great Reich began to look to their own survival. Only Goebbels was still undaunted.

The little doctor (Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda) was still promising great things. He promised a secret weapon which was so powerful that it would decide the outcome of the war, he spoke about glories, he tried to make bad blood between the allies, he wrote articles to different papers, he made speeches in public and on the radio. He had a lot to do as he was the mouthpiece for all the others. The Fuehrer was no longer heard. Goering had stopped talking a long time ago. Hess had disappeared in disgrace, Dietman was ill and the others tried to forget what they had said previously.

It was not good in Germany, there seemed to be no safe hiding places left. Those who were not threatened by the approaching Front were threatened in

the towns by falling bombs. The huge Allied air raids destroyed cities, killing thousands. Many cities were already in ruins - Hamburg, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, Munich, Stuttgart, Ulm and many, many others.

One day we received a letter from Alma.

*"I am still alive although the town I live in is already dead. What can I write about it? It was too commonplace to be tragic. Out of the blue came thousands of tons of metal cases filled with dynamite and something unknown and into the sky rose clouds of dusty debris, bricks and flames. There remained only ruins under which were people, either crushed or burned. The survivors left the ruins of the town. I am at present in Halle. I don't know why nor for what reason I exist. Maybe just to become a victim during future air raids.*

*"People invent nice games, don't they? And this is humanity: I feel ashamed to be a human.*

*Your bombed-out - Alma.*

*P. S. I am sorry only for the books."*

Dresden was finished too. I remembered the beautiful, charming Dresden, its Zwinger, opera, castle and avenues along the Elbe River. Now 'there were left only ruins and stumps. 'Sic transit gloria mundi' (so passes away earthly glory).

March came. The sunshine became stronger, warming the earth. The meadows started to show some green, the small rivers flowed rapidly. The cows in the barns were mooing longingly. It was a promise of Spring.

Although I was tired after a whole night's work, I did not want to miss the sun and the awakening Spring. I got up during the day and, crossing the town, went to a barn behind which were some cement pipes. I used to lie on them, bathe in the sun and look at the snow-covered Alps. During my night work, with eyes smarting from the very bright light, I would long for those moments.

One day when I was dozing peacefully on my cement pipes I was woken up by some loud, peculiar noise. Lifting my head, I saw from the direction of the forest a group of boys running. They were rushing straight towards the barn. Occasionally they would drop to the ground throwing wooden grenades, crawling on the meadow, running crouched over. Behind them, German officers came from the forest watching the boys through field glasses. The boys were in the uniform of Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth). Puffing and sweating, the

first reached the barn with a triumphant yell. The barn including me, was probably the aim of the exercise of attack. When the majority were near the barn, a bugle called off the war. The youngest were the last to arrive at the barn, covered with dirt, puffing and red in the face. The youngest looked no more than nine years old. Two were carrying a wooden gun of actual size, the third carried the ammunition box and one of his shoes which he had probably lost during the attack., Shortly the three officers arrived. Two were on crutches as each had a leg missing above the knee, the third one had the Iron Cross on his chest and an empty sleeve - the whole arm was missing. They were the instructors whom Hitler had chosen as tutors for young boys to teach them how best to kill people. The boys were listening attentively, mindful of their teachers missing limbs. Assembly and withdrawal were sounded by four buglers. The boys went proudly, in a military file. They could be proud as they were considered worthy to fight soon at the Front. They were like soldiers. The Fuehrer himself took the parade of their Hitler Youth delegation which was now already fighting at the Front.

They heard through the radio how, in the Fuehrer's Headquarters, the Fuehrer accepted them as true soldiers. Some had even received the Iron Cross and one of their comrades, a boy of ten, received from the Fuehrer himself a golden cigarette case. The Fuehrer loved them all. They were honoured to be able to give their blood to the last drop for the Fuehrer himself and the NDSAP. (Nationale Deutsche Socialitische Arbeits Partei) (National German Socialistic Labour Party)

Everyone could read it in the newspapers. Every day there were obituary columns marked with black crosses, headed by beautiful words: ... 'They died for the Fuehrer, Volk and Vaterland'.

The boys were entering the town now singing - 'Unter der Lanterne' (Lili Marlene). Behind them followed the officers on crutches.

One day many dusty buses and trucks arrived in Isny, full of people and luggage. They must have been running away from the approaching Front. On some signs were visible between cracked dirt: 'Town administration -Vienna', a red one parked near the Mayor's office had the name 'Melba' and below it 'Chocolate Berlin'. Many private dusty cars around hotels and guesthouses contained men in dusty and crumpled civilian clothes, most with Party member medals pinned to their collars.

As usual I had my dinner, a bowl of soup, at The Stag. Marushka was rushing about an overcrowded room with scissors, cutting the various ration cards when

taking orders. Mostly she had to serve eighty people or more. The heavy beer glasses were bringing her to near exhaustion, especially after the morning cleaning of hotel rooms. Rucksacks lay on benches and, under the tables, leather suitcases. Men were spreading maps on the tables, maps of the hilly Allgau, their fingers tracing the hills. Between these hills were faint lines crossing the nearby Swiss border. No music was heard from the radio - only 'Luftanmeldungen' (air reports). The latest was:

"Large formations of enemy planes are proceeding in a south-easterly direction ... stay tuned in ... attention, attention, the aforementioned formations are 20 km from Augsburg. Augsburg ... Augsburg...! You now have a full air alert, all to go to the shelters." There was no sound in the dining room except the loudspeaker. Everyone was listening. The speaker continued: "Some bombers are bombing the southern district of Augsburg; the rest have passed, over the town flying to the east."

About eight in the evening before going to work I used to listen to the radio in the guest house. Most of the guests, concerned for their home towns, would sit near the speaker with maps in front of them to follow the latest communiqués from German headquarters. Nobody doubted now that Germany had lost the war.

The Allied armies were pushing deep into the Reich behind the Rhine, damaging the main railway junction. Cologne, Frankfurt-on-Main, Wuerzenburg and Kassel were already taken. The speaker announced that two German officers had been shot after the army found them guilty of neglect - they had not destroyed a bridge near Ramagen. This allowed the allies to force their way over the Rhine. The Fuehrer's headquarters were looking for the scapegoats. Eisenhower's correspondents announced that the best way to cross a river was over an undamaged bridge.

The announcement tried to avoid mentioning towns. They usually spoke in general geographical terms, mentioning long rivers along the Front or some threatened province. Therefore the news bulletins dwelt for days on heroic battles in the Ruhr which stopped the enemy. But in the factory we knew better. We were able to organise, quite nicely, access to other than German news. A young Yugoslav, a lawyer from Lumblan, had a hidden receiver for listening to the Swiss radio. We all appreciated this neutral news. This Yugoslav was a work controller which made his job in distributing the news much easier. Walking along the workbenches he would draw on the wings the latest positions of heavy fighting. Through him we learned that the heroic fighters in the Ruhr

were doomed as the Allied forces had already completely encircled the German divisions and the first Allied armoured divisions were approaching Hanover.

The factory ran out of material for work. Some workbenches stood empty. The finished flaps were not taken by anyone. They were stored everywhere, even in the yard under the open sky. One day a full transport of wings was returned to the factory. All the wings were full of holes - some were twisted. The transport had been caught in an air raid before reaching its destination. We were told to patch the holes with pieces of tin. We all knew that this job was senseless but we were held at the workshops and had to work.

Even my Lange became quiet and depressed but never for long. The night before he had read an article about the 'Wehrwolf' (German partisans) and the 'Panzerfaust' (anti-tank gun). Now he was again of good hope, speaking about the 'Endsieg' (final victory).

Previously one had to be quiet and listen to Lange but now people started to joke, especially the Swiss labourer who loved joking. Now he came over to Lange, listened attentively, using a glass from a watch as a monocle. Suddenly he interrupted:

"Do you know what the English are calling the Panzerfaust?"

"What else can they call it?" asked Lange.

"They call it the Eight Mark and Twenty Pfennig Suicide Apparatus." The others started to laugh. Lange was confused. A pity he was a good man, but so stupid.

During meal break the rumour had it that the Gauleiter (Governor) had left Stuttgart and was living in Jaegerdorf, a small village near Isny. This was also repeated in the whole town. It was impossible to check. The rumours started to become more and more fantastic and unbelievable that Hitler and all his staff were now in Allgau, the American paratroops had landed in Ulm, and many more. One thing was typical of these rumours; they usually appeared shortly before some catastrophe.

Easter came. The Resurrection Day, a day of peace and happy chiming bells, was a bad day for the people of Isny. The bells were ringing, but for a different reason - "The town is burning:" - the scream called the people to the streets.

Under cover of night, planes had come over Isny. People were sleeping, nobody had kept watch at the sirens. People were woken up suddenly by the noise of explosions. Rushing to the windows, they could see the so-called

'Lamps' (parachute fires) hanging above the town, the planes circling or diving low over the roofs. The planes, after dropping mainly incendiary bombs, disappeared back into the darkness. The bells began to ring the alarm, the sirens to wail and people rushed out to help fight the fires. The phosphorous was spreading from roofs and houses to the streets very quickly; there was no time to save all buildings. Three houses were already burning very brightly. Everyone was trying to help save goods and animals, rushing with hoses and buckets to keep the fires down. The best were the young Dutchmen. Not thinking about themselves, they were helping those most in need. They started the motor pump just in time as the fires started to spread to the neighbouring properties. The houses were usually adjoining each other in this old town. Nobody slept that night; everyone was watching lest all the town was consumed by spreading fires. The towers, also scorched, were still ringing their bells.

A pale dawn reached the town behind the hills. The day of Resurrection.

The houses were still smouldering. The fire was abating. People heaved a sigh of relief.

Next morning, written by an unknown hand, the following sentence appeared on the walls of the charred houses:

“Give me ten years and you will not recognise Germany”

Adolf Hitler 29.1.1935

(Famous words, once proclaimed by Hitler).

From this day on, the Isny people had no peace. The enemy bombers were appearing more often. The siren wailed a few times a day and sometimes during the night.

People would rush to the nearby fields or into the forest as the town had no proper shelter. One Sunday, sitting under a tree in the field, we looked in awe at a large formation of flying fortresses. Hundreds of planes covered the sky. In many key formations they were flying to the north, in all the Isny valley -the air was vibrating. We were sitting quite unprotected on the lawn like flies on a tablecloth but we were quite sure that these bombs were not meant for us. We were simply too small for this load. We looked, full of dread and respect, at this army of monster metal birds.

Somebody counted - 1,200 planes.

"Oh, our poor Germany:" sighed a priest sitting at the River Arg. He began to say prayers for those who shortly would perish amongst the crumbling walls of the remaining German towns. Only a streaky white trail remained behind the departing planes.

"No capitulation," announced the papers that day. The Fuehrer had issued orders that each town, village and hamlet had to fight to the last drop of blood. "There are no open towns," said the Fuehrer. "The white rag is only a sign of treason. Death to all who try to negotiate with the enemy."

Once more a few mayors disappeared as they fled to the hills and forests.

Came the 74th issue of ration cards. The same figures were still printed but the amount available was cut down by fifty per cent.

On April the 20th the town started to build barriers against enemy tanks. The barriers were erected at the gates of the township and on the roads leading to the town. Big poles were rammed into the streets and old beams placed crosswise between them. The old town gates reminded me of medieval days during the time of siege.

Next day the radio announced the death of Roosevelt, the President of the United States.

"The biggest warmonger is dead," announced the Goebbels' papers. "That same Providence which saved our Fuehrer in a miraculous way during the-attempt on his life has now, during our critical moments, removed our worst enemy."

It was the last try of the 'Little Doctor' at tempting God and lying to his people.

The American tank divisions were at the gates of Berlin. Leipzig was being shelled by the Soviets. The East and the West were nearly close enough to shake hands.

The Luftwaffe ceased to exist as did the V.1 and V.2 also Heim's factory ground to a halt. The workshops were quiet, the wings gathering dust. The factory was closed and we were sent to dig peat out of the bog.

All the carefully organised administration started to crumble. The work police disappeared somewhere and the worst foremen were removed. Mr. Heim was in a panic, hiding all that he had acquired during the war. The work on the

bog did not last long. The labourers began to disappear. When the first few fled, the others started to follow. Within a few days only the boss and a few frightened men were left. This was the end of our work for the army industry of the Third Reich.

Once again I was a free man about whom nobody cared, whose time was his own.

It was good to walk along the streets among people who were not in a hurry, going nowhere. Peacefully, as a passive foreigner, I was awaiting new developments. My only occupation was to pick up cigar and cigarette butts from the street as it was impossible to buy smokes. Cleaning the tobacco, I gathered it into a small tin box. It was something of a sport. Sometimes from a passing car as much as half of a burned cigarette would fly out and I had to be quick as there were many in my trade. Having secured a smoke, I would sit near the cloister pharmacy, inhaling deeply. Here were two main roads on which the evacuees trudged along. Some went to Lindau near the Swiss border, the others to Immerstadt in the Tyrol. Here the VIP's chose their ways of escape - some looking for shelter in Switzerland, others in the hills. The bigwigs went by cars loaded with leather suitcases and small fry went in trucks or sometimes by farmers' carts and sometimes even walking behind carts pulled by bullocks. Sweating faces, dirty clothes, backs bent under the load. A picture so well known to us. First us - the Poles, then French and others, and now you. The German people. A scene from the past but with another cast. I remembered Krzemienice again, the highway of the year 1940. Was it any different on the bridges of the Loire? Near Dunkirk? In the hilly Croatia? On highways of Hungary, Rumania or Greece? On the ways from Moscow to the far east of Kazan?

Ebbing and flowing on the foaming waves of an ocean of human hatred. The wanderings of nations over lost lands, over tracks of human stupidity, revenge, greediness and fright! We all had to go along these tracks - the conqueror as well as the conquered.

Today, on this track of damnation, passed the vanquished conquerors.

## **BELLUM VOBISCUM**

We were going to Bregenz! We were told it was possible to buy cigarettes there on the ration cards. I was free anyway and Marushka had a free day

coming to her. It was a beautiful April morning. After walking for four hours along a crude asphalt road, we turned into the woods for a short cut. After a few more hours going uphill through winding lanes, we reached the top of the Pfender hill. The forest ended and before us spread a breathtaking view.

The bluish snow-covered profiles of the Swiss Alps seemed to support the sky. On the far horizons, the different shaped hills looked like clouds. Between them, lower down, were summits of lesser hills, snow white, slowly merging the green hills with the water of the Bodensee. On the green hills were white Swiss houses and villas and castle towers shooting up high. Below us, nestling in the valley, was a town. Church steeples, sloping roofs of houses and stone breakwaters lapped by waves all joined closely together. This was Lindau, a town inside the sea.

The Germans had a saying:

Lindau liegt im Bodensee Wer nicht glaubt Geh hin and see.

(Lindau is in the Bodensee. Who does not believe Go there and see.)

We started to descend the steep hill by a serpentine track through cliffs overgrown by moss, sometimes covered with rushing water. When we came down into the valley the grass was quite green, the fruit trees covered with flowers. The fresh wind tossed the apple blossoms over the lawn. Here was full Spring. We were amazed as this valley was barely 200 metres lower than Isny and such a change: Within six or so hours we had passed from the end of winter into full flowering Spring. Above us was still winter. We, people from such countries as Poland and Lithuania, felt we were in a fairy tale. The streets of Bregenz were swarming with evacuees. The shops were crowded and we were only able to buy a few packets of cigarettes. Only ten cigarettes per person were sold in each shop. We took a train and went to Lindau, along the Bodensee.

I wanted to light a cigarette and, to my great astonishment, saw the sign "Non Smokers" in the Lithuanian language. A Lithuanian car - perhaps I had even travelled in the same car long ago, and now here. My God, everything seemed to be topsy-turvy in this world, not only people. Nothing was for sale in Lindau except earthen ashtrays costing one mark. The beer house served water instead of beer. It was getting dark. It was impossible to walk back home. The train back to Isny was leaving at four in the morning. We had to stay at the station, as there was no hope of getting a room in any of the overcrowded hotels.

It was already dark and no lights were showing in the town. Coming towards the embankment we saw on the other side of the sea many lights which looked like twinkling stars. The lights were on the hills, along the embankment and

some climbed high towards the sky. It was Switzerland, the lucky country which did not have to shut the light out of its cities.

Groping our way through the town, we came to the station which was in complete darkness. There was no space in the waiting room; in passages and in the hall people were sleeping on the floor. We bedded down under the handrails beside the ticket window.

During the night we were woken up by the loudspeaker: "Attention: Attention: In a few minutes there will be an inspection of documents. Nobody is allowed to leave the station. The station is surrounded by police. Please have your identification documents ready." The doors burst open and in came many S.S. men and military police. The checking began. We were asked in detail why we were here although we had a travel permit. The check was very detailed and lasted over an hour. In the end quite a large crowd was arrested and the rest ordered to the platform to board the train. The waiting was not pleasant. None of us liked to spend time on stations or in stationary trains as they were very often bombed or shelled. However, we had no trouble and arrived in Isny without incident. In the meantime Isny had changed. It had become a 'Hospital Town'. A flag, with the markings of the Red Cross, was waving from the town hall tower. On the roofs of the schools were painted large red crosses on a white background. To Isny were brought over one thousand wounded who were put in the school buildings. In the streets were soldiers from various divisions - most were on crutches, some were heavily bandaged, some were blind. They all looked very thin and apathetic. They were being carried from town to town as the Front approached. It was so distressing to look at these young people, the cannon fodder. The crippled were leading the blind, those without hands were fed by their comrades who only had stumps for legs. I felt greatly distressed looking at two young officers in the guest house 'Under the Sun'. I was drinking beer when these two arrived. Leaning on each other in their tragic condition – one was from the marines, the other from the air force. The young marine had dark glasses and a yellow armband with three black dots. His dark glasses hid his empty eye sockets. He was supporting himself on a stick as his leg was bending unnaturally and his knee was damaged but he had two good arms. With one arm he was holding one of the empty sleeves of the pilot who had no hands but had two good eyes. The armless was helping the blind and the blind provided help with his hands. They needed each other to live among people. Those poor unhappy boys without limbs and with ragged bodies. I left with a heavy heart, thinking that all over the world were many like these two.

On the sooty, ruined wall only part of the writing remained. Someone had tried to wash it all off. Only part of the famous sentence uttered by Hitler was still readable .. " and you will not recognise Germany .... 1 ... 1935.

19th April and the Fuehrer's Headquarters announced: "The battle for Berlin has begun."

Next day was the Fuehrer's birthday. Most of the inhabitants fled to the forests as a rumour was spreading that the Americans would bomb all towns not as yet damaged to celebrate his birthday.

At last our turn came - the Front was coming nearer to us. When in most of Germany the fanfares of victory were sounding, when the battle for Berlin was nearly over, we were still in a blind corner, hidden from the west by hard-to-manage hills of the Black Grät. The French Army which operated in our district bypassed the difficult corner from the south and went towards Neckar, breaking the German resistance in the south.

It happened on 21st April. Pushing their divisions into the open breach, they quickly took Tuebingen, going towards Sigmaringen, and suddenly they were only 80 km away from Isny.

Allgau sounded the alarm. The 'Volkssturm' was ordered to patrol the roads and the inhabitants were ordered to build more anti-tank barricades.

The Mayor ordered all goods in the shops to be sold without ration cards. It came at the right moment as far as we were concerned as Marushka had started to use medicine for cooking. Frozen potatoes she cooked in cod liver oil which was given to her by the chemist on a prescription and she flavoured the water with Sedobrel as there was no Maggi sauce left. The meals could be called medicinal but tasted horrible.

Like others, we rushed to the queues in front of the shops. Even sirens did not frighten the hungry population. I was lucky to be able to get butter and cheese. Triumphant I put on our small table a large chunk of Swiss cheese the size of one quarter of a wheel. Never in my life had I had so much cheese on the table. It was a feast not to be forgotten. We cut the cheese in large chunks, spread plenty of butter on top and gobbled while looking at all the cheese still on the table. Little droplets were oozing through the holes of the lovely yellow cheese. Marushka, as always, started to calculate. According to her, compared with the monthly cheese rations, we had in front of us enough for TEN years as the ration was 125 gr. We looked at the cheese respectfully. After a few days the shops of Isny still had plenty of cheese to sell without coupons. But

everyone had bought enough cheese to last a long time and one also became satiated on cheese. Not for nothing did we live in the cheese country. You could pick and choose between all the Swiss varieties: Emmentaler, Camembert, soft and hard ones, in different packagings, in different tastes. The soldiers were buying whole wheels, bowling them along the street to their cars. At last we all had a chance to spend the money saved which we had accumulated during the ration restrictions.

The dairies became empty of people for now we were buying clothing and fabrics.

When the French were near Bodensee and the shelling could be heard in the Isny valley, Isny opened its army stores for the civilians. The stores were packed with uniforms of the NSKK (National-social Corps of Motorised Vehicles). The men from the 'Volkssturm' were tossing out brand new uniforms of the Party members. Black trousers, brown shirts and grey army blankets. Just by chance, opposite this store was the town hall where big piles of used clothing, were waiting for distribution. This used clothing was gathered, not always given voluntarily by the population, by the same Volkssturm to help the army supplies. Nobody even dared to offer them; everyone would have just laughed because new clothing was now available in plenty.

In all this bustle some soldiers were walking singly along the streets. Many of them had no arms and carried only their meagre belongings on their backs. Sometimes they went in groups behind a cart, holding on to its sides. Among them were sometimes the dark Asiatic faces from the Vlassov Army and many Austrians who were returning to their own country. I even saw a few Hindus in the uniforms of the German Army with white turbans on their heads. They were looking for some sheltered place against the approaching Front.

A rumour was spreading through Isny that the French Colonial armies were coming towards us. In fearful tones it was said that some were quite black Negroes, that some were Senegalese who would rape all white women. People became frightened. When London announced that the Americans had reached the Danube on a stretch of 60 km, people heaved a sigh of relief. Maybe they would come first? The Americans were welcome; they were not from dark, unknown Africa.

As the Front came nearer, sirens and alerts became very frequent. Marushka became very nervous again. Her nerves started to break - she could not stand it any longer. One day we were standing in a queue near the station. Suddenly, without warning from the sirens, planes appeared over the town. The planes

began diving, shooting from machine guns. We hid in the entrance of the house under some staircases. The planes were shooting quite undisturbed along the streets, through the houses, along the road.

Marushka gave me an ultimatum.

Next morning we left Isny, going into the hills. Marushka, with her glasses on, watched the sky just like before while I pushed a handcart with all our belongings. We turned into a side lane behind the barn and suddenly saw a group of Volkssturm men sitting on chairs behind the barn. Beside them were their rifles. Marushka got flustered on seeing them. However one old man turned to her with a smile - "You go ahead with your little cart. We are here to stop only the tanks." He certainly had a sense of humour.

Marushka, not frightened any more, sat down and asked: "Are you from the Volkssturm?" (Nation's storming division).

"No, we are Volkstumm," (nation's stupid men), the farmer replied to the laughter of the others. "Look," he continued, waving his fist, "this is our 'Panzer Faust' but really we don't need any Panzerfaust. We are here just watching so that no stupid clot starts shooting at the tanks in our district. If some moron starts shooting, the tanks will open fire and all our goods and farms will be ruined in the last minutes of war. We are trying to prevent it. We are not that stupid," he finished, smiling knowingly at his comrades. We left the highway behind, going towards the hills. In the evening we were allowed to sleep in the best room of a farmer's house after giving him a piece of material. We thought we might wait there until the French Army came. We hoped it would not last more than a couple of days. The farmers had a wireless and let us listen to the London station. Here we learned about the grand opening of the San Francisco Conference. The news from the front - Ulm was taken, the French tanks were near Ravensburg and Friedrichshaven. That meant that the French were encircling us and were only 57 km away.

At night two soldiers knocked at the door asking for a place for the night. The farmer let them in.

Next morning American planes were shooting from machine guns at everything that moved on the highway. Sitting safely under a tree in the forest we observed their manoeuvres. They were just like hungry vultures looking for prey. On the road near us a truck from Isny dairy was burning. The front of the car was in flames and the container, full of holes, was spraying the milk onto the road. From our vantage point we saw, how six planes were diving over Isny. First they circled the town, then came in quite low over the roofs.

Marushka was holding my hand, looking nervously at the planes. "You see how good it was that we left Isny See, some thing is burning." It was true. When the planes left, smoke was over the town.

After an early tea, when it became darker I went to Isny. One of the hotels had burned down. Many windows were broken and some people were wounded. The town expected the French by the next day. The rumours were that the tanks were already in Wangen, our next biggest town, only 20 km away. The German soldiers were looking for civilian clothes. Many of them gave up and were looking for a hiding place in the nearby forests. The town was full of nervous tension. I bought another piece of cheese and a large piece of sweet pressed cacao beans and returned to the farmer. In the yard Marushka, pale and shaking, met me. The daughter of the farmer, carrying the milking buckets, was crying.

"What happened?"

Taking my arm, Marushka said: "Come, I have to sit down. Here on the bench will do. I can't go back as yet. A tragedy happened here. Do you remember the soldiers who came last night to our farmer? They were sleeping in the kitchen. After you went to Isny I talked with them. They were nice young boys. They were telling me that they were going south to look for their division. The blond one, only a boy, was speaking full of tenderness about his mother saying that it wouldn't be long now and he would see her again. He would be the only one left to return home - one out of five. His four brothers were lost during the war. He was repeating 'not long now, my Mutti will be so happy - at least one will come home. The war cannot last much longer, maybe a few weeks.' He was showing me an old crumpled photo of his mother. At this moment another soldier came into the kitchen. He was also quite young, not more than nineteen. He had a rifle over his shoulder. He wore the S.S. uniform with the black skull bones and he started yelling at the boy I was talking to. "Come on, hurry up, quicker, assembly in five minutes." He lit a cigarette and went to other farms to look for more soldiers, hurrying them on to start moving. Half an hour later he came rushing back. The soldiers were still sitting in the kitchen finishing their meal. Of course they were in no hurry to go back to the Front. Just imagine: This black one, the one with the skull, without saying a word took the rifle from his shoulder and ... shot straight into the face of the soldier sitting at the table amongst the farmer's family and the other soldier: ... The bullet went through his head and stopped in the wall. On the wall were also parts of his brain. The farmer's wife fainted, the daughters were crying, screaming. The dead soldier fell to the ground; there was a lot of blood. The

dead one was the remaining one of the five sons waiting to go home soon to his mother. She has waited for him so long! The black one with the skulls slung his rifle back over his shoulder, lit a cigarette as if nothing had happened and, taking with him the other deathly-white soldier, left the kitchen.

In the yard he asked the farmer's daughter for a glass of water. She refused. I heard her saying: "I will not serve murderers." Then I helped to bring the dead soldier outside and helped the daughters to wash the floor and the wall where the brain was still sticking to the wall. Oh Zyg, it is so terrible: So utterly senseless:"

"How did it all finish?"

"The farmer reported it to the Mayor and the leader of the company. They certified the death, took down evidence, wrote a report and asked tall the farmer to bury the soldier in the village cemetery. We asked the officer if it is permitted in the army to shoot one's own people, just so, without any provocation. The leader of this company was an older man, I think a noncom. He gave me a sad smile and explained that those were the remaining soldiers from a penal unit, these masters of life and death are members of the S.S. As a matter of fact the non-commissioned officer was not the leader. The true leader was this arrogant youth from the Black Corps."

The old farmer's wife became seriously ill. Her home until now was a peaceful haven far away from the turmoil of war and only some muted sounds reached it. Now in her own home Cain's bullet killed a young man, a man to whom she had offered shelter. His blood was splattered on her kitchen and her walls. He was buried with the photo of his loving mother to whom he would never return. She, the farmer's wife, had three sons at the Front. Would they ever return to her?

Deep sadness and depression filled the house. We could not stay and intrude.

On a neighbouring hill was an old, empty herdsman's hut and near to it a barn for the cows used during summer. These shacks were now empty, the rattling wooden door held in place by a bit of wood. In front of the barn was an old wooden trough, catching the clear water coming from the face of the hill. Amongst the old trees bees were humming. All around it was quite empty. This hut was known by the locals as "Huetten Hochberg" (hut on the high hill). Here we found shelter. In the loft was some hay which I brought down to the barn where, under the manger, I prepared our sleeping lair. Marushka boiled water in the small shepherd's cabin and I brought twigs and wood for the small stove.

It might have been idyllic pastoral living if it were not for the sounds of the approaching Front. At night our hut trembled from the rumble of the cannonade.

When dawn began to lighten the dark barn we heard footsteps coming towards the hut. Through the crack of the door I saw soldiers climbing singly up the steep track. Their army coats were open; they had no guns. Some were leaning on knotty, gnarled sticks. When they were passing along the hut, Marushka opened the door and asked:

"What is happening in the valley? Are the Frenchmen in Isny?"

"Not yet but they soon will be. Is this the way to Schweiberg?" asked one of them.

"Yes. Are you . . . going home?" Marushka asked.

"We are going into the hills and then to our own Austria. For us the war has ended," they replied and continued uphill, disappearing in the morning mist from our sight.

We looked at each other. "Do you remember?" We both remembered the mill at the River Horyn. Then, also in the mist, walked soldiers with their army coats open, also without arms, then .. they were Polish soldiers .... Nearly six years have passed. Today, in the uniforms of the Reicharmee, the previous victors are walking, supporting themselves on sticks. It happened that, during our wanderings, we saw the first and the last stragglers, disbanded soldiers, men wrecked by war. The fortune of war had turned full circle.

Next day, the 29th April, was a Sunday. The morning began with very heavy shooting and shelling. From the west, behind the hills we saw columns of smoke. It became quiet by noon. The road on the Isny valley was empty. Nothing moved along the road or the nearby fields. When it started to get dark I went to Isny, going through the forest. I wanted to know what was happening, Near the town walls in the trenches beside the road were lying a few boys from the Hitler Youth, armed with machine guns. Two of them wore army coats, long sleeves hiding their hands, coats reaching to their ankles. I think I saw the same boys during their training when 'attacking the barn.' Now, beside them was a real machine gun, long belts of shining cartridges were lying on the bottom of the trench. Their expressions were full of concentration. They were carefully observing the approaches. They were the only defenders of Isny. I did not meet any more armed men. To my amazement, all anti-tank barricades were open. The long, heavy planks were taken out and were lying along the poles. The road to Isny was open. In the streets was a festive atmosphere of

expectation. There were no evacuees staggering along the streets, no cars, no soldiers. The town was not overcrowded any more. On the streets walked the 'Auslanders' (foreigners), gathering into groups and discussing the situation with animation. The Germans were standing near the gates, looking around distrustfully. The Volkssturm men disappeared. Shops were closed with shutters drawn. At the pharmacy I met Aleks, the Yugoslav who used to distribute the latest news heard from foreign radio stations.

"What is new?" I asked, shaking hands.

"I am waiting for the Frenchmen. Any minute now - they are already in Friesenhof, 4 km away."

"Do the Germans intend to defend Isny?"

"I don't think so, can't see any preparations. A while ago there were a few small units rushing around but they disappeared somewhere. I have not seen anyone from the Volkssturm either. I think they are sitting at home and just waiting. All the locals are against defending as it would not help anyone. Isny could be ruined and burnt in half an hour. I don't know what the Mayor will do, or the local party members, but they have made no move so far. Some of them have already fled to the Tyrol."

He stopped talking. In the street an armed soldier appeared. He was running, holding a hand grenade. Everyone was looking at him. From the gates came voices of the Germans: "What do you think you are doing?" "Put your grenade away:" "You will bring disaster to all of us and to yourself:" "You can't fight alone with tanks!" "You stupid bastard, come and hide yourself." Voices were coming from everywhere, telling him to stop and hide.

He disappeared behind a bend. I went to 'The Stag' which was closed to the public only a few days before as the army took over the whole building. Today it was empty. On the window sills were some empty tins, on the floors scattered papers and note pads and bullets. In a corner was a heap of revolvers. In the big dining room sat a few German officers awaiting their fate. They looked nervous watching the street through the windows. They had no arms and had probably decided to surrender. Not far from them sat the few permanent residents, Marushka's boss and next to her the Ukrainian girl Anushka and the Estonian girl Rolaine. Two soldiers came running along the street. One stopped and gave a few shrill whistles through his fingers, giving somebody a signal.

I went towards the station. Here I met my mates from the factory, the French war prisoners. All had rosettes in their national colours pinned to their

chests - their prison uniforms were clean and looked fresh. Their faces were happy and smiling. No more walking along streets with an armed guard. With beating hearts they were waiting for the liberation, the moment for which they had endured five long gloomy years. It might be only minutes now and their countrymen would come as victors.. We shook hands. Their faces which not so long ago seemed to have forgotten what a smile was were now radiating happiness. We were talking happily when suddenly from the western side of the town came violent shooting. Bullets whizzed over the roofs. We hid in the house. When the shooting quietened down I went to the market place. From the side of the meadows came a heavy droning sound. The tanks were approaching. Again some firing. People became alarmed. "Where is the hidden enemy? At whom is the firing aimed?" The way into the town was open. There was some movement at the Town Hall. The Mayor and his two town councillors, looking pale and very serious, came down the footpath. Looking around, the Mayor unrolled a white flag and, holding it in front of him, started walking in the middle of the road, his two councillors on either side.

# Capitulation!

All eyes were glued to this white banner. From all the windows people were staring. The bearers of the flag of truce continued walking in the middle of the road in complete silence. All realised that the last deciding moment had come. They turned the corner. After long moments of waiting, we heard the droning between the town walls. The houses were shaking, the streets full of screeching, jarring noises. With a loud noise, the first tank rumbled into the market place. Our French war prisoners were sitting on its long barrel. One of them was holding the banner of free France whilst others were waving their hats, railing their victorious France. Behind the tank came an armoured military car on top of which were lying soldiers, pointing their machine guns, ready for instant action. All wore metal helmets - only their teeth and the whites of their eyes where white. They were black. Along the footpath ran French soldiers looking around attentively, holding guns in their hands. From the armoured car came a French officer. In seconds he was surrounded. He opened out a large map and our Frenchmen were giving him instructions. Slowly the Germans also came out into the streets looking with interest at the passing tanks. A few greeted the French but the majority, full of reserve and curiosity, were silently watching the enemy army.

In a very short time the town was occupied. The tanks were stationed at crossroads and near the gates. The soldiers went through streets, yards and some houses. Occasionally we heard some single shots.

'Our' Frenchmen rolled a full wine barrel from somewhere and were drinking and urging their mates and other foreigners to join in. They felt they were hosts to the town. Some of the ex-prisoners even had arms. When the French banner started to wave from the tower of the Town Hall there was no end of cheering. We were drinking wine offered from buckets and barrels amidst cheering and toasting to the French army and the United Nations. In the meantime the French patrols, informed by our Frenchmen who knew the set-up of the town, flushed from their different hiding places the German soldiers and the more prominent citizens who were known as cruel oppressors.

We only realised that the war was truly finished for us when we saw the first group of German prisoners, guarded by the French, where the soldiers in the uniforms of the Wehrmacht marched along the street with their hands raised. Then we saw the VIPs led by the Mayor and our Heim walking with bent heads

and being hurried on by the 'Blacks'. Only then did we realise that Germany had fallen. Defeated in their own country, in the streets of their own town. What an ironic fate had befallen them. What a joke! They who were so proud of their master race, they who intended to be the future Aryan Masters of Europe walked now with their heads bent, driven also like cattle, pushed and hurried on by the dark-skinned, flat-nosed Senegalese who maybe were only half tame in Africa but were imported to Europe to give help and conquer this master race. These men from Africa walked now smiling and proud. They were pushing ahead the whites, the whitest of the white masters. They who were once slaves were now ordering about a white nation in their own land. In the dark faces the eyes were shining, white teeth between broad lips, the white turbans accentuating even more the dark bluish skin. I looked on thinking what a fantastic and ironic situation.

The people of Isny had barely time to calm down when the old, lame Hans, the doorkeeper of the Town Hall, came into the middle of the street and, according to old Allgau custom, began ringing a bell, calling to attention the people in the square. In his loud and penetrating voice old Hans started calling out:

"All people of Isny have to immediately bring to the Town Mall all their radios, cameras and all arms in their possession. This order is signed by the War Commandant of Isny, Captain of the French Army, Commander of the II Group of the 62nd Regiment of African artillery."

This was the first order issued by the victors.

Soon the place around the Town Hall was swarming with people. People were coming from everywhere with their radios, heaping them in the halls of the Town Hall. Six years before the Germans were taking our radios away from us in our lands. Now THEY were paying their first tribute.

With difficulty, I pushed my way through the crowds, going to Marushka to share the good news with her. At last we had become free people, members of the United Nations and victors.

Next morning we returned to Isny. The streets were quite empty. The neighbours told us that the army had ordered the inhabitants to leave their houses for the next 48 hours. During this time houses were searched and some people arrested. The Russian prisoners used this time to completely loot the factory and the villa of the big boss. Heim, while in prison, committed suicide, shooting himself through the mouth with his own revolver. His main henchman, Party Member Altenbach, the man most hated by all the workers, valued his

own life more. He paid for his love of life in a painful and degrading way. Some of our labourers who felt a lust for revenge found him and delivered him into the hands of the 'Blacks' who, having an odd kind of humour, arranged a mock trial. Altenbach was tied to a chair with two soldiers guarding him. Every passer-by was asked if he knew him and, if so, to treat him accordingly. The crowd consisted mainly of factory labourers so he was beaten and his face spat upon until his bleeding head was bent. Only then did some spark of compassion spread through the people and they began to disperse. They had had their revenge. Altenbach was arrested and we heard nothing more about him. He was forgotten like one forgets the bad times.

On the first of May, the day of the national-socialistic festival, the German radio announced the death of Adolf Hitler. He who was worshipped by many and hated by many had removed himself from the living but his body was not found. Three different versions were circulating amongst the people like budding legends. If history is unable to produce facts, these legends will blossom on the 'tomb'. The fantasy of the descendants will create either a devil or a saint. One fact remains - he perished together with his creation. The Third Reich of the future one thousand years ceased being after only ten years. The final blow aimed at the heart occurred the next morning at 15 hours - Berlin had fallen. Above the ruins of the would-be capital city of the world waved the flag of the United Nations. The last fortresses fell: Hamburg, Lubeck, Rostock. The millions-strong army surrendered. The fighting stopped in the south - in Holland, Denmark and Norway.

The machine of the Reichswehr stopped!

On the night of the 7th of May to the 8th of May a few gentlemen in grey uniforms arrived at the headquarters of the Allied forces in Reims. Field Marshal Jodel, in the name of the Reichswehr, at 2.41 p.m. signed the unconditional surrender of all armed forces on land, sea and air. Next day all European countries announced the end of the war as from the historical date of 9th May, 1945, at zero, zero hours and one minute.

In Isny the church bells were ordered to ring but most people could not understand why the bells were now ringing. For the last ten days the 'Blacks' had been in full control of the township. They liked three things: gold watches, white women and fattened geese.

# Peace

PEACE! ... How oddly strange and false does this word sound, like a forged medal thrown on the conference table?

For nearly six long years we had been waiting for this big word. We were longing for it like a blessing from Providence. "Pax Vobiscum" - these words willed our imagination. Bells would be pealing from all church towers of the world. The sound, touched by a magic wand, would bring radiating happiness to all the earth. Multitudes of homeless wanderers would by returning to their homelands like a procession. We hoped that these words would heal the wounds of the earth and human hearts, covered in mourning. Freedom would blaze pure and humane. .

The word was uttered. The sound touched our ears like a bell trying to proclaim happiness ... with broken ropes .....

Somewhere in far San Francisco sixty-four nations were discussing the act of peace on earth.

In the meantime dark, odd clouds were gathering in Eastern Europe. So far no thunder was approaching nor heard but the political atmosphere was unfriendly, heavy and sultry. Nobody was breathing freely but rather like in a stuffy room.

Those who would like to spread their wings and fly home were held back by others pointing to the sky - the weather is unsuitable, a storm is hanging in the air, wait a bit ... there is still time before winter. The Cold Front was approaching ...

In the streets were posters in French, English and German. Walls and shop windows were covered with colourful announcements. People were crowding, craning their necks, reading about the victorious processions of the army, about the erection of the banner over the ruins of Berlin, about the duty of men to be registered, about the time allowed to be in the streets - until six p.m. Also about giving rights is to the foreigners as members of the allied nations and their rights to move freely outside the radius of three kilometres, about the confiscation of cars and motor bikes, about the death penalty for possession of firearms, about the new allied money, about the order to bare one's head in front of a French banner, of the order forbidding fraternising with soldiers and the local German population, about bowing to a general of the Allied Forces.

The Germans looked in horror at the photographs taken in Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald, Majdanek and many, many more extermination camps which had been hidden secretly by the fallen regime. They simply did not want to believe in the existence of these huge factories of death (or pretended not to believe?) where millions of people were transformed into ashes or skeletons - for the good of the Future Happy Europe. We saw pictures of chimneys of the dreadful crematoriums, of the skeletons dug out from the pits and others, dried out skeletons barely covered with rotting skin. Under the photos was written - "These shameful acts are on your conscience!"

These placards were a plain public act of accusation of the Germans or at least an accusation of complicity. It hurt. No wonder that one night 'unknown hands' tore down these placards. It cost the town a lot. Ten thousand marks and three days home arrest for all its people. After three days when they were allowed out there were the placards back again ... these shameful acts ... are on your conscience:

More and more people came to Isny. Many of the deported had been assigned as slaves to the German farmers where they had been the 'glebae adscripti' (attached to the land) for many years, torn away from the world and other people. At last they were able to throw down their shackles and leave to look for their own people. Many came by accident of war, just being blown in by chance. They were walking around the streets just looking for their own kind. It was not hard; if they did not hear their native tongue they could spot their national colours attached proudly to someone's chest. After the Allied Forces entered Isny, all the foreigners wore their country colours to distinguish them from the locals.

One day quite different people were seen in the streets of Isny. They wore odd striped uniforms. There were quite a few of them. They were all speaking Polish. We surrounded them immediately, asking who they were. They were inmates from the Auschwitz concentration camp. They had fled from a 'Bauzug' (a train carrying labourers to building sites) and had waited for some time until able to come to our French zone.

"This is the truth" said one, pointing to the placards "a factory of death."

"My God: How many people went through these chimneys as smoke. Oh heaven: I am telling you!!! Millions!!! They were carted in wagons to the ovens. I was taken there in 1943 but just look at my number" - he rolled up his sleeve to show the tattoo marks - the number was 125,375. "Later on they even stopped numbering. It was terrible to become a 'Mussulman' (a name given to very

emaciated people, thin as skeletons, near death from starvation). If a doctor saw such a 'Mussulman' he would send him immediately to the ovens. Many also died during work. When such a chap was already unable to work with a shovel, the S.S. man would hit him with a stick on his neck, hit him some more and when the fellow was on the ground unable to move much then the S.S. man, rotten bloody bastard, would put the handle of the shovel under his face and, putting his feet astride the shovel on both sides, he would swing a few times up and down and the Mussulman was finished. No gas chambers - he got his free ticket to heaven. When we came from Auschwitz to the 'bauzug' we thought we were grabbing God Almighty by his beard."

"Why were you taken to Auschwitz?"

"I, personally, was there for political reasons. There were also some criminals but not many. During my time the majority were Jews. There were even hutelders (in charge of barracks). When they went up in smoke the hutelders were allocated between us. Yes, my countrymen, it sure was a mangle. It is better to rot in the earth than to live in Auschwitz, I am telling you!! But now life is beautiful, like a fairy tale, and the Germans are now under our heel." Smiling and rubbing his hands he asked: "Look, folks, maybe someone has a smoke?" Many hands stretched out offering cigarettes. We Poles took care of our 'striped ones' as the people from the concentration camps were called.

In the small, crowded room of the Mitynski family stood a beautiful wireless. One of his five children got it from one of the 'Blacks' in exchange for a nickel watch and wristband. The 'Black' one already had three radios but no wristwatch and a business deal was easily performed. Thanks to this transaction I was often able to listen to the radio with my countrymen. There was usually a biggish group listening to news from London. One day there were many people. Among them was Mr. Goch who was arguing at length about the question of the 'Veto' which the Russian brought up once again. "I don't know much about politics," interrupted Mr. Mitynski. "You had better tell us what is going to happen to us. The war has already been finished quite a while. When will we be able to go home? It is still impossible. Have they forgotten us back home?"

"Who is going back home, sir, when a new war is already hanging in the air," replied Goch, a bit angry about the interruption.

"What? War with the Russki? My God, that would be the last straw. One war has just finished - people even have had no time to put their bodies and souls together. People must be getting quite mad:" Mrs Mitynska was moaning.

"You can't help it. As long as the Bolsheviks are alive there can't be peace" said Goch, full of conviction.

Maybe the Russki will give us our land back without a fight. He has that much of his own lands."

"Who is going to give back anything without a fight?"

"I am certainly not going back while the Russek is still there," said Mrs. Cybulska. "I have heard that their GePeWu have already deported seven million Poles to their Siberia. Have you listened to this morning's news?"

"No." I became interested.

"They spoke so nicely from London about the sixteen Polish generals still being imprisoned in the Soviet camps. The news was saying that the imprisoned ones had been fighting for our and your freedom."

"My God, what is going to happen? When will it all be over?" Mrs. Eitynska was very upset.

At six o'clock ... "Here speaks the Polish radio Warsaw, Poznan, Lwow, Katowice, Wilno and Baranowicze on the London waves. Good evening. We are starting our third news broadcast from the London station ..." It became quiet in the room; people were listening with serious attention. Perhaps at last we would hear something about our country, about the possibility of returning home. There were so many rumours spreading anxiety ... the voice continued: "During the battles in the far east an important part is the relation between different castes in China ... now we are finishing our broadcast.

You can hear us again on the meter band...."

I switched the radio off.

"Now my old one, have you learned something of interest?" Mr. Mitynski asked his wife.

"No-one is telling the truth," moaned Mrs. Mitynski. "The radio does not say anything of importance to us and the people are saying too much. What should one do? To whom should one listen? I even don't know if I should start these bags of flour now or if I should keep them until winter. Maybe we will have to stay here during winter. How will I feed seven?"

Days and then weeks of waiting. Spring had passed and with the Spring passed the hope of a quick return home. Summer came, with the corns and their ringing bells. It was a hot summer. Our Frenchmen, the previous war prisoners,

had left long ago, going back home, and the next ones to go were the Dutchmen. The Germans, who were bombed out, started to return to their ruined cities to start rebuilding a new life. We were still here. We people from the East: Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Jugoslavs, Lithuanians and Estonians. The East was still closed to us. We were eating the well-deserved German cheese and butter, and waiting. We were free not to work. The days were ours to do as we pleased. People were walking up and down the streets, playing cards and drinking home-made vodka made from sugar. The girls were flirting with the 'Blacks' and the older men were organising associations, clubs, administrations and so on, thus giving their democratic temperament a wide field of action.

The Russians conformed to a less democratic system, obeying a self-appointed commandant. Their democratic feelings were satisfied by accumulating private property. Heim's factory they considered their own property. The red banner was raised on the roof and inside barter was flourishing. Machinery, tools, factory equipment were changing hands mainly going to the farmers. The most popular currency was Schnapps. With Schnapps came the wish to have a girlfriend, to take her for a walk. But why walking? Very soon pushbikes, motorbikes and even cars found their way into the camp. The boys, once mobile, were travelling over the roads, footpaths, squares, everywhere, going into ecstasies. They were taking sharp bends at sixty, gathering experience by chaffed skin, broken bones and broken vehicles. But who cares? Skin and bones will heal and there are still plenty of vehicles around. The young Ukrainian girls were dressed colourfully, the old berets discarded. In their permanent frizzy hair they wore red flowers. Couples were joining tenderly together. The young boys, Wasia, Ivan, Jaszem, Zonia, were allowed to take their girls on their bikes or even in cars. In the evening many cars were leaving the factory with boys and girls, all with happy, smiling faces. The driver, revving loudly and travelling fast, was very proud and happy - at last life was smiling on him.

The slow Lithuanians began speculating. They had to think about their future as none of them intended to return to Lithuania which had become one of the Soviet republics. They walked along streets with cases of goods such as cigarettes, cigarette papers, tobacco, razor blades, combs and other small goods which were hard to get in Isny.

The Jugoslavs, family minded, lived mostly quietly at home. They received better living accommodation and were happy with their families. The Estonians disappeared somewhere and started to build their permanent lives here in Germany. Only one Rumanian was left as he was a great friend of the Poles.

He was playing sentimental songs on his violin, looking full of love at the Polish girls. He greeted everyone with the words 'Dobranoc, kochana' (goodnight, my love) as they were the only words he could speak in Polish.

Out of sheer boredom, people started to get married, making great festive weddings. They were mainly young people who worked before as slaves on tree farms. Now they arrived at the church in a farm cart covered with flowers. We were often at these weddings where I usually had to make speeches and give the bride away as only a few had their parents. There was always plenty of food - roast veal, and cakes made by the farmers daughters. There was a lot of dancing including true quick 'polka' and the last dance was always a mazurka.

In the meantime the Polish group and some other groups were creating and disbanding governing bodies, administrations and committees. There were many people who would like to be appointed as managers, directors, secretaries, etc. Meetings were called where one could hear monologues on topics such as who has the right to call himself a Pole or who are the 'Volksdeutsche', the 'Race People'. The arguments became heated and quite often ended with black eyes. Neither was the Press forgotten. For the 'sake of strengthening the Polish Spirit in foreign land:' appeared 'Gazeta Polska' (Polish newspaper). The editor was a retired major. He told me he was creating a new idea of the New Reason of State during conditions of emigration. His aim was to bring awareness to the masses and lead them to understanding of the New Reason of State in the way of .... then he would drink half a cup of 'moonshine', eat a piece of bread, sniff a lemon rind and finish his confusing argument saying: "I will show those f .... bastards from the committee who I am. Sir, before the war I was the local chairman of the Nation's Defendants Federation. Those smelly, rotten stinkers from the committee know only how to milk cows and scatter manure."

Already in the sixth issue of his paper he gave the general outline of how the new Polish constitution should be during the exile government.

In the meantime, the outside world started to take notice of Poland. On the 15th June, 1945, a conference of leading Polish politicians was held in Moscow. After a festive dinner in the banquet hall, they were invited by the Soviet Government to attend a Court session which was being held in the large hall of the Tribunal of the Red Army where sixteen Polish accused were to be tried. Many were invited, such as representatives of the Corps Diplomatique, representatives of the army and foreign journalists.

It was decided during this conference, supported by a few liberals from the London exiles, to change the name of the Communist Government in Lublin to the Government of Warsaw.

This way the Government of the National Unity was created.

New events occurred. Our London Government did not recognise the Warsaw Government and the Warsaw one did not acknowledge the London Government. Now, thanks to the thoughtful intervention of our allies, we had two presidents, two governments, two councils of state, two prime ministers and two marshals. But there was only one Poland, smaller and scaled down, shifted from East to West and uncertain of its own tomorrow.

This odd political concept simplified solving the conflicts of our countrymen in foreign countries. Each could now choose between two complete governments including two armies of which one had the white eagle with a crown and the other without a crown.

In this dualistic atmosphere the concept of Poland began to form and ripen between the emigrant Poles. Amid the ruins of Germany, groups started to develop, advocating the London Government. Very soon it started to take roots in Isny.

Two representatives from the London Government arrived during one of our general assemblies when choosing once again another chairman Mr. Goch was delivering a speech between catcalls from the slightly drunken audience. The cheering was enormous and went on and on. During the first short rest period from the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the new chairman, one of the visitors took the floor. He was a non-commissioned officer of the highest rank. He wore an armband on which POLAND was written. He started with a polite allusion that his countrymen were not playing nicely and continued that he would not speak about politics. He mentioned that we all had to get adjusted to the new way of life and that we should start to take roots in the foreign country. He spoke about being united as only in unity is strength. Who knows what might still happen? We should start organising cadet corps. He finished his talk with a fervent promise of material help.

On our way home I was stopped by the ex-chairman who went under three different names: Bialy, Rely, vel Bielinski. He told me that he had spoken privately with the men from the Polish mission, who had entrusted him with the work to build a battalion for the Polish Army as he was a retired captain of the Polish Army. "Mr. Kruszewski, I will do it," he told me. "I am already fed up with all the civilian gangs. Today they have overthrown me as their

chairman. I will show them what the army can do. I am not one for talking - I love action. Look at the Town Hall and the French banner. I am telling you, the Polish banner will fly there. When I'll organise my battalion the French will transfer the power to me. I've had those stupid civilians. I will tell the German police to take off their uniforms and I will build a Polish police force with our strong boys. I will change all the German street names, giving them names of our big men. You know, in 1919 my battalion took the town of Bujazno. I, as the commandant, immediately gave the order that... " the ex-chairman was already infected by the old slogan: "Where we are, there is our country."

In the afternoon I went to listen to radio news. Mrs. Mitynska was peeling potatoes and her 'old man' was cutting tobacco. I switched on the radio. Odd how the voices came over the air. London was speaking in German, Luxemburg in English, Warsaw in Russian. At last I heard a Polish speech. I stopped tuning. Moscow was transmitting from the Festive Academy of the Society of Polish Patriots. Just at that moment the chairman of the honorary presidium was giving the chair to Citizen Aniol (Angel, a member of the academy). It became his honour to read aloud the telegrams addressed to Citizen Stalin.

In a few moments the clear, emotional voice of Aniol was giving thanks to the Big Leader of the Nations for the recovery of a free, democratic and independent Poland. Feeling lifted in spirit because even angels intervene for Poland, I shifted to the London station. The sound of music was just fading and the voice of the announcer began. "This is again the Polish Radio Warsaw, Poznan, Lwow, Katowice, Wilno and Baranowicze on the waves of London. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. We are starting now on our third radio news .... and now: finishing the programme, not in connection with political situation, just for remembering, just for sentimental reasons you will hear a Polish girl singing some old folk songs." A rich alto voice full of deep feeling, to the accompaniment of a guitar, began singing with sad emotion: "After many, many years you will find peace among flowers as if nothing has ever happened." "When we will be again together ..." and many more songs, all full of longing. Memories of previous old times started flowing. The lilacs in blossom, the walks in the large botanical gardens, the small cosy cafes in Warsaw, the gay crowds, the stuffy, nights in the basements of the well-known dancing hall, Adria.

It was like a swan song of Warsaw from before the war, coming on the air from London. When I switched off, still remembering, Mr. Mitynski asked as usual: "Mr. Kruszewski, what now? Will there be war again or not?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Today the angel himself was speaking to Stalin."

A few days later I left Isny, going with my theatre group to give performances in neighbouring Polish communities. I had organised an amateur revue called "Poland Pictured in Songs and Dances."

Our first performance was in the capital city of our country as there was located the Central Society of Poles which included other counties as well. This committee was working very poorly. When the war ended in Germany all the majors, captains and lieutenants started to increase in rank as they thought they deserved. Who was there to prove otherwise? On their epaulets new stars were added as in their opinion it was their due. They could not get adjusted to the co-operative civilian way of life. They started to fight between themselves. First they were fighting for influence, then for chairmanships, lastly either for London or for Lublin. The heated debates and arguments usually took place in the large local pub. Their large official working place, decorated with big printed words such as: 'Chairman', 'Vice Chairman', 'Vice - Chairman II', 'Editor', 'Secretary', was empty. After walking through the empty rooms, I at last found a member of the committee - Mr. Nowik. Mr. Nowik was called bitinglly the boy from the cows as during the war he was working for a farmer. He was sitting at his desk, surrounded by files and letters.

"I have had it by now," he greeted me, throwing some papers back on the desk.

"What happened?"

"The major had quarrelled with the chairman and the chairman with the captain. Nobody is coming to the office. The French Governor had suspended our paper. I have to cope alone with this. I travelled to Baden-Baden where our Polish mission is located at present, asking them to intervene with the French. I could not find our mission for a long time. At last I found them. They had a lovely villa, probably 'inherited' from some influential German. I had to wait one and a half hours to be heard as they were all sleeping, according to their servants. At last, at eleven a lieutenant came still dressed in his pyjamas, yawning - probably sleepy from last night's party. He told me:

"I don't think we can do anything about your problems.

"Here I am back again. All is in a mess. The men from Lublin arrived in the meantime and ordered something to be stuck over the crown of the eagles. They also hung portraits of their men on walls. But that is not the end. Later on a few arrived from the London mission. They told us to immediately take down the portraits and to remove the sticking paper from the crowns. What should I do, I am asking you? It can drive one truly mad. Some are coming and saying hide the crown, the others - show the crown. To whom should I listen? And anyway what are they fighting about? I have really had it by now. I don't care. Let them paint me in any colour - white, red or even in dots or stripes ... I am now resigning from the committee." He finished, crumpling more papers between his hands.

In Biberach we were greeted enthusiastically. We had to repeat our performance twice, both times to a full house. The people were happy. Some were even crying with happiness on seeing after all these years Polish national dresses, old Polish folk dances and hearing their favourite songs. Flowers were thrown all over us. We were as touched by the people as they were by our performances. We were all invited to a sumptuous dinner for the opening of a new camp (for displaced people) to be called "Warsaw's Uprising". Biberach had many poles - over 1,200. It had three camps for the civilians and a military company consisting mainly of Polish prisoners of war. Their chief was Lieutenant Bojar-Tulipanski who was also the commandant of the camps. One could call it an autocratic government; Lieutenant Bojar could be called the Knight of Biberach. He had his army, his military police, his magazines of arms, his food stores. He even had a prison where he shut up all those who would not comply or who tried to take the power away from him.

We heard a rumour that not so long ago a unit from the nearby town made a raid on Bojar's country trying to rescue one of their mates whom Bojar had jailed. The raid was not successful. Bojar's armed forces repelled the raiders from Schussenried, taking a prisoner. Bojar, feeling lenient, just allowed the prisoner to be beaten up before being released. Bojar must have felt really lenient at that time as he had empowered himself to deal out death sentences. This document I saw with my own eyes on the announcement desk, signed with his own signature.

The power and strong position of Lieutenant Bojar-Tulipanski was not so hard to explain. The French had only a small garrison but they had a very large camp of German prisoners, the so-called 'criminals of war', who needed to be kept under a strong hand. The French authorised the Lieutenant to take charge

of this camp, giving him a good position supported by arms. They needed him and he needed them.

It was quite different in Leutenkirchen. The Polish camp was much smaller. It fitted into two buildings of the local school. In each hall slept thirty people. They were fed in one mess organised by the French. The leader of the Poles was a farmer captain of the Polish army who, during the war, was a prisoner in the camp of Buchenwald. He was a well-built man with dark eyebrows and gentle eyes. He usually walked with a revolver. He kept good watch so that his people behaved themselves. He told me he would personally beat up those who behaved 'like pigs'. The captain was against all prisons - maybe because he had spent a long time in one. His punishment ended with hitting someone in the face. He explained - "With this mob you can't do anything else." He did not believe in any democratic rules such as electing a chairman. But he was not a persistent autocrat. His power was just finished when we came with our group. I was astonished to see how he had changed. Instead of the military uniform, he was dressed as a civilian, including a soft felt hat. Instead of the revolver, he carried in his hand an ivory-handled cane.

"I am finished with this mob, Mr Kruszewski" he greeted me. "All day long they either eat, sleep or simply spoil the air around them. Their behinds will get rooted to the beds, the useless mob. One day I called some of the boys to do some duty and some women to go and help in the kitchen. Nobody care to work. I stopped dinner that day. They came to me telling me I should make a list, a roster of duties. To hell with them. Now I have to start making lists as well when quite often I have not even time to sit down and have a proper meal. Enough talking. I threw everything to hell. Let U.N.R.R.A. Cope."

It was raining and the attendance for our show eras not good. We returned to Isny wet to the skin. We had finished our first 'artistic tour'.

Weeks passed. July was ending. Fields were mown for the second time.

The Russians, Ukrainers and White Russians left Isny. Yugoslavs were also returned home ... only we Poles were still here in this country with the cheeses full of holes. We tried to cheer ourselves up by saying at last Poland was nearer to us by at least a few hundred kilometres.

We were still surrounded by a nightmare of uncertainty. Some gloomy frightening rumours were always circulating. The news from our homeland was always interspersed with anti-Soviet propoganda.

We began to organise a list of people who definitely wanted to go back to Poland. The others were jeering "Ha-ha, are you in a hurry to go to Siberia?"

Again some people started to doubt, became frightened.

"Is it true, Mr. Kruszewski, that the Russek takes everything away when one comes to the Polish border?" Mrs. Mitynska asked. "People are saying that they leave you only two shirts, marked with their stamps. People are saying that if someone comes in the street without the stamped shirt he is immediately taken to camps behind barbed wires. What should we do?"

"Best go without a shirt."

"You are only joking!"

Mr. Goch had not given up hope. He was trying to be active. He was trying to become a chairman. On a nicely printed letterhead he started to ask for donations to build a school for Polish children. His name even appeared twice - once as a general donor, the second time as the leader and inspector of the future school. All the activities and his flowery language were meant to make you forget that once he was co-working with the Germans, that he once fitted nicely into the place given him by the Germans. After a lengthy speech justifying why he should be the future chairman of the Polish organisation, he was beaten up and helped by the French military police to return home.

He was the last of the 'democratic' reigns in Allgau. U.N.R.R.A. took over and it became quiet in Isny.

Churchill, speaking as the opposition leader during the opening of Parliament, said the words which will be remembered by Poles for a long time: "There are only a few virtues which the Poles do not possess but there are also only a few errors which they have not committed."

Near us lived a Mr. Toofil Pietrzak. A little man, by profession a boilermaker. He loved his drink and preferred to drink in company, as drinking alone made him very sad. Now he discovered a new hobby - black marketeering. He was dealing with everything but his passion was musical instruments although the profits were not as good as with other goods. He could play a few instruments - not well, but very lovingly.

To his dark room came one day a young Russian boy from Lublin - Rysiek Glowacki, who loved to write poetry.

"Mr. Pietrzak, I would like to buy a violin. I can't play it - it is to be a present to my sister who is engaged. I heard you have many."

Pietrzak, taking a good swig straight from the bottle, pointed to three violins lying on his trunk.

Rysiek fondled one, which was shining and looked new.

"You will not buy that one."

"Why not?"

"It will be to dear. Look how she looks, straight from the factory. It would cost you a thousand."

"And this one?" asked Rysiek, pointing to an old box, partly broken and patched up by an old piece of plywood.

"That is also a violin. A bit old maybe but one can still play on her quite well."

In the box lay a violin, shining on the clean green lining. Taking it out, Rysiek came close to the window to see if, in addition to the two broken string, it was not cracked. Something was inside it. He tried to read.

"What are you doing?" asked Pietrzak.

"I am looking to see that it is not bent."

Holding it in the light he could just make out the writing: 'Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis. Paciebat anno 1727.'

He did not know about violins but, being a bright lad, he thought it might be an old Italian instrument. Nothing seemed to be broken. He remembered that, as a child, one of the neighbours told him that a violin had to be old, like old wine. He decided to buy it.

"How much, Mr. Pietrzak?"

"I am not selling for money, only goods in exchange."

"What goods would you like?"

"I would need three kilos of sugar, one kilo of butter and a cigarette lighter."

"I can give you the butter and the lighter but I have no sugar."

"No business Mr. Glowacki, I need the sugar."

"Mr. Pietrzak, you just look at this old box, two strings missing. Look how worn down the wood is and the box is broken. You are asking too much for this old thing."

"Just for you I will let you off with one kilo of sugar."

"Agreed."

"Shake hands". They shook hands.

"Aus?"

"Aus!"

He took the violin and left. Next morning Miss Isa was astonished when Rysiek stopped her, asking if she knew the name of a good violin.

"I know," she told him proudly - "Stradivarius!"

Rysiek grabbed his head in both hands: "My God, as true as I live, I have one!"

"You? Here in Isny? You must be joking."

"No, I am serious. I have it here at my room in Isny." They hurried to his room, grabbed the violin and came to me.

"We have a Stradivarius!!" Isa shouted as she came rushing to me. Behind her came Rysiek with an old box under his arm. I took the violin in my hands. It was not very big, extremely light, of noble lines, a light hazelnut colour shining in a peculiar soft light. The narrow neck was worn down by many loving hands. On a card, yellow with age, were the words - Antonius Stradivarius Cremonen Faciebat anno 1727. Beside it, in a circle, were the letters A S and above them a small cross. The letters were printed; only the last two - 27 - were written by hand. When I touched a chord, there came a full beautiful sound, hanging long in the air. I looked a long time at his violin, full of respect and admiration, still not quite believing. What could I, who did not know violins say about it?

I turned to the happy owner - "Ryszard, if this is a forgery I think it is a good forgery. If it is the original, you are a millionaire. I would advise that you keep it and look after it carefully until you return to Poland. There go to a specialist, to proper Authorities."

They left. I remained for a long time under the spell of the violin and its sound. What became of it? If somebody reads this or hears about it, try to find Ryszard Glowacki, a baker from Lodz, and learn the fate of this violin.

It was already two years since we had left our home. We never received any news about our family. The Front did not exist any more. It was over three

months since the war had ended for us but an impenetrable wall divided us from our homeland. Letters to Poland were not accepted.

Lying on our bed, we would return in our mind's eye back home, back to our children and parents. To the last moments of departure. I was dreaming about little Jurek standing on the highway and, behind him, the policeman. Jurek's form became smaller and smaller the distance was growing, becoming unending ... and I would wake up looking at the ceiling in our room in Isny. Where are they now? Are they still alive? Do Jurek and Roman still remember us? Are they in Poland or Lithuania? Or were they deported?

Sometimes during the silence of the night we would spread out on the table our most valued possessions - photographs. In one Roman was just trying to walk, holding a finger of Grandmother Julia, in the other Jurek was playing with little pups in the kennel of old Ralph. We went to sleep with their faces close to us. At night Marushka would whisper:

"Are they alive? Will we find them? I am so-frightened." She used to cry during the dark nights.

On the 6th of August, 1945, the world was informed about the first atomic bomb over tire city of Hiroshima, The white people produced an until now unknown energy, harnessing it behind armoured plates and dropped it quickly on the yellow people.

The military news announced proudly the power of this new weapon. One small bomb killed 50,000 people and wounded an additional 30,000. The city ceased being, going up in flames and ruins.

The resulting turmoil caused destruction for ten kilometres. The unbelievable heat near the explosion charred buildings, trees and human beings and, further down, the radioactive dust condemned thousands to a lasting agony.

One of the American papers wrote: "The genius of the human brain gave the world a method to release the unknown, until now, nature's energies for the benefit of mankind. It marks a new phase in human history."

If it is true that the human mind is able not only to discover this energy but also able to harness this natural energy, we are standing at the threshold either of total annihilation or before fantastic blossoming. Now it would depend not so much on the genius of this human brain but on his humane conscience.

Emotions were running high. In the Far East the last epilogue of total war and immense human tragedy took place.

The loudspeakers from the world were announcing in short clipped sentences:

"The Japanese received their knock-out"

"Reached by the penetrating atomic bomb, the bleeding and frightened Japanese consider further fighting senseless."

"The new weapon is causing them to face unaccountable losses."

"The Japanese Government agreed to accept the unconditional surrender if the sovereignty of the King will be acknowledged."

On the arena of the Far East appeared the young Caesar. The news hurried on:

"The Caesar of Japan, Hirohito, called the Son of the Sun, is of small posture. He has two daughters and four sons and wears glasses. No-one is allowed to touch his body with naked hands. If a doctor has to examine him, he has to do so while wearing silk gloves."

New developments continued. The Japanese Government was still sitting. The Russian armies continued to advance hurriedly to Manchuria, Sakhalin and Korea. Great concentration of the Anglo-American bombers with their deadly loads were ready and waiting.

At one and the same time the radio stations from Washington, London, Moscow and Chungking were announcing the news:

"The Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tojo, is herewith announcing in the name of his Caesar to the United States of America, Great Britain, Russia and China - the acceptance of the last conditions of capitulation.

The Son of the Sun issued orders to all the armed forces on land, sea and air to lay down their arms,

□□□□□

On the 14th of September, 1945 at 23 hours, after 2175 long days and nights ended the second and last great war..... the last one as, during this war, were

released the two most horrible powers in human history: atomic energy and the energy of evil.

If people realise and acknowledge these powers, then peace on earth will come for all, times, and, if they do not fight these powers, then it will be no longer war but suicide of humanity.

During these long, bloody years, through great pain a dazzling truth was born ,..., war is absurd.

Let those who come after us understand this truth born in the blood of our generation, let them on the anniversary of this day ring the bells of happiness, as it should be the holiest day for mankind ... the day when Peace was resurrected!!!

## **PAX VOBISCUM**

Isny, 14th September 1945.

# Postscript

*This book in wooden cover contains the memoirs of our family. After my death it should pass to my older son George.*

*In the early morning of seventh December 1949 I Zygmunt Skarbek-Kruszewski, my wife Maria, my two sons, George and Roman and my mother Helen arrived at Port Melbourne in Australia on the ship S.S. "General Hersey".*

*We came to Australia from Switzerland, where I have been in diplomatic service of the Polish Legation in Bern. In September 1948 I resigned, because I was convinced that the communist regime of Stalin's dictatorship is ruining Polish national economy & terrorizing the population. The pressure of the party policy was so strong at that time, that I personally felt disgusted performing my duties.*

*After my resignation we decided to immigrate to Australia. In Australia they were no possibilities for migrants with Law degree to earn their daily bread, therefore I learnt the welding trade at a technical school in Switzerland.*

*After medical examination by the Australian Commission in Switzerland, the "I.R.O." (International Refugee Organization) organized our travel. In the end of September 1949 we left Switzerland by train going through the Swiss Alps to Italy. We passed Milano, Florence, Roma and were brought to a migrants camp in St. Antonio, near Naples. 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1949 in Port Napoli over 2000 migrants from all parts of Europe including us were loaded aboard the ship S.S. "General Hersey". We were sailing to Australia 26 days via Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean passing Fremantle we arrived in Port Melbourne on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1949. From Melbourne all passengers were taken by train to a Migrant Centre in Bonegilla near Albury. Our first impression of this strange Country was very odd. After we passed the wide mosaic of Melbourne's small suburban houses with their miniature front gardens all civilization ceased at once. We were in an endless sea of yellow. Widespread, leafless dead gum trees, black from lightnings created an impression of sad and silent emptiness. In January 1950 the Government Employment Office first me and afterwards my family to the Migrant Hostel Maribyrnong in Melbourne. I was obligated by a 2 year contract, as every migrant at that time, to work for the Australian Government as a physical worker. I was employed as a gangener helper in Maribyrnong Government Explosive Factory. My wife Maria was employed in the Hostel as a clerk. Our boys: George (9) and Roman (6) went to an Australian primary school in Footscray, not knowing a word of English. At that time they spoke fluently two languages: Polish and Swiss-German. In 1951 we left the hostel and found private accommodation in Mt. Evelyn near Lilydale. I started to work as a welder at "KM steel Products Ltd."*

in Richmond, Maruszka, my wife worked first with "Jeldy" bedspread manufacturers near Lilydale and shortly after as typist with Y.C.W. Cooperative Housing Society 99 Queen St. City. Boys went to the state school in Mount Evelyn, here we met first of all friends with two girls: Helen and Diane who became our life

Engineer Grade I. In June of the same year he left Australia for the Round-the-World trip. He sailed by ship to Japan, from there through Siberia to the Soviet Union. From Moscow he went to Warsaw and spent a few months in Poland visiting many of our relatives and friends. From there he traveled through Germany and Paris to London.

At this point I finish this brief biography of our family. My intention was to leave my descendants a clear picture of the origin and the fate of our family. For this purpose I sketched the attached genealogical tables, which are based on old family documents and study of Heraldic tables at a University in Vilno-Poland. I included some pictures and documents of our past, and also war memoirs, written by me in Polish ("Bellum Verbiscum").

From here on, I hope, my sons George and Roman will continue their family records and convey them to the new generations of SKARBEK'S. Good Luck.....

First day of August 1965

*Zygmunt George Skarbek*

October 1960 the parents of Maruszka came from Poland to live with us: her mother Julia, née Pollak, and her father Adolf Wojtkiewicz (90).

George made his intermediate at Springvale High School and matriculated in University High School. After obtaining matriculation with two honours he enrolled at the Melbourne University in Metallurgy, getting a free place. Next year he changed his mind and enrolled for Electrical Engineering course at Caulfield Technical College in Melbourne. In 1962 he received his Diploma of Electrical Engineering and began his professional career with State Electricity Commission.

My mother, Helen Kruszezski, née Juchno after spending many years in Hospitals, lives at present with us. She is widow. My father Zygmunt, solicitor in Vilno-Poland died in 1940, in the year of the birth of his first grandchild George. Vilno was the town where I was born 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1907. In 1964 George completed his training with S.E.C. and was promoted to

## Postscript #2

The wooden cover mentioned above was carved by Zyg and a photograph of this cover has been used for the cover of this book.



Zygmunt Kruszewski-Skarbek leaving the Polish embassy in Bern, Switzerland. He was a part of the diplomatic corps.

