

“**The Sitzkrieg of Private Stephan**” (**Sieg! Sieg!**, 1961) by Erich Kuby is an autobiographical novel set in France during the German invasion of 1940.

“*Nichts in diesem Buch wurde erfunden.*” (Nothing in this book was invented.) – E. K.

The starting point in the novel is a village named Pütz (Prüm in *Mein Krieg*) in the Eifel (hilly region west of Cologne up to the Belgian border). The main characters are Stefan Wolzogen-Kuby [a play on “wohlerzogen” or well behaved?], his best friend and sculptor Ernst Benhard (Hansheinrich Bertram), and his nemesis and personal representation of Hitler on earth, the former SA storm trooper Sergeant Hahl (Unteroffizier H. oder Hahn in *Mein Krieg*).

I quote from *Mein Krieg*:

pg. 143: The silent protest: I do not belong to the H's. I don't mean with that the the Nazi H[itler]. The Nazi H. is the German H[ahn or Hahl in the novel], is one of 80 million who, just like him, imagine that they are their way world domination, which they no more qualified to exercise that a tribe of aborigines.

pg. 150: The one H[itler] leaves me indifferent, but the other H[ahn or Hahl in the novel] has driven me nuts, or rather that I had to run up against the former in the person of the latter in order to lose control of myself and stop winding my way through this mess. That is the main point of the entire matter....Good, they can't all be exterminated, that would be the exact method of the various H's.

In the novel, Kuby's court-martial in Demidoff, Russia in 1942 is moved backward to the end of his participation in the French campaign, and there the story ends with Private Stefan being sent to military prison back in Germany, after a general (modeled after General Jahn) reduces his sentence and says (pg. 438), “I've studied your case. If I had been your company commander the whole thing would never have happened. I have reduced the sentence to one year and five months. You leave tomorrow for Germany.” The novel has a classic open end: “And now Stefan Wolzogen's war began.” Somewhat like the end of Thomas Mann's “Magic Mountain” which Kuby must have read.

To those of you who do not and never will read German well enough to get through Kuby's “Mein Krieg” I recommend this (somewhat condensed) translation of the novel. It describes in greater detail his dilemma with the Wehrmacht, and its dilemma with him. To be sure, the translator, a native German and expert in German literature, occasionally has difficulties with colloquial English and slang, and much of the humor in the original is untranslatable. But don't let that stop you – this novel is the easy and way to get Kuby's message from *Mein Krieg*.

As in introduction I include here the chapter “The Invasion of Paradise.” It corresponds roughly to the chapters “Kriegsreise durch Frankreich” and “Als Sieger im Paradies” in *Mein Krieg*. Also come other relevant passages which struck me.

I may later include the episode from the chapter “Machine Kaput,” in which Sgt. Hahl get his Iron Cross by taking the credit for the relatively harmless exploit of truck driver Benhard when he discovers some forlorn and starving French troops from Africa who are hiding in the woods. See. pp. 308-16.

“The Sitzkrieg of Private Stefan,” chapter “The Invasion of Paradise”

by Erich Kuby, translated by Theodore H. Lustig

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It wasn't long before Sergeant Dammers was relieved of his assignment. Barely an hour after Lieutenant Meyer had been informed of the event by telephone he arrived in La Cachette, in a terrible mood, and ordered Dammers to pack his things and stay with the supply detachment of the company until further instructions were received. No one, not even Meyer, said in so many words that his carelessness had caused Hebenstreit's death, but that accusation was of course implicit in the swift transfer. **Corporal Hahl** was just as quickly named acting squad leader, and Meyer let it be understood that Hahl's promotion to sergeant and his official appointment would follow in the not too distant future, and that it depended only on his satisfactory performance during the trial period.

The squad suddenly was short two men. Replacements had to be found immediately, all the more since shortly after Hebenstreit's funeral the company was ordered to take over all communications for the division headquarters. The replacements arrived in the course of the afternoon. One of them, Karl Schoenberg, had served with the construction squad and came from Berlin, a fact which became obvious as soon as he opened his mouth; he had served his full two years in the Army, had been in Poland, and was therefore in many respects an old war horse. The other one looked as if he came from a village in southern Italy, had missed his way and landed in the German Army by

mistake; but his German was excellent, slightly tinted by a Rhenish accent; his name was Heinrich Hirsch and none of that confirmed his Neapolitan looks. He had coal-black hair, worn, against all regulations, so long that it showed under his cap, an olive-colored skin, a curved nose with a knife-edged bridge and eyes like coals under his long, feminine eyelashes. The heart of any first sergeant was bound to sink at seeing this warrior even a mile away. The uniform hung like a sack on his skinny body, the belt loose and crooked around his waist, and when he was ordered to pull it straight and he tightened it, he acquired the waistline of a ballet-dancer, Hirsch had arrived in Pütz with a casual detachment of twenty men the day after the division had left town, and had covered the additional distance on the back of a truck. Now, having arrived in La Cachette, he was at last given a front-line assignment. His military experience was limited to three months' training with a signal replacement battalion.

Hebenstreit's death thus brought about considerable changes in the squad. As far as Stefan was concerned, Hirsch's arrival gave him the status of an old hand. But apart from that....

"It's a good thing we have something to do," he said to Benhard. "Just imagine having had **Hahl** as squad leader when we were still in Pütz!"

There was in fact quite a lot to do, because the division couldn't get across the Meuse. There was time to set up a network of telephone lines. It came into being during the night. Stefan had drawn duty at the switchboard; Hirsch the new man was to take the incoming messages and was supposed to learn the ropes. Hahl and Fränzel were hanging around outside the Coffin. When daylight came, the network consisted of twenty-three lines, including the so-called inside lines to the command posts in the immediate vicinity.

It was a warm night, Stefan had the door open and sat in front of the board that kept buzzing with great insistence. The telephone war was in full swing. That night, the switchboard had

the code name "Lotus." "This is Lotus, this is Lotus," Stefan answered and then repeated the desired connection – "Bock Beer – I'm calling" – before putting the plug in.

Infantrymen are always restricted to a view extending only a hundred yards to the right and left, fight their way blindly through the country side, across countries and sometimes across continents, and even afterwards don't know where they have been. Signalmen, particularly when they are attached to a division headquarters, are in a very different position, in this as in so many other ways. They are as well informed about the general situation as the commanding general himself and his chief of staff. Sometimes they know about changes even sooner than the top brass, because they read messages before passing them on and listen in to conversations, even though that is of course strictly against regulations.

At four o'clock in the morning Stefan knew that the two divisions at their flanks had succeeded in crossing the Meuse in the early morning hours and had mopped up the opposite bank sufficiently to allow the engineers to start putting bridges across. Only in the sector of their own division had the enemy, well dug in on the steep and wooded river bank, repelled the repeated attempts at establishing a bridgehead made by assault boats during the night. Now daylight was coming and it could be taken for granted that the attacks would not be resumed until the following night.

Hahl, standing before the open door of the Coffin [communications truck], listened to what Stefan told him about the situation.

"Shit," Hahl said, "there's something wrong somewhere."

This was an army that had no experience with meeting resistance, and stubborn resistance at that. It had become used to the idea, particularly after the Polish campaign and after these first few days, that it was irresistible, and this conviction was half of its strength. The French actually dared to defend themselves? How did they get that idea? If they succeeded in halting the ad-

vance, the explanation had to be found in the faulty direction of the German troops.

“What in hell are they doing up front?” Hahl said. “That little bit of water, just a few yards! What's happened to our Stukas?”

“Perhaps they have something else to do,” Stefan suggested.

Now, after daybreak, it was getting quieter at the switchboard, incontrovertible proof that the halt would continue for a while.

“But we have thousands and thousands. . .

“Who knows,” Stefan said.

Hahl looked up. “You'll stay on duty until seven o'clock, then I'll send Tilkenspross to relieve you. You, too, Hirsch. And as soon as you have a chance, get a haircut. We're working with headquarters here, you can't run around like a gypsy.”

“Yessir, Corporal,” Hirsch said.

“In the event of trouble with the lines, let me know immediately.”

Hahl got his coat from the cab and walked over to the chateau with the barber. They had orders to sleep in the back of the cellar, because that was at a lower level. Standing up, Fränzel wrapped himself into a shelter half, then lay down in the grass under the Coffin. Thus he had cover against shrapnel which, when it burst high above ground, formed little black clouds and then rained down in a wide spray. Fränzel had to stay close to the switchboard in order to be available as a courier.

Before falling asleep, he shouted from underneath the truck, “Wake me when you're relieved. I'm going to take a drive and see what we can organize. Want to come along?”

“What do you want to organize?”

“Man, I don't want to starve around here.”

Stefan was fighting sleep. When you get beyond a certain point, fatigue actually hurts. For days, ever since they had left Pütz, they had never slept more than an hour at a time. “Now, that's impossible,” he said to himself when he didn't hear a buzz on the switchboard and Hirsch had to nudge him before he replied,

"This is Lotus." I'll have to get over this, he thought; It would be a joke if I couldn't, a cup of coffee wouldn't hurt.

There was a little left in his canteen, but it was cold and had a disgusting metal taste.

"Do you want it?" he asked Hirsch, but Hirsch wasn't thirsty. He reached out and let the rest of the coffee run out on the grass. He was so tired that he felt cold.

"Why don't you take a walk over to the shed? I've seen a headquarters field kitchen there, maybe they have something warm to drink."

Hirsch took off and soon came back with a canteen full of steaming hot coffee.

Exactly as Stefan had asked Hebenstreit six months ago, Hirsch now asked Stefan, "Tell me, what's it like around here?"

"I can't tell yet; the corporal [Hahl/Hahn] has been squad leader only for a few hours."

"But he was in the squad before, wasn't he?"

"Yes, that he was," Stefan said. "But it makes quite a difference if someone can give orders or not. That can change a lot of things."

"And otherwise?"

"Otherwise? Otherwise, there's a war on. Even if it's hard to believe. Tell me something, why do you look like an Italian? Do you have an Italian grandmother?"

"No," Hirsch said, greatly surprised.

"I do," Stefan said "and still I look like somebody the Romans lured with a sausage from the German forest.

"I'm only called Hirsch, but we're pure Aryans."

"Well, that's wonderful," Stefan said. He felt revived by the coffee. "No Duce blood at all? Funny, the way Nature does things sometimes."

"Anyway, I don't believe all that stuff about race and all that. My father's a teacher and he says all that's wrong.

"Is that so?" Stefan said. "The corporal thinks it's right – just so you know."

"I'll watch out", Hirsch Said. "I'd like to live in a castle like that.

"Can you take over for a while? There isn't much doing now," he said to Hirsch. "I'll be around."

Hirsch put on the headphones and took Stefan's seat. Stefan got out, rubbed his ears and took a deep breath of the morning air. Benhard, who had awakened a few minutes earlier, had taken a folding chair from the truck and was sitting on it. In front of him on the lawn were bread and an open can of liverwurst. He was studying a map.

"Hungry?" he asked Stefan.

"Not yet."

"That little town up ahead, do we hold it?"

"Nouzonville – sure, since noon yesterday. Where have you been? On mental vacation?"

"Nobody tells me anything."

"Here, take a look," Stefan said and busily bent over the map, "that's the steep river bank where the French are dug in. They're shooting through curtains of leaves that stay fresh just one day and are replaced at night."

"The things you know."

"Their artillery is only so-so. Behind this hill here they have railroad guns, 32 cm, a lot of nonsense, they can't do anything with those things."

"Is that right?"

"That's what Kuhleder says."

"I see. They really have a nerve to make such a fuss. That wasn't in our plans, was it? And what else do you know about the war? Are the Belgians still fighting? Or have we already reached Paris?"

"All right. You don't have to ask questions if you don't. . . ."

"Now, now, now. . . ." Benhard said and dipped a piece of bread into the oil that was left in the can. "One never knows. You're really enjoying yourself, it seems."

"Enjoying myself – no. But . . . I've never seen a morning like

this, it's like the first morning of creation. It's not the weather, the blue sky, you know, not the air . . . everything is so – so –"

"Real," Benhard said.

"Yes, that's the right word."

"Just as I thought."

"Incredibly real. But it could also be a dream, the castle, this park, the Chinese tea cozy over there next to the weeping willow, and in the middle of all that – us. You ought to see yourself sitting there, and over there our trucks, the wires, the headquarters pennants . . . listen!"

They heard Hirsch's monotonous voice over in the switchboard truck, busily repeating, "Lotus . . . Nirvana, I'm calling Nirvana."

"The wrong prop in the wrong set," Stefan said, "and that's why everything seems to be so real, it couldn't be more real."

"Real, more real, most real . . . boyohboy!"

"I imagine the people who own this place must have had it in their family for a hundred years, and they never saw any more how it really looked. It was their chateau, about this time they would have come from Paris for their vacation, the children used to play out here in the summer . . . they let their boats sail on the pond . . . they knew all this so well. It was very nice but always the same, every year. And they wanted to keep it that way, always the same, and so they were very careful with it."

Benhard laughed.

"Yes, it was their castle, their park, their lawn, their summer pavilion. Property encumbers, they couldn't do with it whatever they liked, as we can do now. We don't have to ask anyone if we may sit down here."

"And there's no one whom we could ask."

"Exactly. We weren't invited, we're simply here. Imagine being here by invitation; you'd have to behave yourself. Let's say the Mayor of Peine had asked you for dinner, you're supposed to get the commission for your fountain, you are Herr Benhard,

and then his daughter comes along and you fall in love with her, love at first sight."

"Not with that one. Besides, he has three daughters, one homelier than the other."

"Nonsense. She is beautiful, you're absolutely mad about her, and what do you say? "Mein Fräulein, may I have the pleasure?" and not a word of all the things you really want to say. And the people who own this place used to say to their own castle, "With your permission, may I enter?" But we? We don't make any fuss, the whole castle means only one thing to us: cover. Nothing else Cover! It'll do the castle a lot of good. If you look at it only the way you're supposed to, a beautiful mansion, a vacation place, why, then it's just so-so. But when you see it as cover against enemy fire, then that's quite a façade! And the park is here so enemy planes won't see our trucks. That'll do the park a lot of good, too. I've never seen beeches like that. They are the most real beeches in the whole world. No trickery, no fuss, France! Just imagine, France, so old and yet so new. I've been in France before a couple of times."

"Here?"

"No, in the Provence, at the Loire, you know, all the places you visit as a tourist. It was very nice. But it wasn't like this.

Benhard thought for a moment and said, "It's probably the uniform that makes the difference."

Yes...but that's not all of it. It's the way it is because we're winning . . . I get the impression that France wants us. Funny."

"Extremely funny. I rather get the opposite impression, The people don't seem at all anxious to meet us. They're not exactly lining the streets."

"They're afraid. Tell me, what are they really afraid of?"

"Hold it now, that's enough!" Benhard said and laughed; he was also angry. Perhaps we're too real for them; that's possible, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's exactly it. In Pütz you would never have thought

of anything like that and put it so well. Admit it, you're a little crazy too by now."

"I like it here, the scenery, the colors."

"It's not that. You can find pretty scenery in a lot of places.

It's the way we fit into the scenery. . . . God, it makes you puke."

"Why that all of a sudden?"

"Well, didn't I think the war didn't concern me? Even if I should die in it, I thought, this isn't my war. In fact, there's no such thing as my war. Did the war concern Hebenstreit? Not one bit, not that much. Now he has died for Führer and Fatherland – ho! He took the wrong train and had an accident. And now suddenly this lousy war does concern me. With the Army in France . . . caught together, hung together . . . and I like it. When I look at them, our fellows here, as they wake up, they're happy – aren't we happy? You too. . . . Why? Do we want to put France into our pockets? No. When our wonderful new squad leader [Hahn] started to turn on the heat yesterday, I thought to myself, what in God's name is he doing here in France? The barbarians in Rome, that at least was a clear-cut proposition. They stared in amazement, and when that began to get a little uncomfortable they smashed everything to smithereens. Bingo, away with all that beauty, at least there was strength behind it. But our Heinis? These inflated snot-noses, these souped-up Caspar Milquetoasts and murderers, both at the same time, what do they want to conquer for? They'll look awfully silly once they get it. Don't take the lollipop away from the child, he only wants to play with it. I don't want to play. I don't want to be a conqueror, anywhere. *Vive la France!* But the condition, Ernst, the condition of being at war, that concerns me. It's terrible, but that's the way it is. My father in 1914, and maybe your father too, flowers at the station and a brass band, the great beginning, the great eruption, down with civilization – they've told us all that and I thought they were idiots. And the drivel that our great idol Thomas Mann propounded. He too discovered the Boche in the deep recesses of his soul and celebrated it on five hundred pages,

"And the drivel that our great idol Thomas Mann propounded." [a reference to "Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen" in which Mann wrote his nationalism out of his system. He then wrote "Magic Mountain," the greatest novel ever written. Kuby was perhaps envious.]

celebrated the strength that now became too much for him after all. Am I now going to be forced to understand him? Yes – and it makes me puke. And he wasn't even in the war . . . first the tanks, and then we, behind them, masquerading as the masters of the world – masters, you hear? He only got a whiff of it, sitting at his desk six hundred miles away. Look at that thing over there – if I had passed it as a tourist, I would have thought, yes, that's pretty. And now – now that thing is cover against enemy fire, and it's therefore the castle of castles, the most real castle I've ever seen in my life."

Stefan had become agitated as he talked. When he stopped he bent down and caressed the soft, well cared for grass that was about three inches long. "If I knew where they keep their mower," he said, "I'd cut the lawn for them."

"You'd be capable of doing just that. I'd like to see that, you cutting the lawn and then the general – or Kuhleder, that would be even better."

They had great fun picturing the situation, Stefan reporting to Kuhleder, "Private Wolzogen, cutting the lawn," and Stefan's tension subsided.

"I was in Yugoslavia once," he said, "in a small weekend place near Zagreb, Hotel Lavica, the Little Lion, the Lion Cub."

"Boy, your memory!"

"A low house with a high roof and black timbers, the bell boy cut the lawn in front of my window every other day. I woke up from the noise, the clattering mower, so busy and so peaceful."

"And no war," Benhard said. "I understand what you mean, at least I'm trying, but, still, for me it's different."

"In what way?"

"Very simple," Benhard said, and threw the empty tin can into the shrubs, "I want to get home after the war."

"I want to, too."

"No, you can forget about that, I can't."

"Why do you think I sent Daniela* away? I didn't want to be forced to be afraid. Can you understand that now?"

*[Kuby's wife Edith and son Thomas spent most of the war in Überlingen at Bodensee, about as far as one could get from the war and still be in Germany.

"No," Benhard said. "That was inhuman."

"I didn't pick our inhuman times, and I didn't pick my country. I don't want to be in a position where I have to take any guff from them if it should get serious."

"What more do you expect to happen?"

"I don't know. Anything. I'm sure they'll think of something. You can rely on that."

"Like the war, for instance, that you like so much. I'd rather be afraid; that way I don't like the war."

"One to nothing your favor," Stefan said.

Stefan lay flat on his back, and looked into the sky, into the blue and up to white clouds that slowly floated toward the northeast. Hirsch called. The repair team had reported in on the line which had been cut to 'Pirate', that they would have everything back in working order in a few minutes. Tilkenspross and Schoenberg came to relieve Stefan and Fränzel.

"I'm going to take a bath," Stefan said. He woke Fränzel and they went down to the brook. Hirsch said, "Aw, there's no point in washing all the time. I'm going to sleep." With that he crawled under the Coffin.

Benhard had already taken his bath and was sitting on one of the stone benches that were scattered over the park, overgrown with untrimmed shrubs. He had a small sketchbook on his knees, a small bottle with India ink next to him on the bench, and was about to sketch La Cchette as seen from the garden. Stefan looked over his shoulder and said, "A perfect likeness, but only a boring old castle."

"Nobody can draw what you call Reality," Benhard said to defend himself.

"Really pretty; I had no idea your brush stroke was so elegant."

"In a minute you get the ink on your face."

"Now, now – I do like it. After the war you can send it to the owners and sign it *fecit* Ernst Benhard, *sculpteur et boche*. I'm sure they'll ask you to visit them. What's that?"

On the back of the stone bench was a weatherbeaten gold-leaf inscription. "Move over a little," Stefan said. Then he read, "*Ton règne est arrivé, pur esprit, roi du monde!*" And below it, in smaller letters, "A. de Vigny."

"That's how even the most sensitive poets can make serious mistakes," Stefan said. Next to the ink bottle was Benhard's box with water colors. Stefan quickly opened it, took a brush and dipped it into the India ink. Benhard turned his sketchbook over because he suspected that Stefan was about to mess up his drawing. "Don't worry," Stefan said and drew a line from the bottom left to the right top of the words "*pur esprit.*" Above them he wrote, as clearly as the porous stone would permit, the word, "*fureur.*"

"*Fureur?*" Benhard asked.

"Sure," Stefan said, "fureur means furor, fureur, Führer, Führer. *Ton règne est arrivé, fureur, roi du monde!*" Stefan re-read the completed sentence, laughed and left. Fränzel had meanwhile undressed. Stefan didn't recall ever having seen him naked before. He was hairy from top to bottom like an animal, covered with a shiny blond fur.

"Boy, what do the girls say when they see you?"

"By that time they don't have much to say," Fränzel said grinning proudly. He dived into the brook that was barely twelve feet wide and only up to their knees at its deepest point. But the water was beautifully clear and fresh and they played around in it.

Back on the bank, they knelt on a towel and held the mirror for each other as they shaved.

"A bathroom with running water, tiled by nature," Stefan said.

"I bet you don't carry anything like that in your shop."

"No, I don't," Fränzel admitted, "but have you seen the plumbing in the castle? Man, they're fifty years behind the times. Anybody working for me who put in stuff like that, hell, he'd be out on his ear the next day, you can be sure of that. Man, a castle like that and bathrooms like the ancient Germans. After

the war I'll go back to France and show them something; there's money to be made, that's for sure. Come on now, get going, we'll take a look around and see what there is to eat. I'm not going to eat that chow they're serving in the company kitchens, that's for sure."

"We'll have to report before we leave."

"To whom?" Fränzel said. "Hahl? That brown-nose, he doesn't have one month more service than I have. That idiot actually addresses the new fellow as *Sie* [formal you], what do you think of that?"

"Me too."

"You too? Ha – what do you know about that? If he tries that on me he'll sure see something."

"We'll sure see something."

"Let's wait and see. just wait. If they really start shooting he'll be so-o-o small. I've seen him in Poland, you know, so-o-o small. Bullshit, report! I've a hunch nothing is going to happen around here for an hour or so, and by that time we'll be back." It took them only ten minutes to get to the nearest village, and they stopped in front of the only store on the main street. But they had come too late. Swarms of flies took off from remnants of cheese and sausage. Large, round, shiny metal containers of jam had been torn open and overturned. The jam was flowing in wide rivers across the counter and dripping down along the many drawers and into those that had been pulled out. The contents of an oil cannister had emptied into a half-filled flour barrel. Cube-shaped cookie cans were lying empty on the floor, their crushed contents next to them. There was an all-pervasive smell of wine and cinnamon in the air. They found nothing useful, except a few pieces of laundry soap and twenty cans of sardines that had been overlooked in the bottom of a wall cabinet.

"They must have had a storeroom in here," Fränzel said. One glance down the cellar stairs was enough for him to realize where the storeroom had been and that nothing worth taking remained there either. The stairs were covered with jam, coffee, and broken

bottles, all mixed up into a sticky mess. The smell of vinegar came from below.

They packed the soap and the sardines in a box and started to walk back to the car, when they heard airplanes; they were coming closer. Stefan put his box down in the middle of the village street and shielded his eyes with his hands.

“There they are – one – three – five – seven . . . seven of them. Pretty high.”

The planes were flying at about 3000 feet and kept in perfect formation.

“Jesus,” Fränzel said, “they’re coming pretty close.” Now they could also hear the anti-aircraft guns, and the white clouds of exploding shells appeared in the sky. “That’s too low. Look – they’re dropping bombs!”

There was a glitter, something falling, a curtain of bright lines that disappeared at once, and then the whistling of the falling bombs, the thunder of the explosions and the ground shaking beneath their feet.

“We’d better get moving,” Stefan said, “that was exactly in our direction.”

They forgot their box with the soap and sardines in the middle of the street where they had put it down. They passed a group of sleeping infantrymen who apparently hadn’t moved and hadn’t heard the explosions.

The sentry held up his hand and waved to them. Fränzel passed without slowing down, the dust swirled up behind the car, and Stefan said, “Take it easy, one more minute won’t make much difference.”

“Look at that,” Fränzel said as they turned into the drive between the remaining columns and saw the castle. “The whole front wall is gone.”

For some peculiar reason the bombs had not started a fire. The castle had simply caved in and no longer had a roof. The planes, making their bombing run from the west, had hit their

target on the nose; had they been just a little off they would have achieved their aim, which was of course to wipe out the division headquarters which they assumed to be in the castle. The sky above La Cachette became black with fighters and bombers, everybody stared at them, threw up his arms in delight and shouted, "They're our planes, they're our planes!" The aircraft covered the couple of miles from La Cachette to the Meuse in a few seconds, and the men could hear the rolling thunder of the attack and even the howling of the Stukas plummeting down. The earth shook and one more piece of wall, two stories high, broke off the front of the castle and buried a truck which happened to be unoccupied.

In an unending stream, hour after hour, more and more squadrons came. At halfpast six the air attack ceased and floats driven by outboard engines as well as assault boats, started across the river under cover of an artificial fog and artillery fire. Contrary to the previous day's attempts, they succeeded in establishing a bridgehead. There were hardly any losses.

Shortly before being relieved at midnight, Stefan listened in to a conversation between corps and division headquarters, in which orders were given to push forward only along the main roads after crossing the Meuse, because the area to the right and left of the roads didn't matter.

"Boyohboy," Fränzel who was also listening said. "They're really going at it. Jesus, if they keep that up we'll be in Paris next week."

"And what do we do when we get there?"

"We'll go to a whorehouse, and how," Fränzel said.

After disconnecting the last telephone in La Cachette from the trunk line, Hahl's squad joined the columns advancing on the main road. It took them all morning to get as far as Nouzonville. They were making slow progress, a few feet at a time.

When they reached the Meuse, just before coming to the bridge

the engineers had put across, the squad had to wait for hours while an officer directed the rear guard and supply units of the tank divisions across the river. The major used his whistle as expertly as a traffic cop and didn't allow a single man on the bridge who couldn't prove that he belonged to the tank divisions. A covey of officers, shouting and swearing like fishwives, tried again and again to make him change his mind and to let their units across, but the major took a fiendish delight in letting them feel that right now only one arm counted – the tanks. When an impudent lieutenant leading a platoon of motorbicycle sharpshooters simply crashed the column, the major pulled his gun and shot the tires full of holes. The lieutenant jumped off and was pretty close to using his fists, but the major only yelled at him, "Push your goddam crate out of the way," and when the lieutenant, who had gotten terribly excited, didn't obey the order at once, the major signaled to a few MP's waiting behind him at the bridge entrance for just such an eventuality. A second man had meanwhile jumped out of the side-car. The MP's simply gave the heavy machine a push; it turned over and by a hair would have fallen into the river.

"Pretty rough manners around here," Stefan said to Benhard. They had got off their vehicles and were standing around watching the upheaval. Time went by, it became less hot, the afternoon faded, and Hahl still waited to get his squad across the bridge. He grew more and more nervous and began to pick a quarrel with his own men whenever he found an opening. He gave orders to get back into the trucks and not to budge. That didn't make any sense, because as long as the tank units were still rolling across the bridge there wasn't the slightest chance of getting priority for Big Klaus and Little Klaus to cross.

"Now listen," Benhard said as biting as Stefan had never heard him speak before, "we'll have to drive all night and you can hit the sack. You can do exactly as you like, but I'm not going to squeeze behind the wheel for no good reason. We'll find out all right when it's our turn."

“We won't need you for that,” Fränzel added. “Why don't you get in? We'll manage without you.”

Hahl was peeved and didn't say a word. After a while he walked over to a group of card players and sat down with them. At last they crossed the Meuse, the squad that Springorum always described as worm-eaten. On the other side they were caught in the confusion of the advance. They made good headway for 10 or 15 miles, cleverly piloted by Fränzel who had a good eye for every hole in the columns, passing slower groups on the right or on the left. Then they reached the point in the wave of the advancing Army where it caught up with the slower tide of the refugees, refugees from France, Belgium and Luxembourg.

On May 9 the refugees had started out from their villages in Luxembourg, which they would never have left had they stayed until the evening of the tenth. The war had only brushed their small country like a gust of wind that doesn't tear a single tile of a roof.

Now their deserted houses were far away, and soldiers were searching them from top to bottom. The people who had stayed home were not bothered. There were the refugees, now, struggling along in the summer heat by day, without shelter at night, and they could use the roads only until the German Army arrived on the scene.

Now the Army had arrived, an endless line of marching troops led by a few reconnaissance vehicles that swept the refugees off the road and cleared the way for the main body. Then came the tanks, the infantry, the heavy guns, the ammunition carriers, the engineers, the personnel carriers, the gasoline tank trucks, hordes of motorbicycles, the horse-drawn baggage trains of the infantry. In the sky were airplanes, always German. Sometimes they were chasing way ahead, and at the bridges across the Loire they chopped off the heads of the snakes that were creeping westward: the bodies twitched awhile and then stopped moving. What

looked like black snakes from above, the snakes they ripped apart with their bombs and riddled with their cannon, was the French people, the townspeople. The rich drove their cars, loaded – if they were wise – with nothing but gasoline and – if they were stupid – with household goods that soon rotted on the fields after the last drop of gas had been used up. Even for 5,000 francs a quart they couldn't get any more. The poor were walking, pushing baby carriages and pulling carts, almost dying of thirst in the burning sun, and after being pushed off the roads they soon became exhausted.

A whole nation was moving westward, frequently strangling the operations of their own army. From one day to another this army had become an object of their scorn and ridicule as had the government which they felt had betrayed them.

The fleeing civilians couldn't even use the side of the road any more after they met up with another part of the French nation that was streaming in the opposite direction, the prisoners of war, without arms and without hope, thousands upon thousands of them. Their columns were guarded every few hundred yards by a German soldier or two whose bayonets, attached to antediluvian rifles, did not make them look any fiercer but only more ridiculous. The fathers of these soldiers, or even they themselves, had already been in this region once before, a quarter-century earlier, and the names of the villages and towns now had a historic ring to them: Charleville, Sedan, Bazeilles, Montcornet, Neufchâtel, and almost within reach off to one side, Reims, Verdun and the Aisne. On that previous occasion they had not marched along the macadam roads as fast as their feet would carry them, but they had crouched in muddy trenches, and if the woods were low and thicket-like now, it was because twenty-three years ago not a tree had been left standing after the constant shelling that had lasted for weeks, for months, for years, shelling that taught fear to the soldiers of yesteryear, a fear this new army had not yet come to know.

Hahl's squad, self-sufficient, provided with all the necessities

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of life like Noah's Ark and with a lot of things that weren't necessary besides, tottered along the road all night. At dawn they passed a control point and were told to continue on to a village called Sormonne, to find themselves a billet and await further orders. Toward nine o'clock in the morning they reached the village, were met by a company courier, the first familiar face they had seen since leaving La Cachee, and were told to keep on going until they came to La Férée. It took them only five hours to get there because Fränzel managed to tail a Horch in which a general was riding, an escort of motorcycle sharpshooters clearing the way for him. Benhard was magnificent at the wheel of the Coffin; although they were driving at a pace close to his maximum speed he kept up with the BMW.

"Well, how was that?" Fränzel said to Hahl.

"I'll look for an empty house," Stefan said; "you stay here. Or does the squad leader have any objections, sir?"

He found a house on the main road on the other side of a bank a few feet high, and beyond a fifteen-foot-wide lawn. They parked the vehicles behind the house under the trees of an orchard. Two rooms and the kitchen were downstairs, and three rooms on the second floor. There was a total of five unmade beds in the house and a crib from which the sheets and the blankets had been removed. Benhard and Fränzel dropped on two of the beds and fell asleep at once. Except for the hours they had spent waiting at the bridge, they had sat behind the wheel ever since leaving La Cachee twenty-nine hours ago.

But at the same time one of the division's infantry regiments had marched fifty miles in twenty-eight hours, with only four hours rest.

Schoenberg, who seemed to be a pretty practical fellow, collected the provisions stored all over the house in the kitchen, among others seventy eggs. He was enthused when he counted them. He broke into a room in the cellar and found twenty cases of apples and several hundred bottles of mineral water in metal carriers of twenty-four each, and they suspected the owner of

the house had been in the wholesale business. For the first time the butane gas stove they had organized while they had been in La Cachette came in handy. Stefan put it up behind the house, Hirsch took over as cook and broke the eggs in a frying pan. They left twenty for the men who were asleep; the rest, almost ten per man, was gone after half an hour. They ate the eggs without bread. They didn't have any left. The red wine in the bottles they had brought was very warm. "Oh no!" Shoenberg said. "Count me out." He got himself some mineral water from the cellar.

They didn't know how long they would stay and whether it would be worthwhile to get undressed. They didn't have any idea of the general situation, and only knew that things were moving awfully fast. They didn't know where their division was, meaning thereby the division headquarters, not the 18,000 men of which it consisted, all told.

Hahl slung the map case around his neck and said he was going to try to get the CO on the phone, or the division HQ, in order to report. They were to put their F pennant up in front of the house so that it would be visible from the road and the squad could be located. The pennants of the telephone detachments consisted of a red square with a white F in the middle. The garden was full of chickens and rabbits which were delighted to have escaped their confinement. If the men hadn't had a lot of other things to eat, the animals would probably have suffered a sad fate. But the well-led Germans were no danger to them; they liked animals. The Reverend Tilkenspross in particular was pleased as punch to see the rabbits hobble around, spurred on by their unlimited appetite. He was thinking of the big Belgians he raised at home.

When he came back from raising the pennant, he carried an almost white rabbit on his arms, an albino gone slightly awry, with one red and one brown eye. "You don't see one like that very often," he said; "there, there, don't run away now." He put the rabbit on the table and fed it cookies.

Stefan raised his head and listened. "What do you think is going on out there?" he said. Against the background Of the monotonous roar of the truck engines a new sound came from the road, something like the noise made by stroking a drum with a metal brush.

"Prisoners," Tilkenspross said, "lots of them." He took his rabbit and lay down under the trees.

Replacement units were rolling westward in an uninterrupted stream. But in front of the house men were marching in the opposite direction. Prisoners. The head of the column had passed the house and the end of the line wasn't in sight. They seemed to be exhausted. There were no guards anywhere. It was one thing to march to victory as part of a disciplined army, and something else again to wander across one's own country, beaten and without leadership.

"They'd rather be home with mother, I bet," Schoenberg said.

"How many are you?" Stefan asked one of them.

"Everybody," someone replied and laughed. Not all of the men who heard the remark shared the man's mirth. But many of them did. "La guerre est fini," they shouted, "la guerre est fini!" Two men came with a third between them. He obviously couldn't go on. His feet were dragging.

There was a white wooden bench in front of the house and they let him sit down.

"Wait a minute," Stefan said and went into the house. He found an unopened bottle of mineral water in the kitchen, one of the bottles Schoenberg had brought up from the cellar. He came back with the bottle, and the man on the bench drank avidly. Then he passed the bottle on.

"Well, if that's the case, we have a lot more in stock," Schoenberg said. He went to get a full carrier from the cellar. They gave a bottle to every third or fourth prisoner who passed. The men didn't stop and didn't crowd around them. They simply took the bottles and went on.

"Let's make this a liquidation sale at greatly reduced prices,"

Schoenberg said. "You stay here, you can talk to these birds." Some got apples, others got water. They said, "Merci mille," and they said, "We don't know what's happened, it's the fault of the English, our generals sold out," and they said, "Thank God, for us the war's over." When two reconnaissance planes flew low over the road, the prisoners dropped to the ground. The German soldiers who saw the performance roared with laughter. Embarrassed, the prisoners quickly picked themselves up. One to whom Stefan had just given an apple said, "Oh my God, those planes! And those tanks!"

"Don't cry now," Schoenberg said. He didn't understand the words but gathered from his tone of voice what the man was saying.

There was already quite a pile of empty apple crates and empty bottle carriers by the front door when Hahl came back. Schoenberg was just coming up from the cellar with another crate of apples.

"What in hell are you doing?" Hahl asked.

"What does it look like?" Schoenberg replied, "We're playing fairy godmother."

Hahl only said, "Follow me," and went into the house.

He went into the kitchen and said, "Close the door. This will have to stop, doing things on your own hook all the time."

He put his hand flat on the kitchen table and leaned on it.

Schoenberg didn't say anything and Stefan followed his example.

Meeting no resistance, Hahl wasn't quite sure what to do next.

"After all, that's stupid nonsense, and besides that stuff ought to be for our own men."

"That's not stupid nonsense at all," Schoenberg said; "those who get something are pretty damn glad."

"Feeding prisoners is not a job for a combat unit," Hahl said.

"Nope," Schoenberg said. "I suppose it isn't."

"We'll have to hit the road right away," Hahl said. "Call everybody together." They woke up Benhard and Fränzel who didn't know for several minutes where they were and hobbled down-

stairs with stiff and aching muscles. Hahl announced that he had made contact with division headquarters and that they had orders to move on to Iviere and to set up a switchboard.

Fränzel looked at the map and said, "We're that far already? I'm telling you, next weekend we'll be in Paris. Manohman." "Paris!" Samenborn shouted.

"When they see you the French women will finally know why their men lost the war," Fränzel said.

Paris however did not materialize either for Hahl's squad or for anyone else in the division. They stayed in Iviere for two days. Then it became clear that they would not be along for the breakthrough to the Channel. The division was attached to the forces guarding the flank. They made a ninety-degree turn and now faced south. After the communications center in Iviere had been dismantled again and the general had left his command post to move south, Hahl's squad was assigned to the artillery commander, the monocled colonel with whom they had become acquainted before crossing the Meuse. So far the artillery hadn't had much to do, but now it was different. The tanks were busy elsewhere and their advance met with more stubborn resistance. Tank units under the command of one Colonel de Gaulle opposed the Germans and tried to break through at the elbow near renowned Sedan. The division command pulled everything up front that had a chance against tanks, the field artillery, anti-aircraft and antitank guns. They didn't exactly have to fight for every foot of ground, but again and again there were rough encounters, and wherever they happened to take place – the Germans always had air support – a village or a little town went up in flames; the excrement of war piled up on both sides of the road, dead horses spread their putrid stench, and there were dead men who were quickly covered with white sheets to spare the advancing soldiers the sight of death.

Only a few miles beyond there was again the Champagne with its chalky fields, untouched and peaceful under the brilliant sun.

The advance had a limited goal, to establish a line north of the Aisne that flows from east to west and for a stretch is paralleled by a canal so that it really flows in two beds, and to hold on until things had been settled in the north. After that tanks would again be available to lead the advance south from these temporary positions across France, behind the Maginot Line. That was the plan.

There was a pause in the war as Hahl's squad rolled into Hannogne toward evening. Little golden clouds strolled across the sky. Suddenly Fränzel stepped so abruptly on the brakes of his car that it came to a skidding stop. Benhard barely managed to avoid a collision at the last moment by swerving around the car ahead of him. Between the houses of the village the road described a shallow, gently rising curve at this point, and down the road came a girl on a bicycle. She certainly wasn't the first girl they had seen since leaving Pütz, nor was she the first French girl they had seen. In Rozoy, for example, a little town that was a sea of flames as they drove through, there had been lots of women on the street trying to put out the fire with pails of water, a fire that even all the firefighting equipment of a large city would have been unable to control. But this girl was a beauty. Blond and graceful, she was riding a good bicycle, an elegant bicycle in fact, that was painted a bright green. She was wearing a light summer dress and wooden sandals with red leather straps. Ring-shaped, shiny-crisp loaves of bread were hanging on both sides of the handle bar.

"Say something!" Fränzel said to Stefan and nudged him.

"*Eh – mademoiselle!*" Stefan called across the street. "*Attendez un moment, s'il vous plaît! Ces couronnes, sont-elles pour la vente?*"

"*Oui, monsieur,*" the girl replied with a smile and put one foot down on the road, "*mais celles-ci sont déjà vendues.*"

"Hi there, doll," Schoenberg shouted from a window of Big Klaus, "how about one of them loaves?"

"They're already sold," Stefan explained. Then he inquired if

the baker had his shop in the village and was told that he was the girl's father. What was her name? Paulette.

"*Alors, Paulette, au revoir,*" Stefan shouted. And all the others shouted "*au revoir, au revoir.*" The girl gave them a faint wave of her hand and smiled. Thus they passed each other, but they didn't travel very far in opposite directions.

After the switchboard had been set up, the stove installed on a garden table on Monsieur Robinard's farm (deserted by its owner) and the whole, ever more elaborate gypsy household of the squad had been organized, the duty schedule finally emerged from protracted negotiations by the interested parties and Stefan and Hirsch left "to go shopping" as they called it, primarily to get milk and bread. They had plenty of eggs on the farm, and by now all kinds of canned goods were kept in stock in the truck. They also had two dozen wool blankets, once for sale in an Iviere's shop, each man had his own folding chair, and they no longer drank wine from canteen cups but from glasses. Hahl had been unable to prevent Stefan's gradually becoming quartermaster general of the squad. Nobody wanted to deprive the unit of the advantages deriving from the fact that Stefan was able to converse with the local population.

So he went into the village with Hirsch and asked the first civilian he met, an old man who used canes to propel himself forward, where the bakery was.

"*Tout droit,*" the man said, "*et puis la premiere à gauche. Quel chien!*"

"*Qui?*" Stefan asked.

"*Ah, c'est un chien, un traître,*" the old man said, "*il travaille pour les boches.*"

Even after one conversation with Houdins, the baker, there could be no doubt why he was held in such low esteem by his neighbors. Although there were many Frenchmen at that time who were pretty mad at their government, Houdins' rage exceeded the normal degree of irritation by far. He was delighted every time a German who spoke French came into his shop.

That gave him an opportunity to pour out his soul. Whenever he heard someone speak with a German accent, he rushed into the shop from the baking room in the back. A gang of liars and swindlers were in Paris, he said; that's what they were, double-faced crooks who made deals instead of getting the Army on its feet, who had sold themselves and the country to England, and the English were the worst of all—they were the real criminals who had gotten France into another war, and he hoped that "Itlair" would give them a good whipping, and when it came to that he wouldn't mind taking a hand himself, as a volunteer, although he was fifty-five years old and had been wounded in the first war. "*Regardez donc!*" he said, pulling up a trouser leg and pointing to the barely visible scar of a bullet wound. He kept his shop going primarily because he was steaming mad. He kept baking bread and selling it to the Germans for money whose value to him was most uncertain at this point. His daughter was not furious at anyone. She would have preferred not to be obliged to work in the shop, but at least she had the counter between herself and the men who kept talking to her in that foreign, hard and hissing language that did not prevent them however from making their intentions unmistakably clear. Paulette liked of course to be admired, even in this drastic and uninhibited fashion, and she didn't have to blush, because she didn't know what they were saying. But she heard certain expressions and phrases a little too often not to understand them after a while, first by osmosis and later because there were enough soldiers who constantly threw certain words in her face, such as "*faire l'amour*" and fuck-fuck. They became old coins to her, carelessly thrown across the counter, words emptied of all meaning, a senseless code. For the last two years she had been considered the most beautiful girl in Hannogne; even before the Germans came she had not lacked admirers and some of them could have been considered seriously. But now things were different, and these men were different, huge blond fellows on a rampage, and Paulette

didn't leave the house after dark. But the soldiers came to her house, standing around in the shop, sitting around, and Paulette wished that she still had a mother, but her mother was lying in the cemetery and she had no brothers and sisters, only an old aunt, the baker's sister, who kept house for him and had no influence on Paulette who was shy and stubborn.

The squad stayed in Hannogne for two and a half days, and during this time everyone, even Tilkenspross, paid at least one visit to the baker. Fränzel took an accelerated course in French with Stefan. What is "beautiful" in French. "eyes"? And "going for a walk"? Fränzel wanted to know how one said "getting married" and "to be unmarried." Stefan wasn't sure about the right word for "unmarried." "Tell her, '*je suis seul*,' but you are married, aren't you?"

"I don't want to say it, I just wanted to know."

"Is that it! Well, I'm sure she isn't married."

"Not only that," Fränzel said, "but she's a virgin."

"Quite likely."

"Likely nothing, I know! I can tell things like that."

"Well – you certainly know a lot about people."

Schoenberg didn't seem to need any French lessons to be more successful than anyone else. He talked to her in his Berlin dialect, quite naturally, as if it was obvious that she understood every word he said. She listened, they laughed at each other, and Paulette herself didn't limit herself to her usual "*Oui, monsieur*," or "*Non, monsieur*" or "*Il y en a plus*," when she was out of bread. That was all the other soldiers ever heard her say.

Schoenberg didn't hide his feelings. When the squad got orders to move out of Hannogne he became downright melancholy. The barber sang to himself, "I've lost my heart in Hei-ei-eidelberg."

"Shut up," Schoenberg yelled at him.

Benhard approached the matter more sensibly. He said, "Maybe we'll stay in the neighborhood for a while, and after all we're mobile."

"So what? That won't make no difference. I know, I don't talk sense, but you can be sure nothing like that's going to turn up again soon; that girl's tops. Even in Berlin you don't see her kind."

While they were busy winding the cables back on the drums Schoenberg confided his secret hopes to everyone in the squad.

"After the war – and after all, how long can it last? – I go to the baker and I tell him, Herr Houdins, I tell him, why let a doll like that go stale in the village here, you go right ahead and send her to me in Berlin, that's what I'll tell him."

"I don't know, Schoenberg," Fränzel said, "I don't think it'll work."

"You never can tell," Schoenberg said. "Once France is in the bag and we got a nice branch office of the Chancellery going here, you'll see how they come running."

"You wouldn't even get permission for it," the barber said.

"Do you think I'll ask?"

"Damn right you'll ask," the barber said; "the French aren't even Aryans."

"What?" Schoenberg said. "How come?" He hadn't looked at the problem from that angle.

"The French are Rumanians," the barber said.

"You don't mean Rumanians," Stefan explained, "it's *Romanists."

"What's the difference," Hahl said. "They aren't Aryans and that's for sure. Just like the Italians."

"Boy, I should have known that," Stefan said. "I'd be home now and not in the Army, with my Italian grandmother!"

"Aw, you're only one-quarter wrong," Schoenberg said. It really bothered him that Paulette seemed to belong to a race which to an Aryan Berliner was taboo.

"Maybe you can get a special permit," Stefan tried to console him. "After all she's blond and has blue eyes."

"You really think so?" Schoenberg said hopefully. "I've been thinking too – with that father."

*"Romanist – the German university term for a student of the Romance languages and literature, an intellectual's joke meant to go over the heads of the other soldiers..

The baker had indeed very little in common with his daughter. He looked Provencal, haggard from sweating in front of the oven all his life; he had black hair and a sallow complexion.

"We were here in the first war too, don't forget," Hahl said.

"Maybe she's German alter all."

"Jesus!" Schoenberg shouted and started figuring. "The war was finished in eighteen, I was two then, and now we have 1940 naw, it don't work out. She's not even seventeen."

"How do you know?" Fränzel asked.

"How do I know!" Schoenberg replied.

They moved up to the front during the night, eight miles driving without lights and under continuous fire. Tracer bullets rose to the sky and far over to the right, red flares were being sent up as tank warnings. When they came to a fork in the road they were stopped by a red flashlight, and the supply sergeant materialized from the darkness. From here on he led the way on his motorbicycle: first along a dirt road, then across a field, back onto a poplar-lined stretch and then again along another dirt road. Getting the impression they were changing course all the time, they lost all sense of direction. The moonlight flooded down on a labyrinth of isolated shrubs and groups of trees. With every minute that passed their ride became more mysterious, less real. What had looked like a tower built of shadows turned out to be a mortar emplacement under camouflage nets when they came close. Next to a small wooden bridge, they crossed a machine-gun barrel pointed at the road from behind a dirt wall. All they could see of the crew was the faint glitter of steel helmets.

After they had turned into a firebreak in the forest, the sergeant suddenly stopped, and everybody got out. The sergeant talked only in whispers, and they followed his example. "Butts out," he commanded. Parked at the side, they recognized one of the construction trucks of their own company. It was camouflaged with young birch trees. The squad belonging to the truck was sitting nearby in a hole that they had dug in the

forest, and they had already installed a switchboard that was to serve the forward communications of the division artillery. Hahl's squad was to man the switchboard.

The hole was lighted by a carbide lamp. On the bottom of the hole was the portable board for ten lines, Put on an upside-down empty crate. The lamp might have been the same that Hebenstreit had once diligently shined, but if so, it no longer showed any trace of his labors. Hahl went down into the hole with the supply sergeant who gave him an explanation of the diagram that showed the six lines served by the board.

"Who takes care of repairs?" Hahl asked.

"With those few lines, you take care of that yourselves," the supply sergeant said. "The longest line is only two miles, that one over here, to Keyring."

Ten minutes later the supply sergeant and the construction squad disappeared in the darkness.

The barber was put in front of the switchboard, the others were told to camouflage the vehicles.

"Follow me!" Hahl said and walked along the trail to the fire-break. The drivers maneuvered their vehicles as close to the low, thin trees as possible.

"Quiet, dammit," Hahl shouted under his breath, "not so much gas!"

The birch saplings which the construction squad had used to camouflage their truck looked pretty wilted. "We'll cut new ones," Hahl said.

"Man, we can do that tomorrow morning," Benhard said. "In this darkness –"

"No back talk," Hahl croaked, "you can't moYe around out here in daylight."

"But the sergeant said we're still three-quarters of a mile from the river."

"You do as I tell you," Hahl shouted.

They went to work in the moonlight and started cutting down two dozen trees. The noise they made could be heard a long way

off. "Quiet!" Hahl shouted as he ran from one man to the other. "Quiet!"

In the north things had been settled now, and Dunkirk was being celebrated on the radio. But along the Aisne things were still at a standstill. The German Army was taking a deep breath. Hahl's squad stayed on in the Bois d'Avaux.

Orders came through permitting everyone to send two-pound packages home. The home front was to benefit from the pillage of France even while operations were still in progress. The loved ones at home were on rations and the letters they received from their husbands and sons made their mouths water. That was the life – for the soldiers! To prepare two-pound packages in the Bois d'Avaux was not an easy matter. Hirsch got a kitchen scale from somewhere and brought it to the forest, complete with weights totaling ten ounces. So they weighed stones until they had enough weights to make up two pounds. Hirsch also brought bright yellow, oiled wrapping paper and red twine. They had everything now, except something to wrap and weigh.

Hahl was himself anxious to send a package to his wife, and he therefore gave permission to use the BMW for a pirating expedition. The crew consisted of Fränzel as driver and Stefan as interpreter. They thought they'd drive to Laon. It wasn't far, only about twenty-five miles, but it wasn't customary for soldiers, mere privates, to drive around behind the lines without official orders. Stefan had with him the entire liquid assets of the squad as well as a long list of wanted items, such as butter in two-pound cans, cocoa, chocolate, perfume, more perfume, canned goods, underwear, black underwear, sport shirts, pajamas, small bottles of Cointreau, soap, more soap, ladies' shoes size 6, size 7, size 8, film, tea, coffee, wrist watches, wrist watches and wrist watches. Such were the things needed for the packages and for the men's own use. Such were the things which the Greatest Nation of the World and the Most Victorious Army of All Time did not have, not any more, and which they hoped the despicable French still

had. Poland had already been picked clean by this time, down to the last icon from Czestochowa, and the Noblest Sons of the Nation, the SS, were now beginning to murder the Poles.

After they left the forest the flat, open country around the Bois d'Avaux soon gave way to hills, closing in on them, becoming steeper and covered with dense beech forest. Small villages with old churches were tucked away in the valleys. The excellent road wound through the countryside like a parkway.

When they emerged from the hills and came out into flat country again they could see, far in the distance, the steep mountain of Laon, crowned with the severe silhouette of the cathedral. Little Klaus ran straight toward the mountain that loomed higher and higher as they approached and seemed to raise its load of stone to the heavens. The bright sky gleamed through the filigree work of the cathedral spires.

A conglomeration of ugly modern houses encircled the base of the mountain. Sentries were everywhere in the streets, supervising prisoners as they removed the contents of all the shops in town.

Look at those guys, aren't they having the time of their lives! They guzzle and they feed until they're crazy. Do you think we could get some of that, sergeant? "We have to take care of our squad, we're out in the forest all by ourselves, way up front, near the Aisne, and we're damn near starved. Did you hear that? The division quartermaster draws the supplies for the whole division! What an ass. How do we get us there? Pretty steep, I hope we'll make it; I'm telling you, we need a new car, a Peugeot is what we need, that's some car. My boss, where I was apprentice, he drove one one time. Man, they're strong.

Lieutenant, can we get in here, sir? Thank you, sir. No, we're signal corps, with General Licht, that's right, sir. The main depot is in the arsenal? Do you think we can get something there?

Man, look at that butter, that's at least forty pounds, that can of butter; looks good, soldered all around. Nice work. All right, that wasn't too bad for a start. Tea, coffee, cocoa, canned meat,

chocolate, but the chocolate is no good. Try some. I'll tell you something, we're not going to get a damn thing in that depot, they won't even let us in. Let's drive up, doesn't cost a thing to take a look. Hey there, do you know the way to the arsenal? You're not from around here? Just as I thought. *Monsieur, s'il -vous plaît, l'arsenal? Oui, c'est ça. Là-haut? C'est loin? Merci, monsieur.*

Hold it, there's the entrance. Pretty busy place. Hm, what now? What in hell are you doing? Can't you see? I'm taking my blouse off. Oh, stop that nonsense. "We can always try, I'm going to walk in there and pretend that I belong. Park under the tree over there. just sit and wait. If I'm not back in half an hour look for me in the guardhouse.

The sentry took no notice of Private Wolzogen. Hordes of soldiers went in and out, carrying boxes in, carrying boxes out, all of them with pieces of paper, requisitions, quartermaster forms, forms of all kinds, forms signed by everybody under the sun. One bag next to the other, and all of them filled to the brim. Clothing? No. But flour, flour in bags. Wheat flour. Three hundred feet long, fifteen feet wide, three bags high. Oil. Butter. Oil! What's that? Beans? No, we don't need any beans. Meat. Canned meat. That's more like it. What does it say there? Beef, hundred cans to a case. Maybe I'd better roll up my sleeves, looks more professional. How much does a case like that weigh? Hm, that's over a hundred pounds. I wonder if I'll make it. That would be all we need for the time being. And the cans have just the right size. Practical idea; one can, one meal.

That's five hundred yards back to the gate and to the car. It's hot as blazes. I'll have to bend my knees. Damn, these cases have hard corners. Does the sentry want something? Sure it's hot, man, and how, Why don't you grab a Frenchman, what do you think we got them for? That's all right. Hello, Fränzel, here I come. He ought to be a little surprised at least. Yes, come on now, that's it. You're quite a guy, you do the damndest things, and with your bare hands. What's in there? Beef? Is that good?

Look at those girls! All in white, and insignia . . . one prettier than the next. Hey, doll, do you want to come along? We got room for you. *Nix compran?* Leave her alone, let's get going, *au revoir; mesdemoiselles, bon courage!* Now then, this isn't the place for us, with all those sentries, let's drive on. Is there another burg around here? St. Quentin? How far is that? Only thirty miles? In this weather, sure-let's go!

You see? Around here they don't have so many sentries. Let's take a look in here. Empty. There are shoes over there. Empty too. That's a jeweler's, we don't even have to go in, you can see from here it's empty. Empty – empty – empty. We've come too late. Somebody's been here before us. Look, there are some stores all closed up, shutters down, iron bars, locked. Wonder if they're empty too. I have an idea. You have to use your noodle. But how do you get in? Someone must be the owner. But who? Just the kind of stores we're looking for. Look at this, that's a department store and nobody's been in there yet. In there we could get everything we need. Wait a minute, I'll ask who owns the place. In one of the suburbs they dug up the old lady who owned the department store. With her girl friend she was sitting in a tiny garden behind a high wall. The girl friend was from Strasbourg and had fled, but now the Germans were in St. Quentin and not in Strasbourg. Madame, we would like to make a few purchases. The store is closed. Yes, we noticed that, but perhaps something could be done about it? Of course we don't want to cause any inconvenience.

What good is courtesy dressed in the uniform of the conqueror? Whether a conqueror says get going, or whether he says would you be kind enough – it's all the same. You can't tell what would happen if you're not kind enough. Of course, monsieur, I'll just put on my hat. Come along, Michèle, please come along. Both of you? Going to be a little tight. Move the case over a little. Man, I'm going nuts, with these two old goats in the car, and that feather hat, right through the middle of town. . .

What does she want? She wants to make a detour to pick up two salesgirls, they're supposed to serve us. Can't she do that herself? She certainly could not do that herself, the little lady with the feather hat. With all the customary formalities, she opened her store for one hour, for two German soldiers. No one had set foot in it since the Germans had come. The store was built around a glass-roofed courtyard and was three stories high. The glass cupola that once had covered the court was lying on the floor in a thousand pieces, and while the two salesgirls opened cabinets and pulled out drawers, doing their job as they had always done it, gabby and polite – what size please? You don't know? Yes, that's a little difficult of course, but perhaps we ought to take the nightgown one size larger, just in case . . . while all this was going on, pieces of glass kept coming loose from the steel framework above and shattering on the floor. "Watch out, monsieur, I'm so sorry, the building is not quite the way it ought to be just now," the old lady said from her usual post at the cash register where she presided over the proceedings. She had taken off her hat. The merchandise piled up on the counter. *Je crois c'est tout, madame, l'addition s'il vous plaît. C'est tout? Deux miller quatre cents quinze francs? C'est vraiment bon marché. Et en marks? Voila. Tellement gentille, madame, au revoir, au revoir, mesdemoiselles. . . .*

We'll keep the bill. Otherwise nobody will believe that we didn't pilfer the stuff.

When they got back the entire squad was drunk. Except Hirsch, who was sitting at the switchboard, cold sober. Hahl had received his promotion to sergeant after all. He was even farther gone than the others. "Comrades," he said, "comrades . . . we musht shtick together . . . fellows . . . even if I got braid now . . . shit, Wolzogen . . . I know you don't like me . . . but we're all together in this Army . . . what the hell . . . gloriously we shall beat the French . . . and so we did . . . yessir, we've done that already . . . we've done it . . . what did you bring back? . . .

what? shirts? . . . shirts . . . shirts . . . what in hell do we need shirts for? . . . That's stupid – shirts! What's that? A phonograph? . . . That's just fine . . . let's have muuusic!"

Stefan put the record player on the table in the big truck and put on the records, one after the other, Lucienne Boyer, Maurice Chevalier, English records, American records, Negro singers, jazz, Josephine Baker. A wall collapsed, the wall that had separated them from the rest of the world for years. They had never heard any of that. Two records quickly became the most popular ones: "*Le Siffleur et son Chien*," and "Chapel in the Moonlight." They wanted to hear that tear-jerker over and over again.

They put on the sport shirts that came from the department store in St. Quentin. They didn't look much like soldiers any more. And they listened to Josephine Baker, musically dishonoring their race, and even Hahl, Storm Trooper and sergeant, thought that Josephine was magnificent.

At one o'clock in the morning the orgy came to an end, and half an hour later the French started the heaviest barrage they had laid down until now. They knew the Germans were preparing to attack and they wanted to disrupt the staging operations. The Bois d'Avaux got its share.

By and by, the drunken men retreated into their hole in the ground. "They're shooting," Hirsch said. The minister's favorite expression had been generally adopted by everyone in the squad. "You don't say," Benhard said, "you really notice everything." "Maybe they'll attack," Hirsch said.

Fränzel laughed. "They'll be glad if we don't attack," he said.

As Stefan was playing one of the Josephine Baker records, "Maria La O" . . . , division headquarters called and wanted to know if all their lines were working. Stefan checked; sleepy or excited voices answered. Surprisingly, all lines were still intact. "What kind of music is that?" the man at the headquarters switchboard in Hannogne asked. "That's fantastic."

Stefan held the receiver directly over the speaker. "Wonderful; hey, keep the line open."

The man at the switchboard in Hannogne called the switchboard at corps headquarters and told his buddy, "Listen to this!"

Anybody who got on the line, although they weren't too many who did between two and three in the morning, wanted to stay plugged in and listen to the music.

The man at corps headquarters put an amplifier on the line and got army headquarters with his carrier frequency apparatus. Army headquarters was back in Germany. "What do you want to hear?" Stefan asked. "I have another Chevalier record here."

"Who? No," the man in Koblenz said, "put that woman on again, she's something."

Stefan let Josephine Baker sing "Maria La O" for the third time. And suddenly there was a girl's voice on the line that said, "Wonderful!"

"Where are you?" Stefan asked.

"Berlin," the girl replied. She was at the switchboard at General Staff headquarters in the Bendlerstrasse. She said, "Don't cut me off, I want to listen to that. Where is that coming from, anyway?"

"From the Aisne," Stefan said and felt a little foolish.

"Where?" the girl asked again.

Laughter from the other switchboards.

"From the A-i-s-n-e, young lady," the man at army headquarters said.

"Quiet!" a voice demanded. They wanted to listen to the Negro singer, they wanted to listen to her enchanting voice.

"Miss," Stefan shouted, "Berlin – can you hear me, Berlin?"

"This is Berlin. . . ." The voice was distant but clear.

"Do me a favor, Miss, and give me seventy-six, ten, sixty-six."

"Seventy-six, ten, sixty-six?"

"Yes, yes, that's it."

Stefan held his breath and took the needle off the record.

"What's the matter now, we can't hear anything," voices shouted from all the switchboards that had meanwhile plugged in.

“Just a minute,” Stefan called into the receiver.

And then there was a sleepy voice, a girl’s voice, hardly audible, but it was her voice that said, “Yes? Who is it?”

“Here’s your party, go ahead,” the operator said.

“Fromont-Labouche,” the distant voice said, a little louder now, “whom do you want?”

Stefan put the needle on the record again.

“I gave you seventy-six, ten, sixty-six,” the operator said somewhat peeved, and after a few seconds she said, “All right, don’t then,” and plugged out.

Fränzel said the engine needed an overhaul, otherwise he’d get stuck with his miserable car the first day they’d be on the move again. He’d take her to the maintenance company. Hahl went with him and in the evening came back alone, riding on the back of a motorbicycle driven by a courier. The repair job would take longer, he said, and Fränzel had stayed in Hannogne at company headquarters.

That was the day they packed the parcels they wanted to send home. Between the seven of them, without Fränzel, they had thirty-one two-pound packages, all wrapped in the bright yellow oil paper that Hirsch had organized and tied with red twine. They wanted to get their parcels to the army post office as quickly as possible, but Little Klaus was not available. They put all the packages into a potato bag.

Stefan offered to take the bag to Hannogne the next morning, he was sure someone would give him a ride. He started out very early, at about five-thirty, carrying the potato bag on his shoulder.

“Just like Santa Claus,” Benhard said. At seven he got to Hannogne and took the bag to the orderly room that had been set up in the school. He saw the CO and Springorum. Something was different about Meyer. Oh yes, he didn’t wear a garrison cap any more but a “boat,” and he therefore no longer looked like a customs inspector. Springorum stalked around with a white scarf, snow white and neatly pressed. He looked magnificent.

“Well, how're you doing up front? You really live. What have you got there? You're not quite right in the upper story, are you? How many parcels do you have? Thirty-one? They'll need a special truck for you fellows. If everybody sent home that many. . . .”

Springorum himself had dispatched more than twenty packages in two days, ten with soap, twenty pounds of the best soap for his mother, and he knew it would come in pretty handy. He wasn't seriously concerned about the number of packages Stefan had brought. The order authorizing the whole business had not mentioned anything about a maximum number of packages per man.

“What the devil have you got in there? Well, never mind, as long as it isn't ammunition. Lieutenant, did you see that, sir? An eight-man squad, out in the woods, and thirty-one parcels.

“Did you organize all that?” the lieutenant said.

“No, sir, bought it,” Stefan said.

Everyone in the orderly room, and that now included also the supply sergeant, roared with laughter.

Stefan showed them the bill from St. Quentin. It looked so French that it didn't mean much to Meyer. He only glanced at it. He didn't care where the contents of the packages came from.

“Wait until ten o'clock,” the top kick said, “then you can take the mail back.”

“I'll be back at ten,” Stefan said.

“All right,” the top kick said. He was quite easy to get along with.

Stefan looked around in Hannogne. The last shelling had left some traces. In the middle of the village there wasn't a house that wasn't damaged. He passed by Houdins' store. The bakery was closed. Nobody seemed to be in the house. He asked where the maintenance company was located because he wanted to see Fränzel; perhaps Little Klaus was ready and they could drive back together. He was told that the maintenance company wasn't in the village itself, but two miles outside on a farm, and he

thought it was too much trouble to walk all the way out there. He went down to the church. The cemetery was full of prisoners. Guards patrolled the walls, and the sentry at the gate didn't let Stefan go in. But there was another, smaller gate, set in the wall across from the rectory, and that's where Stefan went in. There were a lot of colored soldiers among the French prisoners. They didn't take much notice of him. One of them said, "Water, *camarade*," and made a gesture of drinking. All of them seemed to be in pretty good spirits; they sat around on the graves, joked and laughed, and when Stefan spoke French with one of them, they quickly gathered around in a circle and asked all kinds of questions whether it was true that the British secret service had poisoned the King of Belgium, that traitor, whether they'd be sent to Germany, whether they'd soon be allowed to write home. "I'm from this neighborhood," one of them said, "just twenty miles [a]way," and he pointed south. Stefan told them that as far he knew the King of Belgium was still alive and that he thought they would be sent to Germany, that the war might be over pretty soon and then they'd probably get home. But, he added, that was his own personal opinion; after all he wasn't Hitler.

There was a small group of prisoners in one corner; they kept apart from the others and wore different helmets. They were English. Stefan strolled around between the graves and, as if by accident, gradually came closer. He said something to them but they looked straight through him as if he didn't exist. They didn't reply and turned away.

Behind Stefan's back someone shouted in French, "They don't belong to us." When he turned around he saw a sergeant who sat in the shadow of the wall, leaned against it and had a notebook on his knees. He laughed.

The thought flashed through Stefan's mind, that's probably the way I would sit if I were in his position. He smiled back at him but didn't know what to say. He hurried to get out of the cemetery and left by the small iron gate. This time one of the

sentries noticed him and challenged him, but he ran away and pretended he hadn't heard.

He ran away. But he couldn't pretend to himself that he hadn't seen the Englishmen, that he hadn't felt their eyes; he tried to tell himself that they hadn't meant him personally and would have acted the same way with any German, but it didn't help. Nor did it help that the Frenchmen had talked to him in their harmless, almost gay manner, although they definitely had meant him personally, him, Stefan Wolzogen, when they cracked jokes with him. But the English prisoners hadn't cared two hoots whether he was there or not, hadn't even looked at him; they had only seen his uniform, and that had been sufficient for them to say, the hell with him, he's German. And they had been right, not the Frenchmen.

There had been no need to go to the cemetery, into the cage in which the unfortunate were held apart from the fortunate, the victims from the aggressors, the innocent from the guilty. He had gone just for fun, and perhaps driven by a secret desire to belong to them, to the others, not to his own people. But he was not one of them, and he had been able to permit himself the fun of visiting with them only because of the uniform that set him apart. That was inescapable. He owed it to his uniform that he could go into strange houses and drink wine from strange cellars; that a department store opened its doors for him and that he fell asleep in the Bois d'Avaux, with the song of nightingales in his ears; that a column of French prisoners of war had considered him a decent human being because he had given them fruit and water that came from a French home, and he owed his uniform even more: a love of life which he had not known before, a joy and happiness against which there was no remedy, and which was not lessened even by the sight of the havoc wrought in this paradise by their efforts, nor by the lewd and loud voices, vibrating with the lust of brutal triumph, that came to him from the radio.

Caught together, hung together – the English prisoners had brought home to him to which side he belonged.

It was ten o'clock by now, and he went back to the orderly room. The mail had not yet arrived. He was about to leave again when the top kick said, "You speak French, don't you? Take a walk over to the military police, they need an interpreter."

"Yessir, Sergeant," Stefan said and asked his way to the MP post. They had moved into the house of the farmer, Robinard, where his squad had spent two days. The duck and her ducklings had disappeared and so had the pigs. But the dog was still there, lying in an overturned barrel in front of the house, surrounded by her puppies who had visibly grown and seemed to be doing fine. One of the MP's also sat in front of the house. He was off duty, had taken his coat off and sat in a grandfather chair. He looked as if the farm belonged to him, and he probably wouldn't have minded a bit if it had.

Stefan explained his mission to him, and the MP said, "Good, come along." His belt with the holster was hanging on the back of his chair. He buckled it around his waist without bothering to put his coat on. He also opened the holster.

"Watch out," the MP said, "this man is going to jump right at your face. He's already attacked one of us."

He went ahead into the kitchen. There was a wooden door that opened into a room where the farmer's wife used to cool the milk. It was a narrow room and just below the ceiling there was an opening for light and air that was covered with wire mesh. The key was in the door.

"Well, come on out, both of you," the MP said and it didn't sound unfriendly.

On the other side of the door, baker Houdins was sitting on the rack for the milk bowls.

"Monsieur Houdins?" Stefan called. Houdins looked up.

"Do you know the fellow?" the MP asked.

"Sure, that's the baker," Stefan said.

"That much we know ourselves," the MP said. Houdins didn't move. He looked horrible. His pale face seemed dead, his eyes were red, his shirt was hanging out of his trousers and was ripped; on his otherwise bare feet he wore slippers.

"But Monsieur Houdins, what's happened?"

"Come on out," the MP said and made a gesture as if he were about to draw. The baker slid off his seat, dropped one of his slippers in the process, felt for it with his bare foot without looking, put it on again and stood in front of the door not knowing what to do.

"Hurry up now," the MP shouted.

Houdins took two steps through the door, and suddenly the MP pushed him aside, looked into the room and said, You too, avanti."

Paulette appeared in the doorway. She wore the same bright summer dress in which Stefan had seen her the first time on her bicycle. The dress was dirty but not torn. She had combed her hair. On her left cheek she had a long scratch with a crust of dried blood, starting just under the eye and ending over her cheekbone. She looked as if she might collapse at any moment. Stefan gave her a chair, she sat down, and only then did she look up. From the way she looked at him Stefan could not tell whether she recognized him or not.

"Monsieur Houdins, do you know who I am?" Stefan said.

"I used to buy bread from you, but I'm not in Hannogne any more, I'm just here for the day. I've been asked to talk to you. Houdins didn't reply.

"How did they get here, anyway?" Stefan asked the MP.

"He didn't open his shop this morning, but then he gets flour from the quartermaster depot so he can keep baking. Everybody wants white bread. So the quartermaster told us to go and take a look, a buddy of mine and myself. He didn't want to bake any more for the boches he said. Well, so we had to get a little rough, and then he jumped my buddy."

"And what about his daughter?"

"She insisted she had to come along,"

"And with her you . . . I mean that scratch?"

"No, no, she had that already when we came."

"And what do you want to do with them now?"

"He's supposed to bake bread. If he does he can go home. I don't want all the fuss with reporting him and filling out forms for the court and all that shit – why bother with all that?"

"And what if he doesn't want to bake bread any more?"

"He'll have to give back the flour he got from the quartermaster." The MP took a slip of paper from his pants pocket. "He must have about a thousand pounds left."

"And that's all?"

The MP grinned and looked at Paulette, "Why, his daughter can make up for it."

"Monsieur Houdins, now I know why you are here," Stefan said. "The policeman doesn't understand what we are talking about. If you want to keep on baking bread as usual, you can go home right away."

"I will not make any more," Houdins said. "I will not bake any more for you pigs."

"What did he say?" the MP asked suspiciously.

"He can't cope with the work any more – just a minute. Monsieur Houdins, you have attacked one of the policemen, and now you say 'pigs.' Don't make things any worse for yourself. Did anyone do anything to you?"

"I will not bake any more," Houdins shouted.

"Papa!" Paulette cried.

"Then you will have to return the flour," Stefan said.

"Go and take the flour," Houdins shouted, "you have stolen it from us anyway, you are thieves, thieves and pigs."

"No, Papa!" Paulette shouted and sprang up from her chair.

"Nothing doing," Stefan said to the MP. "He'll return the flour. Can they go now?"

"Well, I'll have to ask the lieutenant first. You stay here and watch them. I'll be back in a minute."

The MP left the kitchen, leaving the outside door open. Houdins followed him with his eyes. The girl did the same. Outside, the MP took his coat from the back of the chair, put it on, hung the shield and chain around his neck and walked to the gate of the yard.

Paulette put her hands in front of her face and began to sob. Her tears came through her fingers and ran down the back of her hands.

"You can tell me what happened," Stefan said, "you can see that I don't want to do you any harm."

"Leave the room!" Houdins said to his daughter.

She didn't seem to hear what he said.

"Leave the room!" Houdins repeated. The girl got up without taking the hands from her face and left.

"Don't run away," Stefan called after her. "I'm supposed to watch you."

She had been raped. In her own house, in her own room, last night. A German soldier had climbed through the window. The window was on the second floor where both the father and his sister had their rooms as well as Paulette. Houdins still couldn't understand that he hadn't heard anything. She had told him, he said, that she had fainted. "Then she came into his room, with her blood-smearred face, she had looked awful, but of course that had been only that scratch, but she hadn't been able to speak for a long time.

While Houdins talked, or rather because he talked, he became less suspicious. "Monsieur," he said, "I believe my daughter." Paulette had gone out into the yard and was sitting on the edge of the well. The MP came back and said, "The lieutenant's coming."

Stefan debated whether he should tell the sergeant what he had found out, but he finally thought he'd better wait for the lieutenant.

When the officer arrived he scolded Stefan because his salute hadn't been snappy enough. The lieutenant didn't ask any ques-

tions. He glanced at the baker and said, "We can still use more men for work in Laon. This one is leaving on the next truck "

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear that he called us boches?"

"No, sir," Stefan said. "I would like to ask the Lieutenant's permission to make a deposition as to what the man told me."

"Deposition! Don't blabber such highfalutin nonsense."

"I see," the lieutenant said after listening to Stefan's story. "And where is she?"

"Paulette!" Stefan called, "Would you please come here a minute?"

"What did he say?" Houdins inquired.

You seem to be quite well acquainted with the girl," the lieutenant observed.

"I've seen her in her father's store – twice," Stefan said

"Pretty little thing," the lieutenant said. "What's that on her face?"

Stefan didn't think it necessary to reply.

"Well," the lieutenant said, "we'll be easy on you this time. Take off!" He made a gesture to illustrate his last words, but neither Houdins nor Paulette followed the invitation.

"Tell them that they can go," the lieutenant said getting impatient.

"Sir. . . ."

"Tell them to beat it."

Stefan straightened up, stood at attention and said, "Sir, I shall report this case."

"Report? To whom?" the lieutenant asked, greatly surprised.

"To my Commanding Officer or the judge advocate of the division."

"And what do you intend to report?"

"The girl has been raped, sir."

"Krüger!" the lieutenant shouted. "Sit down at the typewriter."

The sergeant felt the bottom drop out. He ran across the hall-

way to the living room of Farmer Robinard, where the typewriter was.

"Billet, the . . . what's today's date? . . . eighth of June 1940," the lieutenant dictated, standing in the kitchen but speaking loud enough for the sergeant to hear him in the living room across the hall. "Deposition. Now then, let's hear your story, at what time did the great unknown climb through the window? What was his name, rank, APO number, let's get on with it, ask them, translate. . . . Now I want the story down to the last detail."

Paulette didn't want to say anything. The longer the business dragged on, the more furious the lieutenant became. When the deposition was finished, it consisted of ten lines and offered practically no clue at all as to the identity of the attacker. Only one thing Paulette had finally disclosed under tears, the soldier had been as hairy as an animal.

Not the Houdins, father and daughter, but the lieutenant signed the deposition.

"Are you happy now? Now you can go and look for the man. A German soldier with a lot of hair on his chest."

"That's not my job, sir."

"But it is your job to look for the quickest way out of here, and take your two protégés along. I hope the daughter will show you her gratitude for all your deep concern for the enemy."

Stefan saluted and gestured to the Houdins to follow him. They left Monsieur Robinard's farm.

"I'm very sorry, Monsieur Houdins," Stefan said.

"Ah, this terrible war!" the baker said. "My daughter wishes to give you something before you go."

"To me?"

"This my daughter found in her room this morning. Perhaps it can be of help."

He handed Stefan a crumpled piece of paper. It was the top of one of the telephone and teletype message forms used by the signal troops of the German Army. Two lines, "Dispatched by –"

and the time, had been filled in by hand. Stefan recognized the handwriting.

When he came back to the orderly room, Springorum said,

"What? Are you still here? Don't they need you at all up front?"

"I've been at the MP post until now," Stefan said.

"Oh yes, that's right. Here is the mail for your squad."

"May I ask permission to speak to the company commander?"

"The CO isn't here."

"Is the lieutenant expected soon?"

"I don't know. He's on the road with the battalion commander. What's the matter? Can't you tell me?"

It really doesn't matter whether I tell him or the CO, Stefan thought. He'll hear about it anyway.

"Yessir, I would like to talk to you in private, Sergeant."

Behind the classroom was a smaller room which the children had used to hang up their coats. The windows were broken and the pieces were lying all over the floor. The stench from two outhouses in the courtyard, not far from the windows, filled the room. In this setting Stefan told the first sergeant what he knew.

"Let me have that," the top kick said and put out his hand.

Stefan handed him the evidence. Without looking at it and with obvious relish the top kick began to tear it into small pieces.

"No," Stefan shouted, "no."

Once, twice, and again and again, Springorum tore the slip into such minuscule shreds that it was impossible even to pick up the pieces. He scattered them all over the floor.

"That's that," he said. "I'll have a good talk with Fränzel. It was a good idea to come to me with that story. So that's finished and done with."

"Nosir, that's not finished," Stefan said. "If you don't follow up I'll report the matter to battalion headquarters, Sergeant."

"Do you really want to get one of your buddies court-martialed because of a thing like that? Man, this is war!"

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"Yessir, Sergeant, and that's why a court-martial would have jurisdiction."

"You are – I've known for a long time that you aren't much of a soldier, a rotten soldier in fact, and a mean bastard to boot. So you want to tell on a buddy? All I can say is that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You don't think of your unit at all, do you? You don't give a damn for that, do you? Things like that are handled within the family, you understand?"

"I don't consider Fränzel my buddy."

"What is he then?"

Hold it, Stefan thought, hes not going to catch me that way.

"You don't have any idea what you're talking about," the top kick added.

"I request a transfer from my squad."

"I'll tell you something. Your squad will take over the division switchboard in Villers tonight. The offensive is starting, do you understand? We're attacking! I'm not going to make any changes at a time like this. You are going to keep silent about this business and that's an order!"

"I shall protest that order through channels, sir."

"Go ahead. But not before the next twenty-four hours are over. You are a sorry specimen. And you're making yourself ridiculous."

From chapter "Machine Kaput"

p. 187

Reserve captain Geiler, in civilian life an attorney [Notar] in Düren, had taken his viola along to Pütz and played in a string quartet every week.

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[Dialog between Captain Geiler and Stefan]

"But you know, sir, we're working on the war chronicle."

"And when do you work on that?"

"Every day, sir," Stefan said.

"What period are you going to cover?"

"Up to the armistice. Perhaps there'll be a short chapter on the occupation. That will depend on how long we're going to stay in France."

"In that case you might as well get ready for supplements. here we are and here we stay."

Stefan laughed.

"That isn't funny," the captain said. "We'll have to govern France just as we're governing Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway...."

"Holland, Belgium. . . ." Stefan continued.

"Exactly, all of Europe. That's what we're going to do now and nobody will be able to stop us. That's the mission which history has assigned to us. I'd like to see what you're writing about Le Creusot when you get that far. You might make a copy for me. I have started a collection, 'Le Creusot 1940,' for my grandchildren. I think that ought to be quite instructive. Europe in statu nascendi. And I'll be able to say, 'I was there.' The French are like clay in our hands. We'll make something of them. "So far we haven't finished the Polish campaign."

"Campaigns are a bore. When I was your age . . . how old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"I was two years younger than you when I joined up in '14. The war was still interesting then; we went in there, well, the Deluge of Steel. Well, you know all about that, Ernst Jünger and all that, but now, that's no war at all. . . . We just shake the tree and all Europe drops to the ground. We're the only people with an idea. The others are helpless. We'll put the Frenchmen back on their feet too. They're like a tree on which ivy has crept up. That kills any tree. We have to get rid of the ivy. With an axe! Did you ever take a look at what crawls around here? Poles, Russians, Letts, Estonians, Negroes, Jews. . . . We have to get rid of all that – they must go, all of them."

"But those people work here, sir."

"Work! I'm sure the French will be glad for every job they can get themselves now. But that's not even the point. The question is the rejuvenation of the whole people. It has to find itself again. We can build Europe only with healthy nations. You're still young, you'll do it. That war chronicle – it really makes me laugh. That little bit of a tank war – bah! The war we carry on now, without tanks, without medals, without fanfare, but with the brutal severity without which both we and Europe would be lost – that's worth writing about. Wait another six months before you write your chapter about Le Creusot. I'll transform this decadent hole into a French town again, a town that fits into our Europe. I'll transform it."

"With an axe."

"That won't be necessary," said the Notary from Düren. "I'll throttle this rabble with silk gloves. With ration coupons. And the French will help me do it. To lead means to do nothing yourself. It means to see that something is done. In another six months the Polish quarter will be deserted, the Marolles will be depopulated, the whole gang will have disappeared. . . ."

"Where to, sir?"

"The lowest of the low will be eliminated. It will be a total purification. That process is going on both in the East and the West. Hunger makes people asocial. And we have camps. They are the garbage dumps of Europe. I repeat, take a look around here, Le Creusot will be a model. It's ridiculous to describe the war without making clear its meaning. Do you know, by the way, why I assigned you the rooms?"

"Because of the [unit] chronicle, sir."

"Certainly not! Because of the tone in which you said, 'Well, then we'll print it in England.' [Stefan's irony had gone over the captain's head] That's the attitude that will bring us final and definitive victory. Calm, sober, sure...sure and never a doubt. You could be my son. I have sons, two of them. They're washrags, both of them. Culture alone isn't enough. Sure, you need culture, but it must be backed up with something. **You have that quite hardness. I can feel it.**"

From chapter "The Laughter"

pg. 377-78

"I could reply, *our* enemies wear a uniform too; Hahl wears a brown uniform when he's at home, and an arm band – but it's not that. Quite a few of our enemies don't wear uniforms, and even Laurent (French musician) said he didn't mind the uniforms. That was a terrible misjudgment, and you didn't realize how terrible. If a man who lives in his own imaginary world, drinks his wine and plays his organ, who has never been in Germany and doesn't know beans or even care about politics – when a man like that can look right through our uniforms and understand that it's not the war and our tanks that devastate Europe, but the terror that follows in the wake of the tanks, and crime, and a force bent on destruction, and insanity, and that the men in uniform are only the advance guard, the pathfinders . . . well, then, my friend, I must conclude that we are apparently afflicted with a particular sort of blindness. I only wish that you would encounter Evil once in such undisguised and overpowering form as I did when I talked to the captain."

....

"You see [Benhard]? It's as I see it. You are born to fall into the trap, like you did into mine. All I can do is warn you. Don't be deceived, I like playing cat and mouse. When the odds against

you are so great as in my case, a hundred cats against one mouse, what does the mouse feel as long as it hasn't be caught? I bet it doesn't only feel fear.

[See the novelette *Cat and Mouse* by Günter Grass.]

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"I despise him [Hahl/Hahn] from the depth of my soul," he wrote, "but I realize that he is only a phantom, that I hate what he represents. I'm not concerned with him as a person. It is most unpleasant that I can't escape thinking about him, and the time in Le Creusot was so nice, in part at least, because I had really forgotten him. Then I managed – and I must manage again – to recognize that it is the whole system that oppresses me. It keeps taking stabs at me, but it does not sully me. Hahl does sully me, and the worst of it is that I'm beginning to see him everywhere. That colonel was a polished and intelligent man, but when he screamed his aria at me, he too was nothing but a brutal boche. And what terrible pride! He wasn't annoyed so much because I had pulled his leg but because 'I had made the Army look ridiculous.' ...

"At the next opportunity I'll have to talk to K. about a transfer, if necessary to the infantry. To put up with the war *and* Hahl, that is too much. I have to get quit of him, as a person and within myself. I wish that could be done in some other way than by transfer, but the only alternative is desertion. I think I'd really prefer to get rid of the war and the uniform, so that I could get at Hahl's throat. But that's a twofold illusion. Before the war, when Hahl wore a brown uniform and I wore none, I wouldn't have been able to do anything about him either. Or better: I never even tried to do anything about him and his kind. Hating him means hating my own helplessness."