

## **Nur noch rauchende Trümmer – Das Ende der Festung Brest**

(Aus dem Tagebuch des Soldaten Erich Kuby)

Mit:

- Text des Hörbildes
- Plädoyer des Staatsanwalts
- Begründung des Urteils

Rowohlt Taschenbuchverlag, 1959

## **Only Smoking Ruins Left – The End of Fortress Brest**

(from the diary of the common soldier Erich Kuby)

Including:

- Text of the radio play based on the diary
- Plea of the State Prosecutor against the charge of slander
- The Court's explanation of its rejection of the charge of slander against Kuby

Rowohlt Taschenbuchverlag, 1959

*Mein Krieg*, 12. August 44 (pg. 427). Zehn Jahre später strahlte der Norddeutsche Rundfunk ein Hörbild über das Kriegsende in Brest von mir aus, **welches sowohl die Staatsanwaltschaft von Amts wegen wie als Nebenkläger den General Ramcke und den Bund der Fallschirmjäger veranlaßte**, mich als Autor und den Fernseh-Produzenten Rüdiger Proske – inzwischen durch Berichte über Zukunfts-Technik bekanntgeworden – vor Gericht zu bringen. Der Prozeß fand vor dem erweiterten Schöffengericht in Hamburg statt (Februar 1959) und dauerte drei Tage, ein Gespensterzug von Zeugen marschierte auf. Ich konnte alles beweisen, was ich behauptet hatte. Es erfolgte Freispruch mangels Tatverdacht.

## **Translation into English of the text of the radio play**

Transmitted by Northwest German Radio in the fall of 1954

*Toward the end of May 1944 Kuby was stationed in Eßlingen near Stuttgart. Discipline in his (communications) unit wasn't harsh. By then, most people realized that the war was almost over. However, right after the allied landing in Normandy, his unit was moved to Straßburg, a city practically untouched by the war and full of "intellectual" refugees who welcomed Kuby, as many people there had heard of or read copies of his unpublished work "War trip through France." A week later, his unit boarded a train and was sent on its way to Brest in Brittany. He wrote to his wife that she shouldn't be too worried, although he has had lots of surprises in this war...*

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... und die Landkarte sieht in dieser Gegend bei Brest so ähnlich aus wie eine Mausefalle. Ob wir hineinkommen werden?

(...and on the map, the area around Brest looks pretty much like a mouse trap. Will we be able to get into it?)

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SPEAKER: This radio play has a motto, a quote from Talleyrand.

I don't approve of it, I don't disapprove of it, I merely report...

GEORG: In these past months, in many French cities, there are celebrations commemorating the 10 years since the liberation of France, the liberation from us, from the Germans. If were to follow these celebrations, beginning with Normandy peninsula where the Americans and British landed on 6 June 1944, it would be a repeat of the victorious campaign of the Allies, and a repeat of the retreat and then flight of the German Wehrmacht. One of the stations of this progress would be the French fortified harbor *Brest* in Brittany. It can't be avoided that the memory of this half year of liberation in 1944 in France be used as the occasion to critically shine the spotlight on the current state of relations to Germany. Special attention should be given to the market places of French provincial cities, where the French people, who in the war suffered terribly, gathers under waving flags and to the sound of blaring trumpets to watch military parades which are all too suitable for extolling and exciting national pride.

Should we Germans, who were the authors of those events, let these celebrations simply pass on by? It would seem that we had completely gotten over the war, if we consider our most pressing concerns and our daily life. However, it also could seem that we would be led to regard our relationship to France in a false light, so that we are surprised by

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certain reactions which we have recently experienced. Perhaps we should refresh our memories in this respect, even if this reminiscence of not very long ago events saddens us.

Each phase of the war events in France from the summer to the fall of 1944 could serve as a model case for what France is now remembering. If we have chosen the reduction of fortress Brest as a model case, it is because of the special circumstances surrounding it, namely that it was cut off from the entire remaining front, and also because of local conditions and the person mainly responsible for the defense of Brest, that is General Ramcke whose behavior was especially drastic.

This story begins this past fall in a rainy Paris. I and my wife had traveled to Paris so that I could show her the city, but it didn't turn out quite right.

SIBYLLE: Yes, unfortunately.

GEORG:...because the other story, the one that 10 years ago also began in Paris, merits attention.

SIBYLLE: But I really don't want to go to Brest. Such a hangover idea, away from Paris. I don't want to be reminded of the war, that doesn't concern me. I was 11 when the war broke out.

GEORG: Yes, yes, I know, and I was almost 30.

SIBYLLE: This Brest, do we really have to go there?

GEORG: I'm afraid so. One should revisit such places from time to time, one should refresh such experiences from time to time.

SYBILLE: Nevertheless, I'm still against it.

GEORG: Yes, I know, you're always against it, but...

SIBYLLE:...but at the end we still sat in the car, took the road to Brest – and it seemed to me that I suddenly was in school again.

GEORG: Do you still remember when the Americans and British landed in France?

SIBYLLE: Of course I do. We had been evacuated and had no radio or newspaper, but the neighbor had a radio and listen to foreign broadcasts. In general he was reasonable, and I remember how he one day burst into our kitchen and shouted: “They are there, they are there, Mrs. Lachner.” “Who is there?” asked my mother, very frightened. “The Americans,” he said. “Early today they landed in France.”

My mother sat down in a chair and began to cry, and she said: Thanks be to God, Mr. Merkel, thanks be to God, now the end is coming.”

GEORG: That was on 6 June 1944, and everyone who was capable of thinking knew that the end was in sight. But then, it still lasted another year. A few days after the landing we were marched, as they say, from Stuttgart to Straßburg. I can't count the number of times in this war I was suddenly ordered to some place. But I was lucky (again), this time it wasn't to Russia, but rather to France which I hadn't seen since 1940. There were about 30 of us, a few non-commissioned, a lieutenant, along with 40 bicycles, more than a 100 carbines and a lot of ammunition. We were supposed to bring the bikes and the carbines to Brest and ourselves along with.

SIBYLLE: How many kilometers is it to this Brest from Paris? We have already been a really long time underway.

GEORG: It will take a while still. You have no idea about French geography. That's not like Greater German geography, where you can travel from one end to the other by bicycle in one day. France sticks way out toward the west, that's Brittany. A beautiful area, it almost looks like

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it were in England. About at the furthest end of it there is a deep bay which can provide shelter to a lot of boats. That is why the French built there their biggest fortified harbor, and why the Germans their most important base for their subs operating in the Atlantic.

SIBYLLE: Why were you sent to Brest if the Americans were already in Normandy?

GEORG: Donnerwetter. Your question simply is flowing over with military wisdom, and that makes you even greater than Gröfaz.

SIBYLLE: Than who?

GEORG: Than Gröfaz. That is short for the größte Feldherr aller Zeiten (greatest field commander of all time). That's what we and many people called Hitler. But I have to tell you that we 30, detailed to transport bicycles to Brest on which nobody would ever ride again, in June 1944 after the Normandy invasion, we were all well informed and knew that we were heading into the Gröfaz, the greatest

mousetrap of all time.

It went well enough at first, at least as far as Paris. In Paris there was still the quiet before the storm, the front was still holding in Normandy. Our newspapers wrote every day what kind of asses the Americans were, and how they were doing everything wrong. There you could read how it should have been according to Gröfaz and Ramcke.

SPEAKER: We didn't underestimate up to that point the stalemate on the channel coast...

GEORG: Stalemate is good, after the successful landing.

SPEAKER: ...we derive from the results achieved despite unfavorable circumstances the proof that our defense, also considering the expansion of the attack space, is sufficient and capable of facing the opponent, in spite of his material superiority, until it is time for offensive battle.

GEORG: That time never came, and as far as the French

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are concerned, the railroad personnel of Paris were, to be sure, on the defensive against us 30 soldiers, but they fought very well in their own way. In fact, they shunted us from one suburban railway station to another around the city and swore that the tracks were full of other trains.

SIBYLLE: And how did you finally get to Brest?

GEORG: Not on this road, and not with the direct train route, the one we can see from here, but rather by way of a long detour through the middle of France and the Loire river. It took us then 14 days from Paris to Brest, and toward the end of the trip, in Brittany, our locomotive shoved two freight cars loaded with stones in front of it so that, not us, but the two freight cars would be blown into the air. Namely, French patriots tended to place mines under the tracks.

SIBYLLE: Stop! What kind of monument is that?

GEORG: What else could it be but one of the thousand monuments to the Résistance. Murdered by the Germans, here rest the heroic defenders of their homeland

JEAN DUCLOS  
HENRI DARTU  
CLAUDE COLBERT

SIBYLLE: There are 14 names.

GEORG: There are such monuments on which stand almost a hundred names. You find them on all French roads from Brittany to the Mediterranean coast. However, our newspapers back then didn't want to admit that they were resistance fighters.

SPEAKER: There are many indications that a certain and not even small part of the English and American invading soldiers really believed in the fairy tale of the "liberation," and thereby in the presence of a broad segment of the populations of France, Belgium,

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and Holland which longed to be freed. Already in the first days after the landing this preconceived notion was dispelled by the bright light of the facts. Wherever it was possible, in the unheard of destruction caused by the invasion in Normandy, to get a hold of some Frenchmen, there was not an inconsiderable amazement about –

GEORG: – that is, among the British and Americans the write means to say –

SPEAKER: – that they didn't at all look starved and therefore didn't greet the liberators with exaggerated enthusiasm. Very recently a Frenchman in Normandy told a reporter from a Swiss newspaper:

The individual German is, in his personal behavior, always très chic. Only when in large groups can one recognize a certain consciousness of power...

SIBYLLE: You, that isn't true. That can not have stood in a newspaper at the same time that all of France was in revolt.

GEORG: Oh yes, I still have the newspaper. Later, as prisoner of war, I found out during the transport how beloved we were...but that is another story. We should get moving, we will be in Brest in in 3 hours...

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SIBYLLE: So that is Brest. It looks beautiful.

GEORG: Yes, when you arrive from the countryside, the first impression of Brest is much more beautiful than when you come into the harbor by boat. That is because the road from Paris ends in the part of the city which lies at the highest.

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SIBYLLE: What is the name of that straight street there?

GEORG: Yes, the Rue Jean Jaurès. The business district goes down there as far as the terrace. Can you see it? There is the hospital, the city hall, the post office, and the other public buildings. One level below, look there, down there, that is the center of the city.

SIBYLLE: That's another especially beautiful street.

GEORG: Yes, the Rue de Siam. That is approximately the Kurfürstendamm of Brest. And the city center borders directly on small, inner harbor, formed by the narrow rocky ravine with the steep sides. There you can also see the steep coast. It goes as high as 100 meters, but it never falls directly into the sea. It has a flat, rocky base, as you see, which is partly widened out into the sea by artificial walls. Down there are the harbor docks and the shipyard. And over there the immense sub bunkers which were built during the war.

SIBYLLE: Look over there, the barracks.

GEORG: Yes. Strange, just like in 1944. Just as I remember them.

SIBYLLE: But in the center all the houses are new.

GEORG: Yes. That has become a completely new city. All of that here was completely destroyed. They have built up a lot.

SIBYLLE: Listen, aside from the few barracks over there – that is a really elegant city. I thought a fortified harbor would look very different.

GEORG:...yes, I thought that too. I expected to find a different Brest than this one. The whole city has been renewed.

Look over there – yes, the little square over there. I didn't think that I would ever find it again. In 1944, when we arrived here, that is where we got off the train.

LIEUTENANT: Platoon – ten hut! Line up! Eyes straight ahead! Eyes left!...Respectfully report: 1 lieutenant, 4 non-commissioned officers, 23 men from infantry communications reserve battalion Eßlingen ordered to the communications staff of Fortress Brest.

CAPTAIN: Thank you. At ease! How long was your trip?

LIEUTENANT: 18 days, Captain, Sir.

CAPTAIN: And what in the world are you supposed to do here? (Smothered laughter among the soldiers). What have you got there?

LIEUTENANT: 40 bicycles, 120 carbines, 40,000 rounds of ammunition.

CAPTAIN: I'll ask the Colonel what we should do with it. In the meantime, stow it in that yellow building over there, there's room in the basement. As long as nothing is going on here, take up quarters in the 4 houses you see over there. They're empty.

LIEUTENANT: Jawohl, Captain, Sir.

CAPTAIN: If things get lively here, and that will certainly be soon, then we go underground. Your commander is Colonel von der Mosel. Today you can take a look around, tomorrow duty begins. You may not venture out into the countryside. –

Into the city always in pairs at least and with full battle equipment. That means: gas mask, carbine loaded with safety on, 40 rounds of ammunition. Understood?

LIEUTENANT: Jawohl, Captain, Sir.

CAPTAIN: Many houses are empty. It is forbidden to enter them. There are still a few thousand civilians in the city. For the time being they are still afraid of us, but when the Americans come closer, that can change. Caution is the mother of the porcelain box. Understood?

So, now let your men move in, Lieutenant, and then report to me.

LIETUENANT: Jawohl, Captain, Sir! Platoon ten hut! Dismissed!

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GEORG: That was the reception. I stayed in this house. Then there was a sign above the door: le nid, the nest. That was the name of the house that stood here in 1944. The view from up here over the entire bay was no different then than today, only there were anti-airplane balloons anchored from the inner city to the sub bunkers. You can't see them now, the cliff covers them. They were like thick silver sausages held in place by their ropes, as protection against low flying planes. But none came. All of July none came. We lay in a forgotten corner of the war. The battle raged 300 kilometers away at the base of the Normandy peninsula.

SIBYLLE: What were you supposed to do?

GEORG: The captain had a dog. For this dog I built a dog house, there in the corner of the garden. That was my first assignment. It took me 3 days, it was a lovely dog house. Through the dog I got to know the captain a little bit. He was a man you could talk to, but he was a white raven.

SIBYLLE: What became of him?

GEORG: He was caught, and I'm certain that he knew ahead of time that he was going to die in battle.

SIBYLLE: You were going to tell me what you did here.

GEORG: As as it was peaceful here? Yes, you will hardly

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hardly believe it, but it is the absolute truth. Along with a farmer from Silesia, a man from the Rheinland, and someone I have forgotten. In any case, four of us went out every day with two-wheeled cart. Through St. Pierre, over the harbor bridge, past the post office, and up the Rue Jean Jaurès.

SIBYLLE: The entire stretch we just rode. That took an hour.

GEORG: Yes, almost to the other end of the city, and then a ways out into the countryside between the stone walls and hedges which protect each field from the wind, and into a small valley. A telephone line went through there, or rather a dozen telephone lines, French civilian lines which were out of service.

SIBYLLE: And then?

GEORG: These lines were made of copper, copper was a scarce item, the homeland needed copper, only this homeland lay 2000 km from here.

SIBYLLE: I don't understand...



GEORG: You can't understand, you were never in the German Wehrmacht. There was an order that these copper wires be made to serve war industry purposes, and we had to pull down the copper wires from their poles and bring them back to the base. Gradually a big pile of the stuff accumulated and was then destroyed by the bombardment.

Meanwhile, in city people got wind of the fact that the German occupiers intended to defend Brest, although everyone knew that it would be completely senseless. The prospect of sacrificing themselves on the altar of German honor made the French rebellious of course, and the French civilian administration had to post more and more warnings on the walls.

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SPEAKER: Appel à la Population du Finistère

Dans les circonstances tragiques...

Under the tragic circumstances through which France is now going, it is more necessary than ever that the populace remain calm and disciplined. Everyone is to remain at his post...

GEORG: Naturally the French administration had to demand calm and discipline, but many Frenchmen were of a different opinion. With the invasion, the French Résistance had become actively organized, and one of their headquarters lay south of Brest, and its tentacles reached well into the city. Since the beginning of the occupation of Brest by the German army and navy in 1941, many groups or individuals suspected of sabotage were executed by firing squad. In June of 1944 the Germans were hastily trying to fortify the city while the responsible French people, among whom the mayor Eusen was the most important figure, tried to *prevent* the city from being defended.

SIBYLLE: Why hastily? I would think that they had been working at it since 1941.

GEORG: Certainly. But all of these expensive facilities were built under the assumption that the enemy would come from the sea. The cannons were pointed toward the sea. Now the enemy would come from the land side, and for that the defense works had to be improvised, tank ditches had to be dug, positions blasted out of the rocky cliffs, houses had to be torn down which were in the line of fire. The enemy came quickly after the successful breakthrough at Avranches and arrived at Levneven on 5 August, a small village only 50 km northeast of Brest. At this point the German command

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attempted with all means to force the French still remaining in the city to help with the construction of the defenses, but in vain.

SIBYLLE: At this point you probably didn't have to tear down any more telephone lines from their poles.

GEORG: That came to an end the day of the breakthrough at Avranches. It isn't for nothing that there is now in the newly rebuilt village a granite monument commemorating this event that practically meant the final defeat of Hitler. On that same day we had to leave our houses in Brest and descend into the underground defense complex of the fortress.

SIBYLLE: From that day on which the war was finally lost, it started again for you people in earnest...

GEORG: Yes –

SIBYLLE: And who was going to defend Brest?

GEORG: That was a right colorful bunch. First of all there were the fortress troops of the army, rather unfit soldiers who over the years had become used to a pleasant life. They were under the command of von Mosel who was still a Colonel at the beginning of the siege. He looked like the ideal German general staff officer with a high smooth forehead, but in fact for this reason, because his family origin excluded him from fitting in with the Nazi mercenary pack, he was insecure. In the past he had permitted extreme measures against the civilian population and let executions take place without legal justification. – Then there were the units under the command of Admiral Kähler. Of them only the active sub crews that suddenly had to carry carbines could be considered to be soldiers.

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The so-called permanent staff which over the years had established itself in the Naval School with civilian beds and civilian whores was so through and through rotten, corrupted, and gone to fat that they would have had to be lowered down into underground installations by crane if fear hadn't sufficed to drive them inside. In addition, there were the groups of the Todt Organization which, along with 5000 French civilians, worked in the shipyards.

In the city there were even several companies of Russians from the Vlassow Army. Thanks to a conspiracy of a Russian woman married to a French officer, shortly before the beginning of the siege these Russians overthrew their SS-guards and went over to the French Résistance taking with them all of their equipment. The Todt units had, by the way, their own commander, the technical Admiral von Schirmer. To all of this came now all of those units dispersed by Patton's army who found themselves in Brittany *west* of Avranches at the time of the breakthrough. They were commanded by the generals Fahrmacher and Rauch, and part of that command was the 2<sup>nd</sup> paratroop division under General Ramcke. All of these big shots came together in Brest, at first beside the Naval School in a large above ground bunker. Come, we'll go down there, it's only a few hundred meters.

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GEORG: That is the bunker where the generals gathered in the first days of the siege.

SIBYLLE: But there is a large red cross painted on the wall, the entire wall. It's faded but still recognizable. Was that a field hospital?

GEORG: Well, it wasn't entirely correct to set up a command center

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in a field hospital, but after a few days the big shots went underground anyway. While living in the block house, they fought about their authority and the overall command. General Ramcke sent a telegram to his supreme war commander which stated that he, Ramcke, didn't want to subordinate himself to a weak infantry commander. Thus he, the hero of Crete and the Führer's favorite, got his way. From the Wolfschanze came the order that Ramcke would assume command over all units in Brest. That was the second great moment in the military career of this man, and it meant the destruction of Brest and the death of 10,000 German soldiers.

SIBYLLE: Yes – so he was a pig?

GEORG: Ach, he was just a ruthless professional. We lived in tunnels bored into the rocks. They were extensive, but still so crowded that I often saw him. And because I, as telephonist, was part of the staff and had the honor of laying phone lines through the underground passages from the communications center located in the command battle station to the general's quarters, I sometimes saw him up close....Thanks to an assignment which I will tell you about in a moment, I hung around for hours a day in the command station for hours a day (which the general regularly visited only in the last week of the siege. Until the end he visited his troops outside and in the bunkers and fired them up. He was the soul of the business. The business was the defense of this city. Unfortunately the enterprise was pure insanity.

He was a short wiry type, beloved by his people, always accompanied by a small dog. When he became angry, he would flail away with a hooked cane. A Frenchman described him as the perfect model for

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the title page of the magazine "Hunting and Fishing." His paratroopers called him "father Ramcke," and he took good care of them. When the paratroopers arrived, we ordinary soldiers learned for the first time in this war the real meaning of the phrase: "The best is barely good enough for the German soldier." They lived like princes, and, just like a thanksgiving turkey, they were well fed in preparation their early death.

SIBYLLE: Terrible

GEORG: When the Americans had closed the ring around Brest, Ramcke made the following proclamation:

SPEAKER: I expect that every paratrooper does his duty to the end with fanatical zeal. The First Division earned immortality at Monte Cassino (Italy), the Second Division will do the same in its defense of Brest.

GEORG: The paratroopers weren't able to translate these thundering phrases in simple infantry man German, like we other soldiers were able to do, as we were less well fed and less ready to accept fanaticism as a replacement of equal value for reflection.

For us the sentence read: At Monte Casino I, Ramcke, was awarded the crossed swords for my Iron Cross, and here in Brest I will get the diamonds (the highest of the high military honors) to add to it.

However, his Führer made Ramcke wait for it. And also the Americans took their time in setting up 32 batteries of heavy artillery around the city. They were in place by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of August, and things were rather peaceful for us in the meantime, except for occasional bombardments. The Wehrmacht reports didn't mention us yet. The skirmishes

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took place outside the city and weren't especially fierce.

SIBYLLE: And what did you do in these weeks?

GEORG: It turned into a strange situation. For 3 years the fortress was built at enormous expense, but

on the coastal hills above the harbor and around St. Pierre, which were separated by steep valleys, there were defensive works which weren't connected to each other by buried or underground telephone lines. There had been laid improvised telephone lines above ground, and of course these lines were often subject to disruption. We, who before had been sent out to plunder the copper of the civilian lines, were now sent out to repair the lines between the hill bunkers. When one of these defensive works didn't answer, we set out, following the lines which we came to know well, up hill and down, through the tank barriers and thickets, and that was a fairly enjoyable job, as long as the Americans didn't get serious, and we looked forward to every repair job that got us out of the underground bunkers. Bunker isn't the right word for what was more like a termite nest in which there were smooth-walled cement chambers as well lit as with daylight and divided into living quarters, command centers, field hospitals, kitchens, dining halls, officers' quarters, shafts, elevators, steps, and switchboard centers. There were also long connecting tunnels cut into the rocks without cement linings. Sometimes the water was ankle high above a muddy bottom over which unsteady planks had been laid. We didn't know how many people were stuck in there as long as the siege lasted, but when it ended and the inhabitants burst out into daylight, we saw huge masses of people in endless columns being marched off into captivity. All in all there were more than 40,000

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of them, many of whom were wounded at the end, filling tunnel after tunnel. On 1 Sept. the Wehrmacht report mentioned Brest for the first time.

SPEAKER: The battle sector Brest is, after the failure of the first enemy major offensive, under constant heavy bombardment. Renewed attacks against our forward positions have been repulsed.

GEORG: During the following 20 days Brest was mentioned almost daily in the Wehrmacht report. The homeland got the impression that a relatively small number of Germans were holding off the surrounding attackers. The paratroopers manned the trenches and field positions. After their own reserves were exhausted, then other soldiers filled the gaps in the ranks.

The fortress artillery soldiers manned those German artillery emplacements which could be pointed at the enemy, until the bombs destroyed the guns despite their steel armor. Of the fortress staff, only we four line repairmen came above ground. All of the other 25,000 to 30,000 men sat underground, day after day, night after night, and heard the dull thuds of the exploding shells and bombs, and felt the shuddering of the earth down to the lowest levels – and played 17 and 4 (blackjack).

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1<sup>st</sup> SOLDIER: I hold what's in the pot, and raise a hundred.

2<sup>nd</sup> SOLDIER: What's in it?

1<sup>st</sup> SOLDIER: Come on, are you sticking with 15, or are you going to draw another card? Man, don't make such a fuss about it.

2<sup>nd</sup> SOLDIER: Shut your trap, I'll do whatever I want.

3<sup>rd</sup> SOLDIER: (*counting*) two hundred, three hundred, well, there are simply about 500 marks in, it's worth a try.

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2<sup>nd</sup> SOLDIER: Ah shit, I'll take another card – 4 – Man, I have 20. What do you have?

1<sup>st</sup> SOLDIER: Not enough. Eighteen.

3<sup>rd</sup> SOLDIER: What a pig. Give me the cards. I bet 100.

LOUDSPEAKER: The Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht announces –

SEVERAL VOICES: Quiet, quiet! (It doesn't get quiet immediately)

LOUDSPEAKER: An enemy bridgehead north of Antwerp was wiped out in a counter-attack – the strong enemy pressure in the Loewen-Sedan sector continues.

A VOICE: Damn it, be quiet!

LOUDSPEAKER: Strong enemy attacks east of Verdun.

1<sup>st</sup> SOLDIER: 10 +11, according to Adam Ries' counting = 21.

3<sup>rd</sup> SOLDIER: Shit, shit.

LOUDSPEAKER: After strong preliminary bombardment the Americans continue their attack against Fortress Brest. Only after bitter struggle against the ferocious resistance of our soldiers (with high losses in some sectors) was the enemy able to penetrate our forward positions. The breakthroughs were cut off..

DRUNK SOLDIERS SING: And we march, and we march, and we march against Engeland.

SIBYLLE: My God, that's so terrible...

GEORG: It was at really terrible above ground where our senseless war went on without a pause. The ordinary soldiers understood perfectly that the first week of September had passed, and Ramcke still didn't yet have his diamonds (for his Iron Cross).

The official version was: We had to hold American troops in Brest so that they couldn't be employed elsewhere. Behind that there is an important military principle. Even the hopeless defense of a besieged fortress can make sense, if the enemy can be defeated at another, decisive point.

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And there are borderline cases in which it is difficult to decide whether holding out as long a possible makes any sense. Brest was not a borderline case.

SIBYLLE: Why not?

GEORG: Of course our resistance occupied American forces, but the Americans didn't lack forces anywhere. It was as though someone had said: I have just harmed Vanderbilt by stealing 100 marks

from him. 100 from 5 billion!

Patton's army was then spread throughout all of France. While 2 of his divisions were held down in Brest, he had other divisions already in Dijon, 700 km to the east. From the immense resources the Americans had assembled a war machine around us that didn't stop, even for an hour, to pour out steel. Some of our defensive structures, which were served by our above ground telephone lines, were eliminated, but 2 positions held out until 2 days before the surrender. That meant that until then we four had to crawl through the battle in order to at least once a day restore telephone communications. Look over there. Where you now see houses, gardens, and lawns, back then there was no tree, not even a bush. We leaped from crater to crater. We treated it like a sport, whether we would return to the bunker or not. We also went out at night because then it was a little quieter outside as the airplanes weren't flying. And at night we saw the unhappy city burn. During the day we saw the clouds of smoke over it.

In the air-raid shelter Sadi-Carnot on 8 September there were 400 French and 500 German workers of the Todt organization, along with enormous amounts of ammunition. It caught fire

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and began to explode. A German worker tried to warn the French to get out, that the ammunition was burning, alles kaputt, vite! But too late. 375 French workers and 500 Germans died. When today's inhabitants of Brest think about these days, they remember their dead in the air-raid shelter Sadi-Carnot.

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GEORG: The bays of the sub bunkers are 10 to 15 meters deep. Our people tossed the superfluous weapons of the fortress into these bays and then topped off with gasoline on to keep the Americans from getting them. One day the gasoline caught fire, and 80 people, German soldiers and workers, burned to death in a firestorm. Protected by 5 to 7 meters thick roofs made of reinforced concrete, the sub bunkers were thought to be absolutely invulnerable. However, one day the Americans dropped for the first time 1100 kg bombs which blew a hole in the bunkers.

The officers were very much surprised by this. Ramcke came, had a look at the damage, and I heard him say:

A GENERAL'S VOICE: Well, gentlemen, what do you say now? The Amis do solid work. Nice big hole there, eh? We never thought it possible.

GEORG: Oh well, so much foresight couldn't be expected of them. The time began when almost everyone got a medal. Including those with sallow faces who hadn't seen the light of day for months. The two corporals who for months had cleaned the toilets received Iron Crosses (presumably without crossed swords, oak leaves, and/or diamonds – translator), and I have to say they earned it more than many others. **In my company I was, at the end, the only the only one without a medal, except for the**

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**East Front Medal (“frozen meat medal”)** which I couldn't avoid getting. The flush toilets in the center of the underground city no longer sufficed for this crew. Buckets were put out, and they overflowed.

From early to late there were many thousands of drunk people, and the liquid had to go somewhere. They repaired to the dark, unused tunnels. There arose a beastly stench in some parts of the underground complex. Drunken sergeants ordered us to carry out the full buckets. We carried them around the nearest corner and dumped them.

SIBYLLE: Please stop.

GEORG: Once I found in the Naval School wonderful fruit conserve containers, apricot and plums, a heavy sack full. I gave some of it away, word got around. **In the last week the dear non-com of the orderly room whom I hated and who hated me. (Is this the same Uffz. H. or Hahn from Prüm and Kuby's first Russian campaign? – translator)**

NON-COM: Listen, you have conserves there. Can't you give me some of them?

GEORG: I don't believe there are any left.

NON-COM: Don't act like that. Now it's all the same. Besides, you don't have to do it for nothing.

GEORG: Why? What does that mean?

NON-COM: You don't have the Iron Cross yet, do you? You're the only one.

GEORG: There is probably a reason for that.

NON-COM: Man, that's a bloody shame. Give me your pay book, the Colonel will sign it without even looking at it.

GEORG: **Nope, my friend. If I don't have it yet, I will be able to avoid it at the end.**

NON-COM: Miserable shithead.

GEORG: That's how it was. **And the ordinary soldiers figured out that Ramcke**

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**still didn't have his diamonds.** But the terrain outside on which we could still move around, had become damned small. And then one day we saw a message posted in 3 or 4 places, wonderful words. In far off Berlin we are thinking of you – Josef Goebbels.

GEORG: Ramcke moved into the command center, the highest point of the underground city, he only had 5 above him 5 meters of steel and reinforced concrete. The central switchboard was there, to which by now only a few telephone lines ran. The officers' quarters were grouped around this central room. The doors stood open, we could see them packing their big suitcases. The general sat in the middle of the central room on a reclining chair, his legs spread, his hands resting on his cane. He wore a coat because it was cool in the bunker, in the white triangle of a silken kerchief the Iron Cross shone, to be sure without the diamonds. In one corner of the room there was a podium, above it a swiveling periscope came through the ceiling made of 5 meters of steel and reinforced concrete. Ramcke's adjutant, half hanging with his elbows slung over the handles, observed the situation outside. He of

course also wore an Iron Cross. He could see the hill between the Naval School and the last houses of St. Pierre, which was nothing but a pile of rubble. On this rising approach to the bunker's entrance there were, here and there, some German soldiers who fired from machine guns when the enemy attacked. And the lieutenant colonel looked through the periscope as though they were doing their duty. And the ordinary soldiers, although they hadn't gone to the War College or an academy, knew full well that Brest was no borderline situation.

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There was only one radio one of the upper bunkers which still had a connection with Berlin and the Wolfsschanze. This radio passed on the the homeland the names of the dead. However, for every officer so much data and details had to be transmitted that the remaining available transmission time (only a few hours a day at best) was insufficient for transmitting the names of the fallen ordinary soldiers.

SIBYLLE: That's not possible. That can't be.

GEORG: On the contrary, that too was possible. I myself saw the ten line radio messages for the fallen officers, and list of names of the fallen ordinary soldiers which weren't transmitted. In the last 2 days, in which there was no wire left to be patched up, I was employed as a runner between the command center and the radio bunker.

On the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup>, a motorized fishing boat (with room for about 20 people) in one of the submarine bunkers was loaded up with all kinds of luggage and weapons. I myself had to bring to the little boat some reels of telephone cable. Then, under the protection of darkness, General Ramcke and a handful of paratroopers left the fortress, which simply could no longer be held, and sailed over the bay to Crozon peninsula where the Americans and French had long ago established their base. There he waited hidden in a corner for American captivity and, as the soldiers said, and for his diamonds.

The rumor was passed around that everything was, and we began to smash the carbines and to open those mysterious sealed safes in which we expected to find the finest food, but we only found black bread and pigs' lard.

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On the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>, after radio messages had been exchanged with the Americans, 3 officers and a corporal left the command bunker through the front entrance leading to the outside. The corporal carried a stick with a bed sheet fastened to it by two knots. A few of us followed him into the daylight. We saw them walk between the craters and up the hill of St. Pierre. No American soldier was in sight. No cannon fired, no bombs fell, the sun shone, the sea was blue, and I gradually realized that I had survived the war. (Again Kuby had been lucky, a theme running through all of his war diaries – translator)

Sergeants and officers crouched under the torn remnants of the camouflage nets and carried on shameless discussions about continuing the struggle. And I laid myself down in an especially deep bomb crater which could have contained 3 houses. Above me I saw only the sky and didn't hear the voices of the others any more. A single airplane with a double fuselage, as I well remember, flew up there in circles, and I didn't have to be afraid of it any more.

The delegation with the white flag came back. A paratroop officer called out to them:



VOICE: Well, is it still on?

GEORG: But it was over.

SIBYLLE: Thank God.

GEORG: They didn't understand that it was finished. We went back to the bunker and picked up our already packed belongings. The officers summoned their orderlies and entrusted them with their suitcases. But we waited a long time, until afternoon. In the meantime, Mosel, freshly promoted to general, negotiated in place of Ramcke with the American major Anthony Miller. In the city, Colonel Erich Pitzonke handed over the crew of the Wilson bunker to the

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American Colonel Hirschfelder. Names can often be full of irony. The major, who had signed the orders for the most inhuman (“unmenschlich”) attacks against the walls of Brest, was called Mensch.

We waited in the command bunker, and suddenly a strange soldier appeared in the upper entrance. What has since then become commonplace to us, we saw then up close for the first time. The round steel helmet, the short light rifle, and the practical uniform. Without saying word, the man backed up against the wall of the entrance and motioned upwards with his thumb. We started moving. Once at the open space in front of the entrance, we were divided up into marching groups. The officers were separated from us, and the orderlies from the officers. The orderlies handed over the suitcases to their masters. After the first few hundred meters the officers began to throw away part of their luggage. Soldiers tore them open. The beautiful things lay on the ground. A man in the row in front of me put on a pink pajama shirt over his uniform. At a garden wall a young American woman from the auxiliary corps, a pretty young woman in an elegant uniform, and we marched on by, 5 or 10 – or 20 thousand unwashed, used up, stinking men. I saw nobody who looked her in the eye. They probably didn't dare.

And then we saw the first French people with rifles and the armbands of the liberation army. They stood around as guards, and one of them wanted my shoes, and I said in French that I only had this pair, and he said in German:

FRENCHMAN: I spent 2 years in Germany, and I didn't have any shoes, except wooden shoes.

GEORG: But he let me have them. [The story is somewhat different in Mein Krieg, pg. 440: “Also the French prisoners had only one pair of shoes and had to give them up for wooden shoes or go barefoot.' I fall silent. I will have to be silent often.” – Translator]

You know what? Let's drive the same route the trucks took us back than, through Brest and to Landerneau, that's only 20 km.

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CHORUS SINGS:

Quand un soldat s'en va t'en guerre il  
dans sa musette son bâton d'Maréchal.

Quand un soldat revient de guerre il a  
dans sa musette un peu linge sal.

When a soldier goes to war he has  
in his kit bag a marshal's baton.  
When a soldier returns from war is has  
in his kit bag some dirty laundry.

It was here, do you see the stone walls on both sides of the road? The first French stood there, civilians, perhaps people evacuated from Brest. They tore stones from the earth and threw them at us. We stood packed on the back of trucks that had no canvas. Those of us on the outside got the worst of it. As far as Landerneau the people lined the road, they threw pieces of iron, hammers, whatever they could find. I stood all the way to the front against the driver's compartment [again Kuby's good fortune – Translator]. An American sat on its roof, his automatic rifle at the ready, guarding us. When the first stones flew he laughed. Later he became serious and shook his head. Some of us were wounded. Four years of oppression, deportation, concentration camps found here their payback. Often the trucks could only move at walking pace. It grew dark, and still they threw at us from the darkness and screamed.

VOICES: 'itler kaputt, 'itler kaputt.

GEORG: In the night we rode through this village. The column stopped here. There was a light in a house, and a woman stood in the window. She screamed:

WOMAN'S VOICE: 'itler kaputt, 'itler kaputt.

GEORG: She disappeared from the window, the column was still stopped. Then she came back and dumped the contents of her night pot on us. Most of it landed on the face of the American guard. He yelled, shouted curses, cocked his submachinegun, aimed at the window, and fired. The woman threw up her arms in the air, stood still for a moment, then fell backwards.

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She wasn't screaming any more.

SIBYLLE: Please, stop.

GEORG: That was in the night from 18 to 19 September, 10 years ago. Now Brest stands again, the people are friendly and polite to us. A war between French and Germans has become unthinkable, the cards have been reshuffled. But only 10 years have passed. On 18 September, the Wehrmacht report was as follows:

SPEAKER: In the ruins of Brest the heroic troops, pushed into a small area, hold their ground, against continuing heavy enemy attack.

GEORG: And on 19 Sept –

SPEAKER: The city and harbor of Brest are nothing but smoking ruins. The surviving defenders have retired to the Crozon peninsula and continued to fight.

GEORG: It was Ramcke and 20 men. On the 19<sup>th</sup> they let themselves be captured. On 20 September the Wehrmacht announced that Ramcke had been granted the diamonds [for his Iron Cross with the crossed swords and oak leaves – Translator]. The 45,000 men who went into captivity had parents and wives at home who were led by the announcement to believe that almost all of their men were dead. It took half of a year for the first cards from the POW camps in Germany to arrive. Then in Germany, there was no postal service and there were no addresses.

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Nothing remains to remind us of it. Nature forgets more quickly than people, (pensively) although people also sometimes forget very quickly. Perhaps we too forget a little too quickly what happened *here* 10 years ago and happened to our country 10 years ago...

### **Summation of the State Attorney's case against Ramcke, pp. 178-9**

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Moreover, the further course of the war incontrovertibly demonstrated that the defense of Brest, along with the human and material losses associated with it, were objectively senseless.....

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In addition, Ramcke felt himself insulted by the following passage in the radio play: "From the Wolfschanze came the order that Ramcke would assume command over all units in Brest. That was the second great hour in the military life of this man which meant the destruction of Brest and the death of 10,000 German soldiers.... This posits only a cause and effect relationship which can be observed throughout history....Such a statement is, according to common opinion not at all slanderous, nor does it represent the assignment of guilt, neither literally nor logically. The pointing out of such a causal relationship is therefore not slander.

### **Summary of the Court's decision rejecting Ramcke's accusation against Kuby and Proske of defamation of character, pp. 198-9**

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...In this context it must be considered that the secondary plaintiff (Ramcke) in his first book made assertions about Jewish fellow citizens and Jews in general, whose tenor matches that of the worst statements of the (N.S.) Regime at that time....

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After all of this the court comes to the conclusion that the accused must be acquitted. Their allegations in the radio play are in part demonstratively true, or they don't fulfill the legal requirements as set out in § 193 of the legal code concerning punishable defamation of character. Also there are no formal insults in the radio play directed at the secondary plaintiff (Ramcke). For these reasons the accused are acquitted for the lack of probable cause. According to § 467 Paragraph 1 of the Code of Criminal Procedure the state treasury will bear the costs of the trial. According to paragraph 2 of this Code the state treasury must also bear the costs to the accused resulting from the trial because there is no proven probable cause.

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*Ich habe die Welt nicht erfunden, sondern nur vorgefunden.* – Spruch vom Übersetzer – Bob Redman