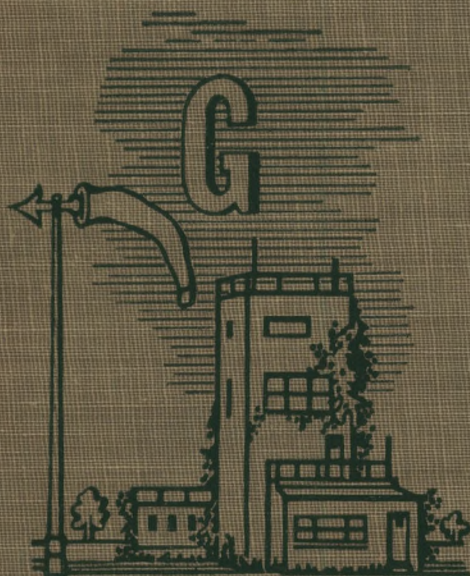

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FOR GENEVIEVE

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G-FOR GENEVIEVE

BY

LT. J. M. HERBERT

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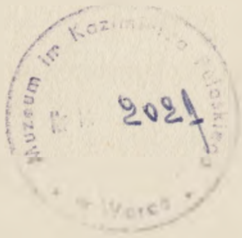

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Foreword

I BEGAN TO WRITE this narrative (narrative seems to me to be the best description of this work) on September 4, 1939, on which date I made the first entry in my diary—an entry which I felt even then would help me later on to visualize the pictures and events descending like an avalanche and like an avalanche carrying me away with them.

This is it:

"On September first, German aeroplanes bombed Cracow. What happened since seems to me like a bad dream. A two-days train journey to Deblin under bombs and the machine gun fire of the German air force; fires in the stations, smashed railway tracks; dead bodies along the roads; destroyed telegraph lines . . . and loneliness . . . I am all alone, except for my dog, in this desolate, ruined Deblin. . . .

"How many bombs have fallen during these five days? Three or four thousand? Bodies of dead men and horses give out a cadaverous stench; bodies of excellent buildings and hangars have an odour of burning; bodies of aeroplanes are spread all over the airfield and smell of petrol, and the body of the airfield smells of fresh earth in the bomb craters, so numerous that there are not twenty square yards of even surface. . . .

"To wake up! To wake up!

"But I cannot wake up, for I am awake and this is reality. This and all that happened since the moment when the first German bombs fell on Cracow, since in darkness I left my house, saying goodbye to my wife and to my boys. . . ."

Since that day three years and three months have passed. I have not spent such a long time over any previous book of mine, nor interrupted my writing for so long, but none of them was started in wartime.

This is a true narrative. I do not mean that I personally have experienced all the adventures of Lieutenant Herbert, but the adventures and impressions are true. Some of them were my own; others were lived by my friends and companions who told them to me; still others are a part of the chronicle of the Polish Air Force squadrons.

I would not like any of the airmen to think that I ascribe to myself the flights and operations in which Herbert takes part. Many of them will recognize themselves or their friends in this character and will know that Herbert is not I alone.

All the other characters in this book are fictitious. The only authentic names are those of some of the Rumanian officers.

And lastly—"Genevieve." I do not remember having seen anywhere an airplane that was so named. I have given her this name because I flew for the first time on a Wellington marked with the letter "G." It was not even an operational flight, not at all—simply a short trip from one airfield to another. But I made this flight in the company of Goral, the friend to whom I devote so much space in this book.

J. M.

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I. On the Ceiling

WE TAKE OFF in a formation of three machines from a small front line airfield. Captain Sikora is leading; to the left, Sergeant Wodzidlo, to the right, I, flying for the first time in this unit. The other two are an old team and they know each other very well. There was a third with them —until yesterday. He was shot down by German Messerschmitts.

It is quite a little while since I sat at the controls of a fighter machine; four months or maybe half a year. And I am sure that during the last flight which I made, no doubt for pleasure, the idea that the next might be an operational flight in wartime did not enter my head.

I must say that in spite of lack of experience, this first formation flight under a leader I do not know goes quite well. The adjustment of the angle of tilt, of engine revolutions and of speed to those of my companions does not present any special difficulties. After a few minutes I am flying wing to wing with them.

I haven't any "pre-battle" jitters. I must force myself to the realisation that we are flying into battle in order to believe it. Meanwhile I am not afraid and this seems rather strange.

On my first operational flight in the Polish-Bolshevik

war—I was nineteen then, with much less to lose, better nerves and a stronger constitution—I did not know danger as well as I know it now, after twenty years in a profession in which a fairly large proportion of its members perish every year. Besides, I dreamed then of "giving my life for my country" not realising exactly what these words meant. I used to be afraid then, frightened as every soldier is, but I was no coward for I did my duty. I did my duty to the very end under machine gun fire and well earned my first Cross of Valor.

In later years I have been frightened many a time. I would say that fear was increased in proportion to my increasing experience. While attacking the enemy, I had at the same time to defend myself against fright.

In the other war, although we flew old machines that no sensible pilot would have used, we had an enormous air superiority over the Bolsheviks. Yet in spite of having thought of all this while taking off, I am not afraid.

We are flying in a close formation, speedily gaining height—3,000, 4,500, 6,000, 9,000 feet. The thrill of this flight is the same as the thrill of air manoeuvres in peacetime. I feel as though I were flying to a sham combat of my formation; to surprise the adversary from the side of the sun, to approach as close as possible, to get him in the sight and press the trigger.

This is what you think, taking part in flying exercises over an aerodrome. This is what I think now, although I know well enough that if I press the button my machine guns will spit fire instead of making a series of photographs, and—if the adversary succeeds in sighting first, the encounter will not end with a picture on a film.

We fly on the left side of a railway track running to-

wards Radom, taking advantage of a thin cover of cloud. The earth down below spreads lazily in the sun and seems to be dozing. Seen from the air it is less "warlike" than when seen from ground level. You must strain your eyes to see the destruction; bomb craters, fallen telegraph poles, here and there gutted houses. As usual, cattle graze on the meadows and geese make white spots on the grass. As usual, grey lines of roads fly back; forests are dark, like bearskins; the rectangles and lozenges of the stubblefields are fawn coloured; the rows of growing potatoes and beetroot, green; the thin belts of tracks shining like silver.

To the left, parallel to me, Wodzidlo's machine is floating lightly. I can see his bony face, turning round to me with a broad smile. The sergeant shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders. Everything is O.K. Then he looks at the sky and again at me, again shrugging. No one in sight, but you ought to be careful.

I follow his example but the sky is clear, much calmer than the earth, so I look to the left where a little lower down, several yards ahead of me, my commander's machine is flying.

The commander sits crouching, as if ready to leap. Now and again he stretches his neck and leans out of the windscreen, then plunges his shoulders deep into the cockpit. The sun falls on the smooth surfaces of the wings and touches the prisms of the glass-panes in the windscreen, lighting them with bright reflections. The rudders throw grey shadows on the tailplanes and shake slightly up and down, left and right, as if they were alive.

At last a cloud, white and thick, like cream, comes our way. Beyond it the sky is clear; blue, with only a trail of smoke on the horizon.

The captain makes a sign with his hand: we will climb over. I throttle up. The machines climb steeply through the air currents and the floating white cloud, gleaming like a floor of glass, slips down under the fuselages and wings, and the fawn carpet of the earth fades out of sight. The pale changeable, uncertain shadows of the planes, now nearer and sharper, now more distant, surrounded by a halo of light reflected from this milky whiteness, are lost underneath and found again, jump sharply down, then spring up, shaking and dancing on the soft edges of the cloud.

To the left and back, from high above, sunshine is streaming. The whole enormous space over us is full of bright, glaring light. It is impossible to look that way. It is difficult, too, to look below; the streams of sunlight fall on the white satin of the clouds immediately beneath us and hurt our eyes. Every move of my blinking lids is like a stab in my brain. With every look at the instruments in the cockpit a cascade of green and red spots rushes before my eyes making me feel giddy.

At last we pass the summit of the cloud and far ahead of us we see the earth. A dark forest emerges, looking like a dull, coarsely-woven woolen rug. The eyes rest on it with delight, absorbing this gentle dullness. It is like a cool hand on a feverish brow, a fresh sea breeze in a desert.

But what is this? Three sudden sparks on a dark background. Three others that light close behind them and die out. I look for them intently—here they are again.

Now I know. One . . . two . . . three. . . . Formations of three machines.

Dorniers?

It is difficult to tell. They are flying against the background of the woods and are indistinct.

They are approaching us slantwise, against the sun, nearing the railway track, heading for the station, crowded with trains. They must be Germans. What would our machines be doing here?

Sikora wags his wings: "Be on guard." The captain points to the bombers. We both nod quickly. Then the commander's arm points to me and above. I understand. He is telling me to remain on the ceiling in order to cover them both while they attack. At the same moment both machines turn slightly to the right, peel off and dive.

They fly evenly as if tied with invisible links. They dive at full throttle straight ahead, as if threaded on a line stretching from the sun to the railway track. They recede quickly, growing smaller every second.

Only now do I feel some sort of emotion. Will they be able to get the others at firing range? Will they have luck or are they going to fail?

The seconds pass slowly, measured by the throbbing of blood in my temples. Almost unconsciously, I, too, turn right and put on speed to be nearer and see better.

They are almost there.

Have they opened fire?

The man on the right in the last German formation suddenly in a high banked turn shows the crosses on his wings. Almost simultaneously the first formation turns sharply to the left; then the second . . . the right hand machine of the last formation is already smoking and falling down, tail foremost. . . .

Where are my friends? I cannot find them for two or three seconds. At last I see them. They are flying in line after the falling Dornier, still inseparable, still close to each other, bound by the distance of a few yards between their

wing tips as though by a steel buckle. And suddenly in two divergent parabolas they shoot up, to appear in the sky above the horizon.

They are together again, and again they dive jointly toward the returning Germans. They are going to attack again.

However, I was not left here, at ten thousand feet to stare at what is happening below. I collect myself in time. Three black spots are rushing to my right. Here my job starts, the defence of those two fighting down below. And just now I begin to feel very lonely.

This is not fear. I don't realise yet that this will be a life and death fight, and I do not think of dying. I know only that I am going to fight against three pilots whom I do not know, of whom I know nothing at all, not even what they are worth as pilots.

I feel as if I were carrying the Polish colours, taking part in a competition, and as if I did not know whether I was worthy to represent them. This feeling—I realise it quite clearly—is thoroughly out of place; it is certainly not the attitude of a fighter with "good morale."

And where the devil is the "stubborn will to victory"? Where the "aggressive spirit"? Where the "offensive attitude," about which our regulations spoke so firmly.

Regulations?

It would be fantastic if at this moment I started to think of regulations!

Luckily there is no more time for any thoughts. Three Messerschmitts are crossing the invisible line running between my machine and the sun.

I turn sharply toward them and push the machine down-

ward. The sun shines into my round mirror; it is exactly behind me.

At once my self-assurance returns. I am invisible in the streams of sunlight—some 900 feet above them; I will have complete superiority during the next ten or twelve seconds.

I lift myself up a little—together with my seat. This is better, now I can aim more accurately. But the moment has not come yet. The enemy is far away, much too far for my fire to be effective.

We fly along slanting paths converging somewhere in space, at the line of the horizon.

It is I who cut their way. I begin the attack. I will not start firing too early.

I open the throttle a little more and push the stick as far as it will go. The engine is roaring at its maximum revolutions.

They continue to fly straight ahead, not changing their formation or direction. Apparently they have not seen the fight between our machines and the Dorniers, and certainly they have not sighted me.

I watch as they enter the greater rings of my gun sight. The squadron leader and the right hand pilot are no longer confined within them; the left hand machine occupies the second ring . . . finally, the third one.

My machine screams with speed, the engines roars, and the absurd thought crosses my mind that they will hear it! I squint at the speed indicator which says 275. My heart is beating faster and faster; I must use all my self control to keep from pressing the button, and I must clench my teeth to prevent my jaws from quivering.

Time loses its usual meaning. Seconds cease to exist as stable and measurable units of time; no single one resembles the next for they last ever longer, in a more than geometrical progression, as I approach the German planes.

Any moment now they will see me. Any moment one of us—they, I, or perhaps the sun—will break from the straight line that is the path of my flight.

I tear my eyes away from the sight in order to check the distance.

Not yet.

And . . . they do not see me yet. They are still flying together.

It seems to last God knows how long.

Easy. Easy.

It is difficult to hold this indispensable calm at a speed of almost 280 miles an hour, at an altitude of 9,000 feet, when some 3,000 feet down below a fight of two against nine is being fought and when at any moment you also are going to open fire.

Do not fire. Not yet. Not yet. . . .

The Messerschmitt on my left is growing larger in my gun sight. Now I have no time left to turn my eyes from him. He is near, but I control the pressure of my fingers on the trigger. Now I can see the German pilot's face; he turns his head and looks at me.

His face is in the very centre of the gun sight. I make a correction and the spasm of a short burst of machine gun fire shakes my machine. At the same time the Messerschmitt turns slightly on its wing, lifts its tail to the left and suddenly falls in a spin, well below my machine.

Not for a moment do I turn my eyes from him, certain that he wants to escape. I throttle back, climb up, kick the

rudder to the left and dive with him from a half roll.

For a second I am in complete darkness. The centrifugal force (two hundred and eighty miles an hour in a short, violent jerk) drains all the blood from my brain. But quickly I regain the use of my eyes and the horrible feeling of sickness passes as quickly as it came.

The Messerschmitt comes out of the spin, diving uninterruptedly.

"This will not help you, my dear sir," I tell him silently. "You just try to flatten out. That's just what I'm waiting for."

He, however, dives more and more steeply until he is almost flying on his back. Then I see smoke; he is in flames!

First amazement and then joy brings a wave of blood to my brain. I have shot down an enemy with one salvo! With my first one! I am numb with the shock that a gambler feels when he puts a high stake on a number and wins; or—even more accurately—the hunter who with his first shot hills big game.

Although in the twenty years since the last war I had not fired at a human being; although I was not yet able to get rid of the ballast of peacetime culture with its loathing for murders in wartime; although my sensibilities have not yet become blunted in this new war—this first victory in the air evokes in me a sort of elation. I did not for a moment think that a man perished by my hand. The sight of the Messerschmitt crashing and going up in flames did not shake me either. It was as though my shots had brought a wild boar rolling down into a forest clearing. But as a matter of fact I did not have much time to analyse my feelings or to indulge in philosophical meditation for the two remaining Germans were close at my heels. Now the supe-

riority was theirs; they were higher up and behind me.

Never before did I realise so clearly that I have a back. I felt it. My whole consciousness was connected with its shape, with the tension of the skin, the position of muscles and bones, almost with the ramifications of veins and arteries. Somewhat less distinctly I felt my legs from the knees down and my arms from the shoulders to the elbows. The nape of my neck and the back of my skull suddenly became as sensitive as my back. I knew every hair under my cap and I felt the exact place where it grew.

My back, the nape of my neck and my head were the most exposed to the shells from the German planes and were awaiting them. For a few seconds all my consciousness was absorbed with this expectation.

This is probably why I did not notice at once the delicate, almost imperceptible, irregular throbs of my rushing machine. Only when I saw scratches on the metal skin of my wings did I realise that the Germans were firing.

I knew that they were upon me and that I must not turn my head. The earth was rushing towards me, bigger and bigger and ever more distinct, swelling under me, and they were firing at my wings. . . .

I made a decision at about fifteen hundred feet. With all the power of my controls I turned my machine in a half-spin and pulled the stick toward me.

I was pushed into my seat. My hands, feet and stomach felt as if they were full of lead. Blood ran to my heart and then flew down my body, and my head was immersed in a cool, sickly darkness, probably resembling death.

By a purely muscular impulse I must have flattened out, because for a moment I did not know what was happening to me. The first impression I had when I regained con-

sciousness was of an obstinate ringing in my ears. Then, as through a mist, I saw the instrument board emerging from darkness more and more distinctly and stabilizing itself in front of my reeling vision. And finally I saw the horizon crossed askew by the wings of my machine.

Then I heard the engine cough, suddenly deprived of the flow of fuel, and again the almost equally sudden choking caused by the surfeit of petrol after the turn.

I breathed deeply and looked round.

I was alone. Far behind me the two Messerschmitts were flying down in a spin, and behind them, a little higher up, the two Polish planes followed.

Only now the memory returned to me. These were the planes of our formation. The captain and Wodzidlo had finished the Dorniers quickly enough to come to my rescue. But—weren't there nine Dorniers? Nine Dorniers against the two of them! And in spite of this they were rushing down towards the Messerschmitts from high above, while I look on.

Having the sun at my side, I see them against the sky, but cannot take part in the pursuit. I am at least twelve hundred feet lower than they are, at a distance of a little more than a half a mile. I will never catch the Messerschmitts from here, and they have no intention of waiting for me to come. Neither will my friends catch them. While they were diving, they were slowly overtaking the Germans but now that they are flying level the distance between them is growing.

The Messerschmitts are less nimble than our machines, the German pilots as marksmen are inferior to the Poles and are not prepared to attack when opposed by equal forces; but their machines are faster than ours. When they

escape on the level, it is difficult to overtake them. And they are escaping now.

My companions are turning back. As is usual with the Poles—whether it is necessary or not—they do it with a flourish; one a yard away from the other, they plough the sky, roundly and smoothly, from the horizon to the zenith. The sunlight flashes on their tailplanes while they are in a half roll; they hang—you would say—unmovingly in space as if scorning the laws of earthly gravitation and, instead of succumbing to it, instead of falling after this spin with a diameter of three hundred yards they emerge together after a last turn tracing a double trail of whitish fumes.

I increase speed and climb in a steep turn, to be in line with them. They greet me by raising their left shoulders—also both together.

I come nearer, take position, join the formation.

Sikora looks at me time and again, turning his head and grimacing terribly. The sergeant opens his bony horse face in a smile and quickly shrugs his shoulders, which means that he is pleased. We are steadily going down at low speed, toward the station. Suddenly the captain wags his wings, see-saws from starboard to port, throttles back and dives down vertically. Behind him the sergeant falls like a stone. I remain a little behind and thus we rush straight toward the railway tracks in an extended formation, like three falling shells.

I do not understand at first what this means, but looking more carefully at the ground I perceive the reason for this crazy dive. On both sides of the tracks, which shine like silver threads, there lie the remains of two Dorniers.

They grow suddenly before my eyes, breaking away in

sharp angles, very realistically from the greenness of the meadow; stiff in immobility; dead.

We go straight for them with a whistling and roaring of the elevator tabs until at the height of about 300 feet Sikora turns his machine . . . and pulls it upward again, over the railway station, and behind him Wodzidlo roars in a zoom, goes up like a rocket and pulls me in his wake.

I have the greater speed for I have not throttled back, and so I overtake them both. Finding myself ahead, I turn right and look for my Messerschmitt. But they see him first, for they overtake me suddenly, one after another, very close by, and dive again.

The German machine lies not far behind the road near the edge of a forest and still smokes on a black spot of burned out stubbles. Sikora twists in a turn between the German machine and the trees; Wodzidlo nearly touches the butting skeleton of the fuselage with his undercarriage and kicking the rudder right and left, joyfully waves his tail in front of me.

I turn after him. We accelerate and in a close formation fly toward the airfield. A large cloud, filled like a sail, creeps under the sun and covers the battlefield with shadows. Above it, high up—circles a solitary hawk.

2. Evacuation

THE FIGHT with the Messerschmitt near Radom was actually the beginning and end of my campaigning in Poland, largely because the engine of my fighter, saved by a strange chance from the havoc at Deblin, suddenly gave way. The valves in this engine rang like bells during Mass and only by a miracle could they have sustained its last performance. But this was the last of them and the exhausted antique groaned at every revolution of the propeller, hissed and leaked air, panting like an asthmatic sufferer. Of its five hundred horse power at least half was grazing on all the airfields of Poland, and the rest—tired out and powerless—was unable to drag the machine along. The airframe, too, was decrepit and somewhat hacked by German shells. It was fit for a general overhaul but not for a flight. I had to part with it without hope of getting another, for we were short of supplies.

So I got a new "ground job" and with a sore heart started on my way to report to my new commander.

Rososza, the estate belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Dolecki, lies several miles north of Deblin, near Ryki. It was the seat of the evacuated Air Base, the headquarters of its Com-

mander, Major T. and of a column of motor lorries charged with the transport of the valuable equipment saved from the Air Force depot at Deblin.

We use our first names when talking with the Commander whose nickname in the Air Force is simply "Little Mary." My functions weren't actually well defined. I was to help Little Mary and comfort him in misfortune and in the undescribable muddle with which he often could not cope. Our task was to supply the various air training corps with petrol and equipment which we were supposed to have saved from Deblin. The point is that there were many truck-loads of equipment, several million gallons of petrol, and we had a score or so of lorries for its transport—to where? Nobody knows. Neither was there any hope of having the ruined railway siding repaired.

We worked day and night without rest. Our drivers were weary and exhausted. We evacuated whatever we could from under the German bombs and dumped it at Rososza, later to load it on trains at Ryki and evacuate it still further.

We were in a gloomy mood; the skies roared continuously; the Germans did their bombing very near us. The men walked about depressed, sleepy and overworked. The German machines attacked stubbornly but not too accurately a bridge on the Vistula. At night—as on every night—we gathered round the wireless set to listen to the news from Warsaw. But that night Warsaw was silent.

Silent too was Zygmunt, my friend whom I met here, the most outspoken and cheeky fellow I know. He dragged his feet lugubriously, and having foretold the end of the world, he looked at the sky as if expecting the flood to begin. When I commented on his prophesy he replied

haughtily that there would be a flood but in Sienkiewicz's sense and not a Biblical deluge. This said, he went to the orchard to pick plums, taking my dog with him. They crammed themselves with plums before the flood as if this could save them, then they both had belly aches. At night they kept me awake with their groans.

Warsaw was silent, Zygmunt was silent, busy chewing plums, H.Q. did not send any orders, so we were deprived of news and frankly at a loss what to do next.

In the morning I drove out to look for our air-captain; a decision had to be taken at last as to the underground petrol tanks which it was impossible to evacuate. But the "air-constable" had evaporated like camphor and for six hours I drove about in vain.

I also called on the H.Q. of the Corps where a general told me that he was no more concerned with my petrol than with the snows of yesteryear but he thought it should be blown up for our forces were retreating beyond the Vistula.

I asked him for a detachment of sappers and for equipment to do the job, but he looked at me with contempt and said that he could not give me sappers or equipment because he had more important jobs for them.

"But there is enough petrol there for the whole air force, sir," I said. "Several million gallons of petrol."

"Well, you'd better put fire to it," he decided.

I was losing my temper.

"I know that much myself. But how shall I do it, sir?"

My stupidity seemed to amuse him.

"You call yourself an airman and you don't know how?" he said. "One match is enough. It will blow up."

"But who will light the match?"

He grew angry.

"What are you, a child, Captain? Somebody must sacrifice himself."

"Maybe you, sir?" I asked coolly. "For I haven't the slightest intention of doing it."

He was so amazed by this answer that he remained speechless for a moment, and I, profiting by it, left him.

Late in the afternoon I returned to Rososza. We decided with Little Mary to start at once to load whatever we could into trucks, and send it eastwards, and transport the rest to the forests near Kock. Then we could evacuate the Deblin dump further. Otherwise we ran the risk of losing everything. I gave my orders, and sent Captain B. to Deblin, asking him to explore on the spot and see what the situation was like in the fortress, whether in fact our forces thought of evacuating it. Then I went to bed utterly exhausted.

Little Mary woke me when it was time for the news, but we turned the knobs of the wireless set in vain, Warsaw was silent.

Meanwhile B. returned.

"I cannot drive to Deblin," he said. "Ryki has been bombed; it is on fire."

"Damn you, why didn't you turn round and take the other road?" I asked, furious at his stupid helplessness.

He avoided my stare.

"It is impossible to drive there," he mumbled.

"Why?"

"At the crossing of the Warsaw road, beyond Ryki, a military policeman stopped me. Deblin and the road are under the fire of German artillery. The Germans have occupied Zajezierze, so he said. The bridge has been blown up by our sappers, so . . ."

"So," continued Zygmunt, spitting out a dozen plum-

stones, "when there are dogs in the village the infantry cannot pass through?"

B. looked at him in disgust and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Not everybody is a hero like you," he said.

Zygmunt blinked and wanted to answer something, but just then a terrific noise shook the air. The window panes shook; the house trembled, the furniture jumped.

"Do you hear?" whispered the captain, pale with emotion.

After the first, another explosion shook the air, then a third, a fourth, a tenth, one succeeding another at ever shorter intervals until they mingled in an incessant thunder of explosions.

This cannot be artillery fire from beyond the Vistula, I thought.

The three of us listened. Zygmunt produced a handful of plums from his pocket and put them all at once into his mouth.

"Will you go with me?" I asked him.

With eyes protruding, blinking toward the captain he chewed and talked all at the same time, stopping only to swallow a plum or to spit out the stones.

"For goodness sake—tph!—there—hm—a gendarme in the road is warning people against sudden death—tph.—The Germans are hitting Zajezierze—the earth is shaking—Ryki—tph!—is burning, the most gallant captain-pilots—hm—cannot reach Deblin. . . ."

"Stop this," I said. "Do we start?"

"I am very frightened, but I will go with you," he said, swallowing the remaining plums.

He looked at the captain from head to toes, spat the

stones in his direction, turned about smartly and we went.

Pryszczyk, my driver, was asleep on the back seat. I took the wheel. Zygmunt sat next to me and we started straight ahead toward Ryki.

Dusk was falling; the air after the day's heat was motionless under the clear sky. Dust mounted in a big cloud and hung for a long time over the stubble fields. Flocks of crows were flying westward, crowing uneasily, and from the south where we were heading, ever heavier explosions could be heard.

We turned from a field lane into the road. Along it, in the ditches, under the cover of trees, processions of people were walking; peasants with bundles on their backs, women with baskets and children in their arms, Jews in kaftans. They were looking back, stopping and looking back as if wanting to turn round toward the place from whence they came—then they went on. The women were crying. The middle of the road was full of waggons and pushcarts laden with their belongings; lean cows and stupid sheep were being driven along.

"They are from Ryki, sir," said Pryszczyk.

I nodded in assent, and drove on, passing this human wave.

Suddenly, past a turning of the road, I saw Ryki, or rather its burning ruins. Naked, black skeletons of chimneys protruded among the cinders, among the flames consuming the remains of smashed walls; whole rows of chimneys, all alike, along narrow streets bare of houses. They were what remained of the village; like crosses in a cemetery; like a gloomy reminder that here had been life before it was destroyed by the German incendiaries.

Glass splinters screeched and crunched under the wheels

of my car. The burning boards creaked. The heavy smell of burning hung in the hot air which vibrated in tiny waves, mounting perpendicularly with the smoke.

On a corner of what used to be a street, under a telegraph pole bent by high explosives and shedding its wires with a look of desolation, I noticed a pram lying upside down just on the edge of a bomb-crater. I found myself slowing down. The pram lay so that I could look inside: I saw a blood stained pillow and a crushed, torn piece of flesh with two tiny baby's legs.

Where is the mother? I looked round, but could not see her corpse. So much the worse for her . . . if she escaped alive.

I passed the mill and the power house, then the manor house with its many fish ponds, where I used to be invited for shooting parties.

Wild duck were flying. The sky was darkening in the east while it became redder and redder in the west. Wild duck were flying—although there was a war on. This simple common fact seemed to be strange, almost grotesque.

But the detonation of explosives was now very near and this turned my thoughts toward the task which lay before me. In the direction of Kock, at an altitude of 4,500 feet I saw a formation of German aircraft. I counted on their not having bombs, for they were clearly returning from an operational flight, so I went on, not stopping under the cover of trees.

At the crossroads there really was a sentry of the military police. He told me that the road to Deblin and Deblin itself were under artillery fire from beyond the Vistula, but the thunder of powerful explosions which we heard was that of the ammunition dump at Stawy blowing up.

He did not know whether it was hit by the Germans or blown up by our own men before their retreat.

We went on. The explosions were so near that time and again pieces of iron flew over our heads, tearing leaves from the trees. Several times artillery shells burst along the road but so far away that even splinters did not reach us.

It was almost dark when we reached the village Irena, close to the airfield. The agricultural college was on fire. Apart from this, Irena was quite untouched, only the glass of the shattered windows screeching on the road as at Ryki. There was not a soul in the streets. The Jewish shops were boarded up. Only in front of the post-office men were loading cases on motor-cars.

This was once the headquarters of our great Marshal when he was preparing the offensive against the Bolsheviks in August 1920. Now he is no more with us. Will Marshal Rydz-Smigly be able to strike as effectively? we wondered. Is he capable of coping with the problems facing him now?

I skirted the craters in the road and passed heaps of debris from the destroyed buildings on the loveliest airfield in Poland. I turned into a road fringed with centuries-old poplars running parallel to the railway siding and stopped in front of the petrol station. Before it railway tracks were torn from their sleepers by the terrific explosion of a heavy bomb and they were twisted around a poplar trunk bare of its boughs to a height of several yards, an uncanny sight. They looked like an illustration for a terrible, frightening fairy-tale; the railway track had reared and climbed a strong tree, to strangle it, or perhaps to fling against it an infuriated locomotive!

A second lieutenant of the reserve with three privates

had been here for a week guarding four or five million gallons of petrol in underground tanks. He was ordered to do so, so he sat here and waited on all this treasure of oil. He waited for new orders which should have come together with his relief, or for a bomb which would blow up both him and the tanks.

The second possibility seemed more likely than the first, for I very much doubted that there would be any new orders, you nice second lieutenant in thick glasses. I thought it is wonderful that you will be relieved or breathe freely again after this week of incessant bombing. I doubt whether you will be able to shave and wash before you die—that is, if you continue gallantly to persevere at your post with your three privates, without food, without water, without cigarettes and with only a spark of hope that you have not been forgotten. What was the use of studying astronomy and trudging through higher mathematics, second lieutenant? What was the use of collecting books, struggling for scholarships and reading beautiful poems as you were doing a fortnight ago? What was the use of dreaming of work in big observatories, when war has come to tear you away from stars and poetry, to throw you here, on this spot of the earth mined with petrol? Tomorrow, or even today, even in the next minute, everything for you may be finished forever?

Do you ask yourself these questions, you gallant, short-sighted scholar in the badly fitting service uniform of a second lieutenant?

I left him all my cigarettes, promised tinned food and water as well as intervention with his superiors—if I found them. Then we drove on.

The barracks in the fortress had been bombed. From a

window a long lace curtain was flying and a palm showed in a broken pot. Under this window lay the carcass of a horse, his entrails out, in a state of decomposition. It smelled horribly. The road was spattered with many bomb craters, debris, smashed carts, flattened equipment, again corpses of horses, again smashed munition-boxes, an overturned car, and, towering over all this, the mournful telegraph poles like crosses, with their hanging wires.

In the fortress itself, completely undamaged, I found a major of artillery. He had with him some two hundred men of all formations, several field guns—and had every intention of defending himself.

I asked him about the bridge on the Vistula. It was partly damaged he said. Tanks could not pass, but infantry could. I wanted to remark that such damage could be repaired well enough for the tanks to pass but I did not want to start a discussion.

Whether the Germans were on the other side of the river the major did not know. He intended to send out a reconnaissance as soon as it was dark. His cannon were pointed toward the bridge and Zajezierze.

"Any reserves?" I asked. Who would worry about reserves now? On the road to Lublin a colonel was collecting the remains of various regiments of a division, so there would be reserves. And liaison was being established.

He also told me that since the commander of the fortress with his garrison had retreated in the morning, without having warned him about it or left any orders, he intended to defend the bridgehead on his own initiative. They had left him several wounded as well. Luckily, there was also a surgeon.

I parted with him, warning him that I would try to cross

the bridge and that he should not fire at me with his field guns. He gave me four rifles, some ammunition and a runner who would warn him if we returned. We drove on.

The bridge emerged from the darkness like the black ghost of a drowned giant getting up from his repose in a lake at dusk. It was just in front of our faces. On the bridge-head there was no sentry. If a German detachment were really stationed on the other side, it could have made quite a nice mess.

I switch on the lights. It is impossible to proceed in the dark when you know that ahead of you there is a gap big enough to swallow a tank. If they begin firing at us I thought, we will have time to turn off the lights and turn back. If not, it will be a sign that there are no Germans at Zajezierze.

With some emotion we neared the damaged bay some two-thirds down the length of the bridge. It was impossible to drive on; the whole roadway was torn off and only on the right a narrow foot path hung precariously on the only undamaged pillar.

I saw no point in further reconnaissance on foot—there was precious little to reconnoitre—so we turned back and devoted the rest of the night to examining the progress of the evacuation of the depot.

Alas, a considerable quantity of material and Air Force equipment was still on the spot. The score of motor lorries at our disposal was ridiculously inadequate in relation to what should have been evacuated.

At dawn we returned to Rososza. Here I learned that Little Mary had retreated towards Kock with most of the lorries. I followed him and found him in a forest. It was daylight; the bombing began anew.

3. Forget-me-nots

IN A YELLOW CARRIAGE with two horses two civilian engineers from the Polish Aircraft Works and a military mechanic arrived. They came early in the morning, soon after we had stopped for a bivouac on a farm near Wlodawa. They found us somehow, although the farm was buried deep in the forest, far from the highway, hidden from human eyes and from German airmen who ranged boisterously all over Poland, machine gunning even shepherds and cows in the fields, and bombing solitary country houses and villages.

So the engineers arrived and Zygmunt woke me up at once saying that I must see them. I cursed Zygmunt, the Polish Aircraft Works and the strangers for I was sleepy after a night spent at the wheel. I was wrong to be so cross for the engineers were looking for a pilot.

"A pilot? What for?" I asked foolishly.

"To fly, of course."

My sleepiness was a thing of the past, and my anger too. The more so when I learned that they wanted a pilot for a P.11, and that this machine had a new engine, was armed and had all the ammunition I could dream of.

"Where is this marvel," I asked, still incredulous.

It appeared to be only a few miles away, near the highway; in a field—or rather in a clearing between the woods. In addition to her there were two liaison machines, RWD-8s, piloted by officers of the reserve, whom it was essential to bring to Zaleszczyki.

An RWD machine is not good company for a P.11; the former has a speed of 75, the latter of 185 miles per hour. But, I thought, let me first see these two fellows off, and I will certainly find a fighter squadron on my way and then . . .

So I boarded the yellow four-wheeler and went off with the engineers, with a somewhat sour goodbye from the yawning Zygmunt who was disgruntled that as soon as we had found each other, I was leaving him to his fate and to the whims of the commander of the base.

The day was dry, sunny and hot like all the September days in Poland. It was not relieved by the glare of fires, the dust of marches and the bursting of bombs and of artillery fire.

From afar we could hear this dull roar, and the clear, milky-blue sky droned again with the ill-boding noise of the German bombers. The forest breathed resin; unmoving, black above, speckled golden and reddish in the middle, glassy green, yellow, and brown down below. Only here and there like a perpendicular line traced in chalk on a blackboard, an unkempt birch tree stood out white against the background.

The carriage clattered on the road, four pairs of hooves clop-clopped metallically and rhythmically, the peasant boy on the box mumbled something to himself or to the horses and smoked a smelly cigarette, the engineers were silent,

looking at the broad strip of the sky between the two screens of forest, and I went to sleep.

Somebody asked me if I had enjoyed my map. But I had not been asleep all the time. I had prepared a rough sketch of the region on a piece of paper.

We turned into a side road to the left, and were swallowed by shadows. The carriage bumped on roots, sand screeched under the wheels and was thrown against the iron rims with a dry rustle. Then, past the turning, rows of trees receded to the right and a sunlit clearing appeared, like a deep stage in a theatre. At a side, their fuselages hidden under the low branches of a hawthorn, there stood two hunch-backed RWD's and an "eleven," with her nose sticking out.

I went to look at the ground from which I was to start. It was quite even, though formerly it had been ploughed into the furrows of a corn-field, now almost invisible under the grass. At the opposite side, under the trees, there was a damp ditch full of forget-me-nots. The smell of mint hung in the air and scores of butterflies were fluttering about the hawthorns.

I turned back, frightening hosts of grasshoppers which jumped from under my feet and disappeared on the meadow.

I shook hands with the reserve pilots. They both knew me, but I could not remember their names. One was an elderly man, a second lieutenant, probably a pilot from the last war. I noticed that he walked with a limp. His uniform, with badly sewn pips, hung on him as if on a stick. His hair had not been cut for a long time, and he looked generally like a scare-crow.

The second man, a corporal, was a mere boy of eighteen or nineteen, probably freshly trained in some aero-club. He blushed like a girl and mumbled awkwardly that he was fortunate to fly under my command.

I shrugged my shoulders: "So you call this a flight!" which embarrassed him even more.

The second lieutenant was already in his machine and impatiently looking towards us. I called him back:

"Why all this hurry? Have you got a map?"

None of them had one and none knew the route, so I told the corporal to copy my sketch, then gave it to the second man and told him what the course was. I remained without a sketch, but I could remember it exactly.

We agreed that they would take off first, and I would then join them. They were to go by the compass, possibly low; I would fly somewhere between them, at a higher altitude.

"If anything happens, you dive very low, hedge hopping, and don't look for me, as you will be unable to help me anyway," I added.

The mechanic, an N.C.O., a sturdy fellow with a ruddy face covered with reddish stubble, was already turning the propeller of the lieutenant's machine. He was in a hurry. It was obvious that he wanted to finish his job, be done with it, and go somewhere else. He flicked over the airscrew with anger, it seemed, skillfully and quickly against compression and caught it before the next one could throw it away: one-two, one-two.

In the silence I could hear the strokes of the smooth wooden edge against his muscular hand, and the soft swish of the pistons. He braced himself in front of the engine, bent towards the right and bore on his outstretched arm

with short jerks of his whole torso, while the lieutenant struggled into the cockpit and strapped himself in.

"Contact!" he barked suddenly, not ceasing to turn.

"Contact," answered the lieutenant through his nose.

Petrol was dropping from under the cowling. The sergeant for the last time turned the airscrew and backed two steps:

"O.K.!"

"O.K.!" the pilot's face appeared from behind the windscreen, then disappeared.

The starter grated. One, two, three seconds. The propeller hesitated then jumped in a cloud of blue smoke; the engine roared.

The mechanic nodded: "Well—at last!" and turned towards the second machine.

The pink corporal from the aero-club sat high on his folded parachute, waiting patiently.

"Where have you had your training?" I asked.

He looked at me in astonishment and blushed.

"At Cracow, sir. But you . . . I . . . I mean . . . I saw you every day and . . ."

"Oh yes, I remember now," I lied. "Have you flown many hours in this campaign?"

He said that it had been only six hours, on the RWD.

"If only I had a machine-gun in her!" he sighed.

"A fat lot that would help you," I mumbled.

"But I would fly differently," he replied shyly. "I could fight then perhaps . . ."

"On a RWD—against Heinkels and Messerschmitts," I added ironically. "Do you think it is enough to have a machine-gun to shoot down a German? Do you think he will approach your gun sight and wait for you to fire?

You'd better take care not to be shot at by our own A.A. guns."

"O.K.," cried the sergeant.

"O.K." replied the boy.

The engine started. I stooped over the cockpit and said once more: "You wait for my sign."

He nodded. I took the mechanic by the arm and went with him towards my "eleven," next to which the engineers were standing. One of them gave me the parachute. The other—God knows why—dragged from a nearby pile two pine-logs which he put under the wheels.

"To test the engine!" he cried, seeing my gesture of protest.

The engine was already started. I had brakes and the logs were quite superfluous. I heated the engine slowly, then opened the throttle full.

Almost in the same moment the mechanic waved his hands and with his outstretched arm pointed to the sky. All three of them were shouting something which of course I could not hear. I turned my head with difficulty. Over the clearing, high up in the sunlight, three formations of nine silvery bombers were flying, scarcely visible against the milky blue sky.

I throttled down my engine and waited for them to pass, then I gave a sign to the two pilots to taxi for the start. They moved forward from under the bushes. The corporal stopped his machine beyond the road at the fringe of the clearing as I told him to do, but the lieutenant taxied round and round.

"What the hell!" I shouted to the engineers, pointing to him. "Stop him!"

One of them rushed forward. At the same time the cor-

poral, misinterpreting my gestures, gave full throttle and lifting the tail of his machine began to take off. Seeing this, the lieutenant also followed suit.

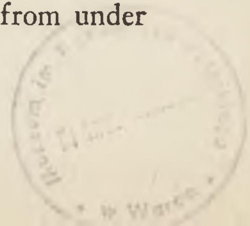
I had just time to think that I had those blessed logs under my wheels, immobilizing my machine and I had turned round to tell the mechanic to remove them, when I heard a whistling sound overhead.

I knew the sound well and I knew where it came from. Besides, if I had any doubts they would have been dispersed by the dry trill of the machine guns. So I did not look up to the sky from where a trio of Messerschmitts were diving, placing long bursts all around the clearing; I only searched with my eyes for the sergeant. But I could not see either him or any of the engineers.

I started from the cockpit forgetting to undo the straps. They held me tight for a second. I undid the buckle, tore from my shoulders the suspension straps of the parachute and struggling with the claw hooks on the hipbands, looked straight ahead.

The second lieutenant was pulling his machine just above the tree tops and turning right, probably invisible from above. The corporal was also airborne some 200 yards behind him, over the centre of the clearing. The first formation of Messerschmitts was gaining height after the attack and turning left. The second was just beginning to dive on the easy, defenceless prey. It roared in at full speed, spluttering machine gun fire until the grass shivered and sand spurted here and there.

The corporal flew on. They fired round him with amazing density and missed disgracefully, while I was at last out of the machine and tearing the pine-log from under the wheels.



I hoped the corporal would escape somehow, but when I was preparing to take off, not caring about the straps and leaving the parachute behind, the third formation finished him off. His machine suddenly broke from its course and fell nose foremost under the edge of the forest. I was taxiing across light grass-covered furrows, when flames gushed from the wrecked plane.

Meanwhile the first three Messerschmitts turned round and were heading towards me. I could see that they were aiming badly, for their shells were falling a good way in front of me, and some of the bursts were cracking in the tops of the pines, as if stitching together the trees on the other side of the clearing. Maybe they were aiming at the RWD which was burning there. At any rate, I was almost certain that I would be able to take off in spite of their fire.

I felt the machine tearing herself from the ground, but I added a boost in order to gain as much speed as possible before turning, knowing that I must take off suddenly and throw the machine straight under the Germans to prevent them from shooting me down at once. Also, if possible, I wanted to fire at them while turning.

The red trunks of the pines, glowing in the sun, were rushing to meet me. Another moment, another second and I would pull the stick in a round move and my machine would rear over these pines, to trace the arc of a loop in a half-roll, straight under the fuselage of the three diving Messerschmitts. Then I would pull the trigger—and—hit them.

I inhaled deeply—Now!

At the same moment—no, an infinitesimal fraction of a second before this—my engine went mad. Something

cracked in it, crunched, and suddenly it blew up in smithereens, shattering the glass screen in front of my face.

The machine pulled down, nearly hitting the ground with the wheels, then bent to the left, leaned heavily in the tail, became soft in the controls and pressed with her belly on the shallow space in front of me. The pine trunks barred her way, and she still had the full speed of the take off though she was almost limp.

I understood some time later that a squirt of German machine gun fire had blown up all my cylinders and cut my engine in two. Now I had no time to think. My instinct saved me, for only instinct can direct the muscles in a flash of lightning.

Right foot, left aileron!

I did this much quicker than I could think it. At any rate quickly enough to throw the machine in a flat skid, her left wing between the trees.

She crashed with her tail against a trunk just as the control stick escaped my grip; flapped the thick boughs with her wing and with her full weight fell into the open arms of an enormous fir which bent back with a cracking of broken branches.

Bleeding and covered with bruises I crept out of the cockpit on all fours. I felt sick. My heart beat somewhere in my throat. It seemed to me that I would not be able to get up.

But I did get up, or rather, I leaped to my feet and, crisscrossing from tree to tree, I ran into the forest like a hare. Not far above there cracked new bursts of machine gun fire.

The branches and needles of firs and pines descended in a thick rain. The shells knocked against the trunks as if

someone was hammering a skull with a stick; here and there they fell into the sand covered with needles; thin ribbons of smoke rose from the ground and the dry wood smouldered.

They lashed at the edge of the forest for a good ten minutes, while I, crouching behind a trunk, waited for them to sight me. Once or twice the shells drummed on the body of my luckless "eleven." Once or twice smoke and dust reached my nostrils, then all was quiet.

I lighted a cigarette and shaken, but already calm, went out on to the clearing. The RWD was smouldering over the body of the pink corporal. The birds were again chirruping and whistling. A large brimstone butterfly, like a tile from a many-coloured mosaic, sat on the forget-me-nots, folded its wings and moved its hairy legs. The grasshoppers were singing again. A green-brown frog looked at me questioningly with its topaz eyes. Suddenly a light wind sprang up, surrounding me with a sickly odour of burning flesh.

Brrr. . . . What a terrible smell!

I turned round and went towards my machine.

She was not very much damaged. Only the smashed engine vomited black oil, and petrol was dripping from pipes twisted like guts in a convulsion.

The Germans will not have her, I thought and lighted a match. The flames spread at once, devouring the old fir which saved my life by taking the shock.

I returned to the ditch on the clearing and picked some forget-me-nots. One bunch I threw into the "eleven" in flames; another on the corporal and his machine.

I shall not forget!

4. The Retreat

No, this was more than a retreat, it was a flight. We were supposed to concentrate in the region of Rawa Ruska in order to finish there the training of our cadets. But the German superiority in the air was complete. Actually, our Air Force had ceased to exist. It was to be reborn again, like a phoenix from its ashes, in Rumania where our Government had already escaped and where we had been heading for the last few days. The disruption was complete. Even in 1920 there was no retreat like this. Maybe it would be best to leave all this, to take a rifle and return to Warsaw?

We were spending the days in forests, the nights on the road. In the daytime I slept two or three hours. At night I fell asleep at the wheel of my car, raving as I slept. Herds of white elephants parting at the sight of the dimmed light of my car, caravans of pink camels, alabaster columns and palaces on both sides of the road were so distinct in these visions, so plastic, that it is hard for me to believe they existed only in my overstrained imagination.

The worst time was around midnight. Little Mary woke me up alternately with Zygmunt, but even they often fell asleep. I smoked cigarettes, sang and recited poems in order

to keep awake, but sometimes even this did not work. I had to stop and walk in the cool air for a few minutes.

At dawn the sleepiness vanished. We dived into a forest soon after sunrise at a place chosen beforehand from a map. We had to see to the food, speak to our men, cheer them up. We had to plan a further route and trace it for each of the eighteen lorries, as the columns very often disintegrated because of obstacles on the roads. We had to choose the next halting place; try to get in touch with some headquarters; try to establish liaison with the command which we had found at last and which was in front of us or, less often, behind us. Sometimes it was possible to shave, or even wash. This left two or three hours for sleep. At dusk we started again.

Fantastic news reached us. Bydgoszcz, Kutno and Cracow were back in our hands! A revolution in Berlin! Italy had declared war on Germany! An attempt to assassinate Hitler! Then everything proved to be untrue, and our hearts, warmed with hope for a while, cooled down in deeper gloom.

Only now did we learn about the fighting of our Air Force. Of past fighting, for there was nothing left now in which to fly; you cannot count the liaison and training aircraft, with an average speed of from 80 to 100 miles per hour, while the German planes made from 200 miles upwards. We learned of heroic, dogged fighting, bloody for both sides. This news came from squadrons and wings we met on our way, from single airmen, from the headquarters and command. With these scraps of news we reconstructed the picture of what had happened.

We had, including the escort squadrons (with obsolescent machines) some four hundred front line aircraft. The

Germans had at the beginning of hostilities about three thousand machines. It seems that we had lost in battle less than a hundred machines, for the rest has been spent either in the murderous effort of flights from emergency aerodromes, or destroyed in the airfields whenever it was impossible to save the slightly damaged machines from the advancing enemy. The Germans must have lost from seven to eight hundred machines, of which about half were shot down by our fighters, by our one hundred and sixty fighters which fought against eight hundred German fighters and against the whole might of the bomber force.

The first week in particular must have cost the Germans heavily. One of my colleagues told me about the two following fights of the Torun Squadron. On September 2nd, seven machines of the 142nd Flight met a formation of twenty-nine German bombers over Chelmno, escorted by six Messerschmitts of the famous Richthoffen Wing. Our fighters shot down seven bombers and two Messerschmitts; one of which was piloted by the German squadron leader. They themselves did not suffer any losses!

On September 4th the whole wing—seventeen machines—had a dog fight with thirty-nine bombers and shot down five of them, in the region of Gniewkowo-Alexandrow.

There are a great many such facts, and when we learn of them we feel easier in our hearts knowing it was not for nothing; that the Germans, too, had to pay a heavy price for this uneven fight against us.

Our bombers—Los and Karas, mostly the Karas type—also taught the Germans a lesson. The Bomber Force made over thirty operations, and that they were effective is proved by a message of the commander of the 4th German Panzer Division to the Commander of the 10th army, in-

tercepted by our forces, in which the German commander specifies the losses of his division in men and material, due to Polish bombing, as twenty-eight per cent.

Our colleagues flew their 220 H.P. machines like devils to save the cracking liaison services, to deliver orders, to reconnoitre. They flew with one machine gun as their sole armament! What's more, even civil aviation pilots and reservists flew the RWD.8's, with no armament at all!

And now. . . . Now the sky purred in the daytime. At night the roads were alive. In the daytime the earth groaned from the explosions of German bombs and the air was rent by machine gun fire. And at night enormous obstructions of carts, cars and people cluttered the roads.

This was war. In spite of this, nature made an effort to create a second beautiful spring, and in the warmth of the September sun violets bloomed again in forest clearings. They blossomed but did not smell.

"What do you expect?" said Zygmunt. "These are wartime violets."

Near Dubno I "revolted." Zygmunt and two sergeants joined the mutiny with me. We decided to form a detachment on foot and return to Warsaw where fighting was still in progress.

In the afternoon we went out into the road to recruit some men. Hundreds of men who were prepared to obey anybody's orders and wanted to fight were heading south. But we enlisted in "our army" only those who had guns and ammunition. Those who had not were told to find them first.

In two hours we had sixty soldiers; before night, over two hundred. But I was not destined to command this wonderful company, which, I am certain, would have

fought like a Spartan legion. When I was preparing to march at its head towards Dubno where a gallant artillery colonel was said to be organizing a centre of resistance, our leader and chief, Colonel W. suddenly appeared. He told us that we were to go to Rumania and from there attack the Germans at once. There were allegedly over fifteen hundred new British aircraft waiting for us. Some time later we also learned that the road to Warsaw had been cut anyway by the Bolshevik armies.

However, I resisted the order to demobilise my company and sent it to Dubno to join the artillery colonel who was willing to fight in spite of the Bolsheviks and of the Rumanian perspectives. Stealthily, I gave them a light lorry with ammunition, four machine guns, some tinned food and petrol. And so they went.

"You should have revolted at Rososza," said Zygmunt. "You would be a hero already, but now . . ."

"But now you had better find out about the route from Bucharest to Warsaw," I replied dryly.

But Zygmunt was doubtfully shaking his head.

"So you really believe in it?" he asked seriously and sadly.

What else can I say about this road to the promised land? That there I lost one of my faithful friends—my dog, who remained somewhere in a bus full of officers' luggage? That there one night on the highway we buried one of our drivers crushed under the wheels while removing an obstacle? That we were passed on the road by whole columns of magnificent military staff cars which, apart from the wives and secretaries of the dignitaries, carried carpets and even potted plants, while there was not room enough for wounded soldiers. That there we strayed in impassable

lanes trying to avoid the legendary German tanks which were supposed to cut our way. That there at last, together with Zygmunt and Pryszczyk, armed with a machine gun, we decided to fight our way through the enemy armour, and at the head of our thinning column we rushed into Kossow decorated with banners and portraits of Lenin.

But this is of no importance now, for here before us is the frontier bridge and on it two flags—the Polish and the Rumanian.

This is the end. The end of a chapter. Something which will end a stage in our lives, in this war,—in history perhaps.

Now all this has been left behind but somehow it still keeps alive inside me and I have the feeling that it will stay there forever.

We stood on a high bank of the river and looked at the bridge awaiting our turn. The armed forces marched and marched; on foot, in motor vehicles, on carts. New, magnificent tanks which had not seen fire; A.A. guns; motorcyclists with machine guns; searchlight companies; sappers with pontoons.

The soldiers had tears in their eyes. Crossing the bridge they looked back just like the wretched people escaping from burning Ryki. Some of them secretly kissed the edge of the Polish flag fluttering in the wind.

We started. Pryszczyk was driving the car absent-mindedly. His roguish, perky face, full of freckles and usually impudently smiling, was now pale as a sheet.

We moved slowly past the flags. I felt a lump in my throat. We did not look at each other, but at the same moment our eyes fell on the white-and-red piece of cloth

and stuck to it as if spellbound; our heads turned to the right.

It's over.

Then we looked at each other; Little Mary, Zygmunt, myself and Pryszczyk.

"Damn!" sighed the latter. "So we aren't in Poland any more."

We were silent. I think an energetic wiping of my nose saved me from tears.

Black thoughts assailed me although the gloomy reality was as yet unreal. The facts collected during all these days did not settle in my consciousness, but touched it only on the surface. The impressions were like those you have when reading a strange, oppressive novel or seeing a tragedy in a theatre. I observed what was going on without taking part in it.

Only the most intimate, private worries about my nearest and most loved ones who had remained far away, separated from me by the waves of war, submerged under it, maybe drowning without help in its wash—only thoughts about them, desperate and painful, burned in my brain.

At the frontier we stopped at the side of the road to let the column pass. Our three light machine guns, thrown on a heap in the ditch dryly clattered with their triggers. I did not hand over my pistol.

Then the four of us got out of the car and looked about. Soldiers advanced with hanging heads, in gloomy silence passing the Rumanians with their hands outstretched to receive arms. With a flourish they threw in their rifles and bayonets and walked on. I can still hear the clatter of the arms.

Pryszczyk stood at my side with hanging jaw and idle

hands, doubtful and resigned. Suddenly he shivered. A Polish officer of a motorised corps came on a motorcycle to the spot where we were standing, alighted, approached the group of Rumanian military men and began to talk to them. As the first lorry arrived they started to unload the machine guns, brand new, unused, their thin layer of grease gleaming in the sunshine.

Just then something strange happened to Pryszczyk. A stifled cry started in his throat, his face twisted and tears fell from his eyes. He leaped forward, tore from the soldiers the first machine gun he could get hold of and threw it into the side-car of the motorcycle.

"I will not give it to this Rumanian bastard! I will not! Our Polish guns! No! No!" he cried spasmodically.

He jumped on to the motorcycle, kicked the starter and rapidly turned towards the frontier bridge, before anyone could collect his thoughts. He raised a cloud of dust, driving full speed back to Poland!

After a quarter of an hour he returned on foot, in the company of two military policemen, very ashamed at his outburst. He walked in silence.

I put my hand on his arm. He looked at me out of reddened eyes.

"So this means—everything's over, sir?" he asked in a dull voice.

"You'd better come into the car, Pryszczyk," I answered. "We will talk later. Now we must start."

He was docile as a child when he took the wheel. We started.

On the way he quieted down and began to criticize, "What kind of roads have they got in Rumania! They put down some gravel without rolling it and are pleased

with themselves. Huts of clay, and I've heard it said they eat only maize. Oh, look at these telegraph poles, sir! Not one is straight."

The road was bad indeed, and the telegraph poles crooked, rotten and rickety.

"They call their money 'lei,' " he went on bitterly, talking half to himself and half to me. "But I hear that for one Polish zloty you could get a whole bag of these 'lei' before the war. Do you call this money! And how they talk? Whoever invented such a language? With them good morning is 'Sana tate.' How is one to live in such a country?"

We drove on. Hordes of children, dirty, swarthy gypsies, welcomed us in every village, crowding in front of the huts, crying their "sanatate." Pryszczyk invariably answered with a grunt; the wheels of our car tore the loose gravel off the road, the crooked posts greeted us with curtseys of their wires reaching almost to the ground. . . .

Suddenly a dog barked, and this unexpectedly moved Pryszczyk:

"Lord!" he cried. "Goodness gracious, sir: the dog is barking in Polish!"

5. Pryszczyk Escapes

From between the hills of Starozhenec, Radauti and Succava, we passed Filticeni, entered the valley of the Rivers Seret and Moldova, and later the steppe which spread as far as the eye can reach on both sides of the river. Enormous, impenetrable fields of golden maize, meadows stretching from one end of the horizon to another, and wilderness, nothing but wilderness—only the derricks of wells in open fields looking at the sky full of mellow sunlight; only somewhere at the cross-roads a simple shrine—Our Lord on a worn cross; only age-old mounds, covered with hawthorns, remembering the times when these were the Wild Fields, trodden by Tartar invasions. Grass dry from the heat, earth cracked and scorched, clouds of dust along the road following each car. Here and there, far away, herds of cattle wander forlorn in the wilderness. It is vast country, extensive, spreading, not yet under the yoke of cultivation, not yet disciplined by fences, paths, boundary mounds; a country which, you can feel it at once, is ancient; a country nostalgic, wide, patiently gazing at the sky, knowing nothing of the world, golden from the sun and the ripe maize, flaxen from the pastures dry in summer, but belted by the juicy greenness and blueness of the Seret as by a crinkled ribbon.

Near the town of Roman we forded the River Moldova, almost dry now, the River Bystrica near Bacau and a few more rivulets on the way to Focsani. This is a much better way of crossing rivers than passing over bridges, mostly in bad repair, but I could not imagine what it would be like to travel here when the rivers are flooded.

At Focsani we were stopped by the Rumanian military authorities who told us that columns of fifty cars each were to be formed here and, probably under escort, directed via Braila to Tulca. I did not like this at all. Neither did Zygmunt. Pryszczyk did not even attempt to express his feelings.

We got out of the car in order to learn something and stretch our legs, while Little Mary with our second driver remained on guard. The situation clearly looked bad—the prospect of an internment camp with huts and barbed wire instead of the promised British aircraft—so we made a somewhat more detailed inquiry and decided that we would not go behind barbed wire. There were many more like us and all of them wanted to get through to Bucharest. There we had our Legation and military attaché. From there it would be easier to escape to France, to fight on. But here . . . No! Decidedly we would not stay here any longer than necessary.

An hour later we joined Little Mary and told him our plan. We wanted to buy civilian clothes and, singly or in twos, steal through to the Rumanian capital as best we could. But Little Mary could not decide to join us. He had some Treasury money, men under his command, motor-cars.

"Besides," he said, "you will be caught by the military police before you make a step."

"Why," said Pryszczyk contemptuously, "Rumanian military police?"

So we parted with Little Mary who handed us our pay in new, rustling notes and we started to look for clothes.

Never before in my life did I wear such rags. We looked like a trio of crooks. In a too-short and shiny lounge-suit and a sports cap that was too big, I looked like a deserter; Zygmunt, in tweeds with a tomato-coloured check, like a white-slave trader; and Pryszczyk, like a petty thief in a dinner jacket and green knickerbockers.

Zygmunt and I decided to take the first bus to Ramnicul Sarat and there change to a train. At Buzau we would change again to the Bucharest electric train but not to go to the capital itself where the train was probably closely searched. Another change to a bus at Ploesti should bring us to the centre of the capital.

We politely asked Pryszczyk what his plans were, but Pryszczyk did not know yet how he was going to travel. He was confident that he could manage.

"I have money," he said, "although these Rumanian blackguards only give twenty lei for one zloty and shamelessly make money out of us poor unfortunates. And money is the main thing in this country, for every Rumanian stretches out his hand looking for a bribe. Well, our policemen were certainly a better sort than these military police of theirs who were supposed to arrest us."

So we said goodbye to Pryszczyk for he wanted "to have a word with a chum and persuade him to escape." We warned him not to loiter at the bus stop or on the station and went to a cafe for a cup of Turkish coffee.

But when we passed the bus station some time later, there was Pryszczyk talking excitedly with two conduc-

tors. I don't know what language they were speaking, for Pryszczyk could swear in Russian, he had learned from us to say "parley voo fransay" and in Rumanian he knew "sanatate" and perhaps two or three more words which he pronounced with a Warsaw accent. The two officials in sheepskin hats and brown coats looked at him with respect and addressed him as "domno vostra"—sir. He looked as important as Voyvod Michael on his portrait in the cafe and spoke very loudly, every now and then spitting through his teeth, an accomplishment which evoked the admiration of a crowd of people standing around.

I called him aside and gave him a short sermon. What kind of meeting did he think he was addressing? Did he want to expose all of us to danger? And if he wanted to go by bus, why did he not tell us about it before?

Pryszczyk fidgeted uncomfortably, blew his nose and looked shiftily at his conductors.

"By bus? Nothing of the kind, sir."

"So what the hell are you doing here?"

"I, sir? I'm here only for a little information, sir. I am exploring the ground, sir."

Pryszczyk promised to be more careful, and disappeared among the crowd, but when the bus arrived, he was the first passenger who got in. He winked to show that he saw us, although in obedience to my orders he did not know us, and quite serenely took a seat by the window.

It appeared that he already had a ticket, which a military policeman had bought for him, that he knew everything much better than we did, and that he was going to Ramnicul Sarat along with us.

We screened ourselves with a Rumanian paper in order to avoid seeing him, but he made such a fuss and was so

noisy that we were covered with goose flesh. First of all —the blasted gentleman—he insisted on taking a suitcase from a young girl to place it on the rack and hit the conductor with it. Then he began to give the glad eye to his neighbour, a sturdy black-eyed Rumanian woman. Her husband, a man as big and forbidding as Taras Bulba, intervened, and a fight seemed imminent. When he addressed a deaf old farmer with "parley voo francey," he caused a real sensation. All the passengers began to ask each other who this very interesting foreign tourist might be.

In spite of this we reached Ramnicul without any trouble. Pryszczyk at once disappeared from our sight, probably with the just fear that I would tell him off sharply for his performance, and we, having bought first class tickets to Buzau, went to look for a restaurant.

We found one near the station, ordered a bottle of wine and were beginning to study the intricacies of the Rumanian menu when the door opened with a bang and who should enter but Pryszczyk. He was loaded with parcels, among them a bunch of grapes wrapped in a newspaper, and as he pushed between the tables he ate the grapes, spitting the skins to left and right. He did not see us, for we sat in a corner, in the shade of an artificial palmtree; he marched down half the length of the room, clumping on the floor with his heavy army boots, and finally sat at one of the tables in the centre.

An elderly gentleman in spectacles sitting near by with his wife and daughter, looked at him from behind his glasses; two officers who had been talking animatedly were silent; a fat man engrossed in his newspaper stopped his reading. Pryszczyk looked at them all calmly, made a pyramid of his parcels in the middle of the table, turned

the bill of fare from one side to the other, beckoned to the waiter, shrugged and nodded.

"SSt, hullo, waiter, povtio, please."

However, as the waiter was in no apparent hurry to serve him—he had already started to serve us—Pryszczyk caught him by the flap of his white coat. Paying no attention to his flow of Rumanian protests, he brought the waiter to the table where the elderly couple sat.

"Bring me this, you luckless Rumanian slave," he said with a frankly Warsaw accent, pointing with his dirty finger to a plateful of hot roast mutton which the matron was eating. "Compreney? Parley Francey? Give me the same and be quick about it."

We were dumbfounded, but the waiter understood. The matron looked at Pryszczyk with a charming smile, and her seventeen-year-old daughter, made up like a doll, after the Rumanian fashion, babbled something in quite decent French.

Pryszczyk frowned terribly in an effort to answer and just then he saw us. He shut his eyes, blinked, and suddenly, straightening himself, stood to attention facing us, then clicked his heels in military style so that the whole room resounded.

Zygmunt nearly fainted. I hid behind a newspaper, and the eyes of everyone in the room turned toward us. We somehow managed to ignore the sudden interest of the patrons and began a difficult conversation with the waiter. Alas, we did not know much more Rumanian than Pryszczyk, so we resorted to his method of ordering our lunch.

Meanwhile he had decided to sit at the table of the babbling young girl and after a while he felt as confident as if he were at home. He ordered wine, discoursed mostly

with eloquent gestures, and had his first lesson in conversation. When we left the restaurant, the elderly bespectacled gentleman was paying for Pryszczyk's lunch!

We went to the station and took our seats in a first class compartment. Only two seats were occupied by a general and a young man who looked at us indifferently and took no notice of our strange appearance. The general smoked a cigar and read; the young man made notes or checked figures on a business letter.

The train was starting when the door of our compartment opened and there stood Pryszczyk with all his parcels. He saw us, blushed, turned around and disappeared. We breathed more freely hoping that he would go by bus to Bucharest.

However, when we alighted at Buzau, all the occupants of the neighbouring second class compartment got out, with Pryszczyk at their head. He had fewer parcels and was seen off rather noisily by a hilarious crowd that had been drinking something out of bottles. "Long live Poland" they cried, or something of the sort, and patted Pryszczyk on the back.

Luckily the electric train was already in the station. We changed as fast as we could to avoid him and got into a very crowded compartment. Nevertheless Pryszczyk followed us closely and of course, he had to take the last free seat next to me. He now behaved as if he did not know us. He fidgeted nervously and did not talk, but gave us piercing looks.

I felt that something was worrying him but pretended not to notice. At last he covered his mouth with his hand and, grimacing towards me, cautiously asked: "How much is the fare to Bucharest, sir?"

"Five hundred lei," I answered, not looking at him.

He blinked, frowned and hissed almost as if scalded.

"Haven't you got a ticket?" I asked.

He wanted to start his familiar "But why, sir . . . ," thought better of it, sighed heavily and shook his head.

"You'd better tell the conductor about this, for you will have to pay a fine."

This made him indignant. He would have to pay a fine? To the Rumanians? Oh, no! Never! Not he!

"Nothing of the sort, sir. I will manage somehow."

This assurance sounded disquieting.

"You manage as you like. But remember that neither Captain Wasilewski nor I knows you or has anything to do with you. And now keep quiet. Comprenez?"

His face lit when he heard this French word. He winked, blinked, coughed, sat more comfortably in his seat, nudging me in the ribs as if to say that we would make fools of the Rumanians together and have a good laugh.

He now looked over at a newspaper his neighbour on the right was reading, produced a broken mirror from his pocket, dusted it with his handkerchief, gazed into it, smoothed his hair, put right the knot of his red tie and began to make eyes at a lady who was sitting opposite him, a smart lady in an excellently cut tailor-made suit. As all his endeavours remained unnoticed he decided to fortify himself. He got up and—to show that he had very good manners—took his neighbour's paper which he spread on the seat before putting his foot on it to reach for the remainder of his provisions. He produced half a dozen chocolate bars, broke one, opened his mouth very wide showing his bad yellow teeth, and began to eat, smacking his lips sonorously.

This at last drew the attention of the lady opposite. She looked at him stealthily and faintly smiled. Pryszczyk did look very funny; his stiff, brilliantined hair was bobbing up and down above his wrinkled forehead; his brows, nose, ears, jaws and Adam's apple—everything was in constant movement, and an expression of beatitude covered his freckled face. He swallowed loudly, said "pardon" and began to unpack the second slab. He did this very elegantly, holding it at a considerable distance with two fingers of the left hand, spreading the remaining three as widely as he could. With his right hand he took off the tinfoil, kneaded it into a ball and threw it up towards the ceiling. The ball fell on Zygmunt's hat. Pryszczyk bowed towards him, said again "pardon" and with a round and expressive gesture offered the chocolate to the lady, holding it just before her nose.

The lady lied in French that she did not like chocolate and excused herself as well she could, very embarrassed. But she did not know with what kind of gentleman she had to cope. Pryszczyk set his jaws and insisted.

"Povtic!—please," he said kindly but firmly and he won.

Not content with this triumph, he offered chocolate to his neighbour at the right, to both neighbours of the nice lady, and lastly to Zygmunt and myself.

We gnashed our teeth, our eyes flashing fire, but we did not want to refuse lest he unmask us.

Then the conductor came, old, gaunt, serious, apparently not appreciating jokes. He punched our tickets as if he were an automaton, without a trace of politeness. Pryszczyk nervously scratched himself. He began to dive into the pockets of his incredible suit, search under the seat, on the rack, among the parcels and again in his pockets.

He could not find a ticket, of course. And the conductor waited, threatening, gaunt and unmoved.

The whole compartment took part in the search. Both Zygmunt and I, not wishing to appear unhelpful, also searched, though fuming with rage at having to take part in this farce. The conductor towered over us like a public prosecutor, and still Pryszczyk's ticket could not be found.

The situation became truly dramatic, however, when the dried up railway official asked something in Rumanian in a wooden and chirping voice which none of the three of us could understand. Pryszczyk stared at him, blushed, mumbled under his nose something which sounded like "go to hell" and looked round in desperation, finally setting his eyes on us.

Then something very strange happened: all the Rumanians began to talk at once and a terrible row started. The lady in the tailor-made took the conductor by the golden button of his coat and said something rapidly like a machine gun; the neighbour on the right swore—as far I could understand—that he saw this "domnul's" ticket with his very eyes; the woman sitting at the window confirmed this hotly; the gentleman in the derby hat gesticulated like an actor and a schoolboy squeaked as if he were being scorched.

All this did not help and the conductor led off Pryszczyk with his parcels to the guard's compartment, to pay a fine of four times the price of the ticket. I felt sorry for him and this feeling was apparently shared by our companions for they talked for a long time indignant over this injustice to a nice foreigner. However, Pryszczyk did not return.

The train stopped at the station of Mizil where no one

alighted except a railway controller in a gold-braided uniform. I looked at him through the window; he ran towards the refreshment room and returned with six bottles of beer. Some ten new passengers got in, but I could not see our Pryszczyk.

The train started. The conductor was not to be seen.

Zygmunt began to think that maybe a robbery and murder had been perpetrated on our Gulliver in the guard's compartment. We decided to investigate and with difficulty pushed toward the front of the train.

Zygmunt went stealthily and on tip-toes towards the glass door of the guard's compartment. Like Sherlock Holmes in person he showed me traces of dirty fingers on a brass knob, a thick layer of dust on the floor and a piece of newspaper in a corner of the corridor. He shook his head and frowned.

"This looks mysterious," he declared at last.

We tried to look into the compartment but there was a curtain on the window. Through a chink we could see, swaying rhythmically on a hanger, a conductor's jacket with gold buttons and the shiny dinner jacket belonging to Pryszczyk.

"Well, well, well," whispered Zygmunt. "Who would have thought . . ."

"What's happened?" I asked, very curious.

But Zygmunt was silent, keeping his conclusions and deductions to himself. I did not dare to interrupt him. I finished my cigarette and was just opening the window to throw out the stub when the train ran on to the first points of the junction at Ploesti. It changed from one track to another, left, right, right again, and again left, until I was thrown against the wall. My cigarette-holder fell from my

hand. I stooped to pick it up when suddenly—oh, horror! —I saw a stream of blood flowing from under the closed door of the compartment.

"Look!" I pulled Zygmunt by his tomato-checked sleeve. "What is this?"

"Beer," he answered with perfect indifference. "Let's go."

Seeing his calmness, I cooled down, though I did not quite know what to think. But the train was just slowing down. It stopped.

"Ploesti!" somebody was shouting behind the window.

We got out. Behind us the controller jumped out, ran to the refreshment room, and again returned with six beer bottles. His pace was quick but somewhat erratic.

I looked around at the coach. In the window of the guard's compartment there stood Pryszczyk in a friendly embrace with the conductor. He was coatless and his red tie was flowing like a flag. Each of them held a bottle of beer in his free hand.

I turned quickly. We went to look at the timetable of the buses. The next one would leave in an hour. It would arrive at Bucharest in about three hours.

"And Pryszczyk will be there in three quarters of an hour," sighed Zygmunt.

"But he will pay a fine of 2,000 lei and will be put in prison on top of that," I added complacently.

"I am sure he has paid already for six bottles of beer," answered Zygmunt sadly. "The other six were paid for by the conductor. There is no question of a fine or of paying for his fare. And the two conductors will take good care of him, too. There's nothing we can do about it. Let's have some coffee."

6. The Camp in Dobrudja

WE WERE COMPELLED to listen to a few unpleasant words from our military attaché on account of our excess of initiative and were told to return to Tulca and busy ourselves with the sending out of our men to France; first of all of the officers, flying personnel and the younger specialised mechanics. We ourselves were to go later.

We looked at each other in gloom and with darkened faces went first to have a drink and then to the station to comply with our orders.

At Tulca, a small town on the Danube in Dobrudja, we met with a typically Rumanian muddle. There was nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep, orders were contradicting and cancelling each other, nobody took care of the men. It was chaos. We feared we wouldn't be able to control the mass of several thousand airmen gathered there.

One day, we were told to start repairs on the ruined Rumanian barracks in which they said we were going to stay, but the next day, they said we were going to be transferred to Severin. The third day, we were to be concentrated in Transylvania; the fourth day, the officers were to be separated from the men; the fifth, the order was to stay put.

The same story all over was repeated with regard to food

supplies; the same with registration of motor-cars, with our pay, with drawing up lists, with the division of duties between the Polish and Rumanian military and police authorities.

The supreme local ruler, the general commanding the corps, made a helpless gesture in reply to all our complaints and reports.

"Gentlemen," he said with an engaging smile. "With us, it has always been like this, and so always will be. We're used to this state of affairs, Mother Rumania somehow has existed in the midst of this muddle since its very beginnings, and twenty million Rumanians manage to live in it. Do you suppose that because of the arrival of twenty thousand Poles we will suddenly change our system for a better one?"

It was hardly logical to expect that. So when finally we had introduced a measure of order in the barracks; when we had organised our men, the supply of foodstuffs, field-kitchens etc.; when in a word we had prepared ourselves to spend the winter at Tulca, a sudden order to pack four thousand men into thirty coaches within less than an hour and to depart for a new place of hibernation, did not surprise us at all. It was obvious from the very beginning that the order would have to be changed, for not more than twelve hundred men with their equipment can be squeezed into thirty coaches. It was obvious that the coaches would not arrive in time and that the whole transport would have to wait at least ten hours at the station before starting. In practice it also turned out that the coaches were sent only on the next day, that there were seven of them altogether and that the Rumanian authorities did not know where to take us.

Only on the third evening did I receive a new order; to take my detachment, consisting for the most part of officers-cadets and numbering some three hundred men, plus five officers, to a village called Sarighiol near the Bulgarian frontier where we would be billetted.

Cautiously I took from the barracks whatever could be taken; a field kitchen, some foodstuffs, the matting on which my men slept and—after a terrible row with the Rumanian authorities—a lorry which I sent ahead with warrant officers, not supposing for a moment that the Rumanians would prepare billets for us in blessed Sarighiol.

We travelled by train the whole night, then we marched twelve miles from the railway station, Hamangea, along a horrible road, preceded by a column of twelve peasant carts on which our sick men and luggage were loaded.

The weather was lovely, the day—October 13th—almost hot. We passed villages drowning in mud; broken, sunken bridges and foot-bridges, empty corn-fields and miserable, badly tended vineyards, or yet unharvested fields of maize. The countryside was sad. There were practically no trees; it was neglected, sparsely populated, poor, though the rich soil, of which a large part lay fallow, could have provided considerable food. The land, almost untouched by the plough, never fertilized, bore on the whole much more than the lazy efforts of the farmers deserved.

The huts—pleasant, clean and harmonious, made of whitewashed clay, stood, as everywhere in Dobrudja, between uneven ramshackle walls of stone, among fences made of half rotten reeds, and looked at us through windows which seemed black, for they were devoid of panes. They were surrounded by barns, pig-sties and sheds, built

anyhow, half-ruined, with roofs full of holes, with almost transparent walls, crooked and decrepit.

The cook-houses, half sunken into the ground, looked even worse. They were built close to the cow-shed or pigsty, windows screened with maize straw or pieces of newspaper, and were the real home of the farmer and his numerous family.

It is impossible to imagine the dirt and stench in these hovels. These dwellings consist of a narrow foreroom the whole floor-space of which is occupied by a kitchen range of clay with an outlet to the chimney. Here in winter, burns a fire of dried sheep's dung. Stacks of dung are kept next to the shed. A small door leads to a room at a slightly lower level. The room is so low that, when standing, your head touches the ceiling. Small windows let in some light, enough to see the dirty clay floor and a sort of bench along the wall next to the kitchen range. This bench, covered with a thin matting of reeds, serves as common bed, table, couch—in a word it is the entire furniture of the room. There the whole family sits, eats or sleeps.

The white house which stands nearby, always with its side to the street and its front towards the courtyard, usually has three rooms and an attractive verandah. It is uninhabited and used only during great family festivals or for the reception of guests. The earthen floors are covered with matting, the walls, hung with "kilims" of wildly contrasting and bright colours; there are limping benches under the walls, a rickety table in the middle and sometimes, but rather seldom, in one corner a large clay oven heated from the outside. The house is relatively clean, the windows are large, and sometimes there are whole panes in them.

Sarighiol is like all the other villages in Dobrudja. Its inhabitants are mostly Bulgarians. The Rumanian "majority" consists of the orthodox priest, the teacher and the policeman. In addition to them there are a grocer who is German and two or three Russian families.

Our billets were not prepared, and the officer and three officer-cadets whom I had sent ahead had interviewed the "primar" and policeman in vain because neither of these dignitaries knew anything about our impending arrival.

The Bulgarians, wild-looking bearded fellows in sheepskin hats, defended the entrance to their huts almost with knives between their teeth, clearly displeased with our invasion. Under the protection of the bayonets of the military police I introduced my men into every hut.

The authorities assigned the duty of guarding us to Colonel Grossu, a rather stupid Rumanian who barely knew how to read or write. He was a short, crooked little man with a wall-eye and was always in his cups, smelling of sweat and of home-made wine. He pretended to speak French but I am sure that any wild Negro from the Sudan could speak the language better.

After a few days spent in Sarighiol I learned why the Bulgarian population of this village had received us so halfheartedly; Grossu's batman, a ragged, dirty, barefooted soldier, brought daily to his quarters a basketful of eggs, chickens, grapes, cheese and all kinds of food-stuffs, arbitrarily confiscated from the peasants. The sergeant of the military police and his subordinates, too, fed themselves in the same way. Tribute in kind—cigarettes, petrol, butter and coffee—was paid by the small shopkeepers also, and the owner of the tiny distillery paid it in spirits. It was generally believed that the Poles would demand similar conces-

sions for themselves, which would have spelled disaster for the village. We, of course, paid in cash for everything. We organised a supply of food-stuffs from Rumanian military stores in the county town of Babadag and we had our own kitchen.

The results of this conduct were soon apparent. Our mechanics, out of boredom, started to repair the harrows, ploughs, sewing machines and all the implements belonging to their landlords. Three members of the brigade, with a cadet who was a civil engineer and specialist in aircraft construction, put the distillery in working order. The boys bought some glass and made panes for all the windows in their billets. We re-opened the Turkish bath which had been out of order for many years. In the sick bay, our doctor organised an out-patient department. Then our men began to go out into the fields, and as every Pole did as much work as four lazy Bulgarians—they were fed in gratitude and the atmosphere became more pleasant for us from day to day.

The climax of this change for the good was the "invention" of the flail. This agricultural implement, unknown in these parts, was made by a private and a friend of his, and their "cleverness" brought fame to the name of Poland throughout the whole of Dobrudja.

The private, the son of a farmer from the region of Sochaczew, was contemptuous of the "shepherds," as he called the Bulgarians because of their herds of sheep. He laughed at their ignorance of farming, at their laziness and negligence. He told them that in the region of Lowicz, mice were bigger than the sheep in Sarighiol and that the Bulgarian cows were about as big as goats in Sochaczew. Polish dogs, he said, got better food than a man here; our

sparrows were as big as their chickens and their horses no larger than Polish donkeys. What's more, Rumanian horses were "dirty as pigs." This soldier did no work at all, just loitered on the farm, spitting contemptuously, and giving his landlords their fill of sarcasm. Only the miserable Bulgarian dogs found grace in his eyes. With bread and the remains of his rations from the common kitchen he fed the luckless mongrels which had been living on raw maize, and not very much of that. After a short time they ceased to bark at us, began to snarl at the Bulgarians and refused to accompany the sheep to the pastures.

Then threshing time arrived. The peasants spread the corn on the earthen threshing floor and drove oxen and cows over it to make them shell the corn with their hooves. Our George shook his head in indignation.

"People, what on earth are you doing?"

They told him they were threshing.

He spat and went away, refusing to look at this kind of threshing.

In three quarters of an hour he returned with his friend, a native of Poznan, carrying freshly cut whittled flails, neatly bound with straps which they had cut from their knapsacks.

"We'll show you how to thresh," he declared angrily.

The Bulgarians laughed at him. What? Thresh corn with a stick? They wouldn't listen to him. They thought he was scoffing, as usual.

He scolded them as well he could, half in Russian, and forced them to make a trial. With the help of the man from Poznan he offered to thresh faster than the oxen and get more grain. They could compare the results.

The Bulgarians agreed and called their neighbours to watch the contest.

The oxen trotted lazily here and there, and George smoked a cigarette; he was in no hurry. The farmers nudged each other, whispering hints of Polish witchcraft. George kept them in suspense for a quarter of an hour, then winked to his colleague.

They each spread a tent sheet on the threshing floor, then they laid down three sheaves, stood facing each other, spat on their hands and began to thresh. The flails whizzed above their heads, spinning around the straps of leather. The echo made the windows shake.

When they finished the oxen were not half through their job.

"This is what I call straw," said George. "This is straw, and not the dust and chaff you get."

And actually, the straw, though a little torn, was long and not so broken as after the Bulgarian threshing.

"And here is the grain," added the man from Poznan. "Some grain, eh? And about three times as much as you get, what?"

The Bulgarians were at first stupefied, then they started a wild row, as if the village were on fire. Neither Fulton, nor the Wright brothers, nor even Edison enjoyed such a triumph as our boys from Sochaczew and Poznan.

The same day a real Polish flail factory was started at Sarighio. First George and his partner made them, then five men, then twenty. Soon our Polish boys became instructors in threshing. Sarighiol spent its days threshing, and at night there were dances in front of the inn, and the Bulgarian young men looked on sadly as their girls danced

with the Polish soldiers to the Polish tunes which had been introduced in the Dobrudja simultaneously with the flails.

The next day the news of the flails spread through the whole region, through Casimca, Ramnic, Slava Russa and whatever the ungodly places are called. From afar Rumanians and Bulgarians came to stare at the wonder and to learn how to thresh the Polish way. I even received deputations asking me to assign soldiers for billets.

At last Grossu, alarmed by our friendly relations with the Bulgarians, wrote a report to Babadag, cautiously praising our activities. Then he called on me and drank a bottle of my rum in token of his sympathy for Poland, which he expressed in an unintelligible language that was supposed to be the tongue of Racine and Balzac.

Much against my wish I had to learn a few Rumanian expressions in order to converse with him. He was not altogether a bad fellow, our Grossu, and for the sum of five hundred lei you could persuade him to do things which would have been punished by prison or degradation in any decent army. But most frequently no financial contribution on my part—nothing but his utter stupidity made him ignore the fact that I was regularly sending out most of my officer-cadets to France via Bucharest.

After we had organised liaison with Babadag where our command under Colonel Liebig, supervised the distribution of civilian clothing and passports, the camp dwindled quickly and without major difficulties. Eventually the Rumanian authorities noticed that the Poles were melting away, and they sent a great number of military policemen to all our camps, to the main roads, the railway stations, the various vital junctions of the escape route. One day the

chief of the military police, Colonel Zoicaro, himself, arrived at Babadag.

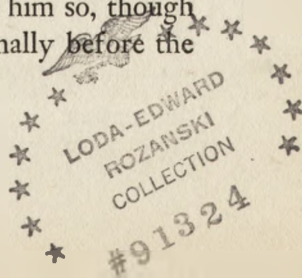
On leaving Tulca, I had heard of Zoicaro that—unlike his predecessor—he was able to introduce some order into the undisciplined ranks of the mixed and disorganised units stationed in our garrison. His severity and brutality aroused an instinctive dislike among us. Later on this dislike degenerated into rumours of Zoicaro's sadistic behaviour.

And indeed, Zoicaro did habitually fall into fits of anger with or without opportunity, whenever he talked to a Pole. In the presence of Colonel Liebig he punched a Rumanian military policeman on the nose for a minor blunder, and beat a peasant on the road because he was slow to drive aside before the Colonel's speeding car. He slapped his aide de camp and more than once hit his batmen so hard that their noses bled. In a word, he was a type that had much in common with the officers of the Czarist Russian army.

Our Grossu trembled like a leaf before him, the sergeant of the military police went pale at the mention of his name, and Zygmunt gnashed his teeth, cursed in English, Italian and three other unfamiliar languages and promised that he would shoot him at the first opportunity if Zoicaro dared to come near our camp.

However, Zoicaro did arrive.

Grossu became completely stupid and was nearly mad from excess of official zeal; the only gendarme sobered instantly though he had been drinking in the inn from the early morning; and Zygmunt, learning about the inspection, disappeared. It was impossible to find him so, though I was ill at the time, I had to appear personally before the forbidding person.


LODA-EDWARD
ROZANSKI
COLLECTION
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I had imagined Colonel Zoicaro as a malicious gnome with a yellow face and angry shifty eyes, snorting—if not smoke and sulphur—at least gall.

The man I saw had a yellowish face with sunken cheeks, but did not look formidable. He wore spectacles, stared stupidly and said something quickly in Russian, trying in vain to make his voice sound impressive.

Is this the man? I thought, very disappointed. But at the same moment there appeared at the door the massive figure of another officer who, though he looked very different from what I imagined, was undoubtedly Zoicaro.

His ruddy face with its pepper-and-salt whiskers and bushy eyebrows glowed with the energy of the old soldier. In his angry, cold eyes was gathered a cloud which at any moment might be pierced by lights of anger. I felt that the Colonel could really inspire fear, especially among people like our Grossu.

I reported to him quite falsely, giving him the number of our men as two hundred and seventy-nine, while in reality there were less than one hundred eighty. Grossu confirmed the number and reported that he had visited the billets of the sick with me and verified the number of those who could not attend the roll-call. Grossu really had counted them with me but he could not guess that I had previously chosen the "sick" men and they would soon be well again, to make up the missing numbers at the roll-call.

Meanwhile it began to rain. The colonel was silent or else threw short orders to the pale lemon-coloured man in spectacles. Each time the "lemon" shrank under the weight of the leaden look of the Zeus from Babadag, then quickly, extensively and haughtily, explained in Russian what was the matter.

The matter was first, the order of the Rumanian Ministry of National Defence which I was to read in front of my detachment. The order was written in Rumanian and "translated" into Polish by the authorities of the Ministry. Here are its more important passages:

"Officers, sub-officers and Polish soldiers!

Fate wanted you to come in Rumanian lands in condition of war refugees. The Government and people of Rumania made everything to save your most human reception in the framing of rules and duties internationally asked by the situation. Therefore to lighten your life, there are introduced measures of quartering you, sharing the beds with Rumanian soldiers; in other places a part of the Rumanian army has been billeted on the population, giving you their barracks. We inform you this way that it is necessary for you to obey military orders as interned, and obediently listen to orders.

I appeal to everybody to find agitators and give them up to the commander of the camp so that punishment may fall on those guilty and not the whole camp.

Minister of National Defence.
Major General I. Ileusu."

I read this composition slowly, catching its meaning with difficulty and mostly using my own words, not wanting to arouse the hilarity of my officers and men. Somehow I managed to read the whole of it, gaining the great respect of my audience who thought that I was translating a French text into Polish.

When I finished it was raining cats and dogs. I was told that I would be personally responsible for the escape of any soldier, that I would be court-martialled, imprisoned etc. and that Colonel Zoicaro was well able to catch every-

body who dared to leave the camp. He made a note of the number of men, gave one of his heavy looks to Grossu and was just preparing to leave when from among the fences a large umbrella emerged and under it the Orthodox priest who came to ask us to a cup of coffee and some wine.

This was quite to my liking. I listened to the threat with a feigned indifference, but I knew very well that I was a hundred men short and that this would become known, sooner or later. Neither could I cease sending them out, and I meditated somewhat gloomily on ways of doing this at the same time avoiding prison for myself. I did not quite know what I would tell the formidable Zeus of Babadag, indeed whether I would be able to think of anything, but I wanted to talk to him informally; at a table, and sipping wine, conversation flows more easily than at a parade. I wanted to find out what could be managed with him, and how.

So I sent a sergeant-major to look for Zygmunt, tell him everything and perhaps stop, for one night, the exodus of men from the camp, and then I went to the priest's house.

The priest, who was a young, handsome man, exceptionally intelligent and educated, liked me. He understood a great many things, knew much about our affairs and guessed the rest. He spoke good French, had mixed feelings of contempt and indulgence towards his country, but must have been attached to this half-civilized motherland, for he worked in Sarighiol conscientiously, just as missionaries in a borderland outpost. Apart from this he had a bad wife, but good wine and extremely good coffee.

We were drinking wine, talking of the needs and wants of the camp, of malaria (to which three quarters of the population regularly succumbed) and of the necessity of

installing stoves in the billets before winter set in, when Zygmunt suddenly turned up. I was a little taken aback by his coming, but was completely dumbfounded when after being introduced to the colonel and exchanging the first few indifferent sentences, he put on a mysterious expression and disclosed the purpose of his visit.

"I know," he said in a low voice, "that Colonel Zoicaro has decided to put an end to the insubordination of our soldiers. What can we do? We really cannot prevent their escape and would like to help the colonel."

Here he looked at me from the corner of his eye and kicked my ankle under the table.

I almost shivered at this display of diplomacy.

"You are a stupid ass," I whispered in Polish. "What bright idea is this?"

"This is it," started Zygmunt anew, smiling sweetly at the lemon-coloured worm who was translating his words into Rumanian while he looked suspiciously at me. "My friend here asks me to explain it to you, sir, in more detail." (Here he kicked me again, this time on my calf). "I heard that you, sir, luckily have a great number of military policemen at your disposal."

Quite desperate, I tried to appear unconcerned and to change the subject, but Zygmunt did not allow me to speak.

"Don't spoil my game," he muttered. "Can't you see I am trying to have them?"

"You are an idiot," I answered shortly. "Before long they will have us."

But Zygmunt pushed his chair nearer the colonel and declared confidentially that he would like to tell him something in the greatest secrecy and under the pledge

that no one would say a word about it, for it might not succeed.

Zoicaro listened rather indifferently. The yellow aide was adjusting his spectacles incessantly and looking at us with an ever greater suspicion.

"I have learned," continued Zygmunt, "of a plan to escape."

I was shaken.

"The man is mad!" I thought.

But I was helpless, for my mere look could not kill the traitor. Zoicaro suddenly became interested, the yellow man pricked up his ears like a horse, and Zygmunt, probably bursting inwardly with pride raised his eyebrows indifferently, wrinkled his forehead and cast down his eyes.

"What escape are you talking about?" asked Zoicaro.

"I have overheard a conversation," answered Zygmunt. "Of course quite by chance," he added apologetically.

His tone was quite unnecessary, I thought, for this was Rumania where such trifles as overhearing conversations are not considered shocking.

"Whose conversation?" insisted the interpreter, more and more interested.

Zygmunt was in no hurry. He was lighting a cigarette and staring at me with his blue eyes in which, as usual, there was hidden mirth.

"The fish is biting," he said to me.

"It's a big fish," I whispered. "It may swallow the bait, the rod and the damn fool angler."

"The captain is perfectly right," said my friend. "We must confide in you completely, sir."

"Heaven help me," I thought.

"Some hundred of our men plan to escape tonight from

Sarighiol," Zygmunt said at last, this time in Rumanian.

"What?" shouted Zoicaro.

"What?" squeaked the interpreter.

"What?" wondered Grossu and stared with his mouth open.

Even I wanted to exclaim, but at last I began to understand.

"The fish did bite," I thought with appreciation. "This is not a bad idea."

And from now on we began to act jointly. The three Rumanian officers had not the slightest doubt that we were acting as informers and that though we had not actively opposed the escapes, now, with the prospect of imprisonment before us, we were betraying our own men. Only the priest looked at us resentfully and with a measure of contempt. Zoicaro and his aide patted us on the shoulders, expressed their hope of a fine catch and promised us a reward.

The colonel did not want to leave us. The yellow man telephoned for a reserve of military police who came at dusk and stealthily and with the greatest secrecy surrounded the village with a thick cordon.

There were so many gendarmes that even a mouse could not have slipped through the chain. Apart from this, reinforcements of sentries were placed on all the roads, and patrols walked about in the village.

"I fear this will arouse the suspicions of our soldiers," I said to the colonel. "They may change their plan of escape, the more so as there is full moon."

He waved aside my doubts.

"They will certainly try to escape tonight," he answered. "They must realise by now that it will become

even more difficult in future. And tomorrow we will make a search; they must have civilian clothes somewhere."

"Certainly," said Zygmunt. "Only so well hidden that we can't find them."

At last we separated. Zoicaro saw me off to my billet, in front of which, to my great astonishment, there stood a Rumanian soldier with a rifle.

"Does it mean that I am under arrest?" I asked the colonel.

"Oh, not at all! You see, it means only that for tonight you are released from all responsibility. I am personally responsible for every one of your soldiers but—you will understand that I must make my own arrangements."

He asked me not to hold it against him and advised me to stay at home for the night. The next morning the sentry would be removed.

He bade me good night; I wished him pleasant dreams and we parted.

I was certain that Zoicaro would not sleep that night and I was right. All night long he visited the sentinels and splashed through mud on the fields and the roads. If he had any dreams at all, they were probably of a hundred captured fugitives, but somehow they did not materialise for the next day Zeus from Babadag was in a fuming rage.

The soldiers who were on guard in front of the officers' billets had bleeding noses and bruised faces. He showed these to me and said: "This is how we punish negligence in our army. Somebody must have forewarned the Poles of our orders. What do you think?" he asked sarcastically.

Blood rushed to my face, but I restrained myself.

"I am grateful to you, sir, for showing me how Rumanian officers punch their soldiers' faces," I answered.

"If anybody had told me that such a thing was at all possible in present day Europe, I would not have believed him. With us, an officer would be court-martialled for such behaviour."

Furiously he spat at me, "The Polish army? The Polish army was beaten by the Germans within three weeks!"

I answered that the Rumanian army would have surrendered within three days, had it fought at all.

"But," I added, "you did not even fight with us against the Bolsheviks though you were under a treaty obligation to do so. And now you treat us as prisoners of war, and not as Allies."

He did not say anything to this, only gnashed his teeth. Then he asked if the men had been called and went with me to take the report and assist at the roll-call.

As I could have foreseen, every soul came to the square, with the exception of those who were really sick and were lying in a small hospital next door to the parish church. There were altogether 172 men.

"Where are the rest?" asked the interpreter.

I shrugged, and Zygmunt readily reported that there were seven sick and two cooks.

Zoicaro summoned the military police and told them to look into the billets. They could not, of course, find a living soul. The search brought no results, for the civilian clothes had been well hidden by Zygmunt.

The Rumanians were amazed. How was it possible? In spite of the cordon, in spite of watching and guarding, and of the formidable Zoicaro himself on the lookout all night long, marching through the camp, a hundred men had managed to escape!

Zeus from Babadag could hardly believe his eyes.

"How? Which way?" he asked his aide, then Grossu, then the local gendarme.

He suspected all of them. He suspected his soldiers, me, Zygmunt and the priest. Until noon he hung on to the telephone in the hope that somehow, somewhere, somebody had been caught on the road, in a bus, on a train or in a station. All in vain. One hundred men had disappeared like pebbles in the sea.

So he softened and used a new approach. First he spoke to Zygmunt, for I was the more offended one.

"Why do they escape? What do they lack here? They have enough to eat, they need not work and they are safe. And where do they escape?"

"What do I know about it?" shrugged Zygmunt. "And besides, you haven't made our lives so sweet."

Zoicaro was quite soft now; he promised to send some stoves and better food, then he attacked me.

"You must know where and how they escape."

I insisted that I did not know anything, but explained that there is a difference between the Polish and the Rumanian soldier. I told him that the Poles had managed to escape from Siberia to Madagascar, to be free or to fight for their freedom; that for us the war was not finished; only the battlefields had changed.

"Hm," he said deep in thought. "So I ought to expect that sooner or later you too will go to France?"

"I will send you a postcard sir, when I'm on my way," I answered.

He smiled and shook hands with me.

7. The Father's Mountain

Soon after the visit of the Zeus from Babadag I fell seriously ill. Dysentery, influenza, malaria and inflammation of the ears attacked me all at the same time. There were moments when I thought I would die and be buried in the muddy Sarighiol cemetery. In my mind I said farewell to my loved ones in Poland; worry about them coloured my feverish dreams. I had had no news from them; I did not know whether they were alive or dead.

Somehow I escaped death, but was so weak and exhausted that I did not feel able to command the camp. There were only some eighty people left in it and they could remain under Zygmunt's care.

Grossu was worried about the melting away of his internees, and to comfort himself he put into his own pocket the pay sent by the Rumanians, falsifying the lists according to my suggestions. Zoicaro was helpless; the military policemen either accepted bribes from us, or were unable to prevent the escapes. The peasants were on our side; they warned me of pending searches, transported the men in carts almost as far as Constanza and when it was necessary, hid the fugitives with their friends in the region.

Having received the permission of the Polish delegate

and the Rumanian authorities, I decided to take a few weeks' rest in Babadag. Baba-Dag in Turkish means "the Father's Mountain." It hovers steeply over a township of the same name which under the Turkish rule had some 60,000 inhabitants, but at the present numbers only 6,000. It rises steeply from the east, covered with a dense, thick forest of oaks and beech trees tangled as if in deadly convulsions. The dwarfed boughs of the oaks, crooked, twisted, low, are mingled with beeches and with an undergrowth of bushes, and form a black thick fur from the bottom to the top of the mountain. The forest is so dense and wild that it seems impenetrable. It grows from a thin layer of earth on rocks that are bald and greenish where they abut on the sides of a road. Full of holes, and negligently built, the road lifts its left then its right side, as if to dislodge the bold traveler.

When a moist, autumn wind blows from the Black Sea and drives low, heavy clouds, the Father's Mountain sticks its humped back into the clouds and with its powerful shoulders seems to obstruct their march westward. The grey clouds seethe over it before they roll over the top and descend along the slope, down to the valley where the village stands.

Almost daily a thin rain falls and when it does not actually fall, it hangs in the wet air or, under the guise of a humid fog, comes down on the roof-tops, on the leafless trees, on low walls of stone, on crooked streets.

Babadag drowns in mud and poverty. The never-repaired, sinking roofs are made of thick, moss covered, badly cut, and clumsily arranged slates. The windows are boarded with half-rotten planks, or covered with stalks of maize. The doors hang loosely on broken hinges. The

low walls of stones, placed one on top of the other, fall to pieces either into or out of the orchards that have grown wild. Stinking gutters are always full of dirty water and rotting remains of vegetables. The roads are flooded with mud reaching to the curbs of uneven and muddy pavements. Narrow alleys, blind lanes, steep streets, walls from which the paint is peeling, shops in cubby-holes, rickety stalls, broken window-panes, ruins of decrepit houses!

Misery looks out from the crooked window frames, from broken doorsteps and rotting fences. Squalor grins from the padlocked, blue painted doors of the "Usina Electrica," idle for many months.

The forlorn, scratchy mosque in a large but weedy garden looks at the blue doors through its slim minaret, but is silent. There is never anybody there, no sound disturbs the silence.

But the "Primaria," a large ugly house with whitewashed walls, with a faded, uniformly grey flag on the roof, is always full of people. Polish motor-cars are parked in front of the entrance. Miserable ragamuffins, half uniformed Rumanian soldiers and N.C.O.'s go in and out in a hurry. Bearded peasants, Russians or Bulgarians, citizens of the lowest class, wait patiently and submissively, leaning on the barrier surrounding this state building.

What else is there? An orthodox church, simple, ugly, surrounded with rubbish heaps where weeds begin to grow; several coffee-houses and tea-rooms sticky with dirt; far away on a hill, the gloomy and disproportionately large building of the station and, very rarely, a ridiculous three-coach train of the late nineteen-nineties, like a forgotten toy of a distant childhood.

Dogs, whole packs of them, pigs, chickens and geese

wade in the mud, wandering in the alleys. Sand carts pass, pulled by shabby horses never groomed and fed as rarely as possible. The policemen, in brown coats with red piping and in high fur hats, are swollen with authority towards the humble and servile towards the powerful; Turks walk about in dirty fezzes, in rags and baggy trousers; the Russians, mostly fisherman, with red or grey beards and red noses, smell of fish and home-brewed vodka; the corn and wine merchants jingle the gold chains over their protruding paunches; the "Plugers," the Bulgarian farmers, grey, poverty stricken, wander about the streets; and Rumanian officials sniff around for a bribe to balance the month-old arrears in their pay.

Everybody gesticulates, talks, smells heavily of sweat, dirt, garlic and "raki," a kind of vodka, sits for hours on end over a small cup of "cafea turcesca"; makes a few unsavoury deals, trades, chooses cheap wares in the shops, or simply stands and stares at the curb.

When darkness falls, small and sooty petrol lamps are lit in the crooked windows, and in the dark pot-holed streets flit the lights of lanterns of passersby. Sometimes the "Usina Electrica" begins to hum, the lamps in the streets light up and remain lit for an hour or two, then the power plant again breaks down and is silent for several weeks. Sometimes the lights of a mud-covered car throw a moving beam of light between the houses and make the darkness seem darker still. A dog barks, an accordion sounds out of tune inside a coffee-house, the wind howls and calms down again, until slowly everything is silent, and Babadag goes to sleep, the uncomfortable, miserable sleep of a beggar who feels the cold on his hard litter under his cover of rags.

In daytime the bell often rings in the orthodox church;

almost every day and sometimes several times a day. It rings for a few seconds, a single bell with a dull, hopeless and gloomy tone. This means a funeral. People are dying here all the time. It's a wonder this sad town is not completely depopulated by the malaria, influenza and dysentery that are constantly raging among the population deprived of decent medical care.

But when on a frosty winter day the sky clears up, when snow covers the dirty unkempt village, Babadag looks quite different. Suddenly you perceive a really pleasant house in the street you have crossed innumerable times, where—you would have sworn—you have not seen it standing. It must be said that the Rumanians are born builders and if it were not for the fact that they never repair the fences, walls and roofs which are falling to pieces, and that they build of cheap materials, their country and village houses would make an impression of simplicity and charm on account of their excellent proportions, their lovely porches, verandas and little columns.

On such a clear, transparent day Babadag is gay with the high-pitched voices of children who come out with their toboggans on to the sloping, steep little streets. The walls of houses are whitened by the sun, and the snow that discreetly hides the squalor of the interiors with frost flowers on the window panes. Babadag is almost merry, almost lovely.

But be careful, stranger. Do not turn into the side lane, for you may see a scene which will remind you of the other, gloomy Babadag and spoil this sunny white day for you.

You may see a bearded Bulgarian, holding between his knees a lean dog writhing in fear and pain, a dog which he stabs with a knife, preparing to skin it. Or maybe a

prosperous farmer with all his family, burning a pig in the middle of the street, above a fire lit next to a large pool of blood which streams to the gutter on the corner, while the ghastly smell of burning bristles fills all the neighbouring alleys, and the pig still quivers, still moves its legs or even starts a desperate flight, only to be imprisoned by the hands and knees of men, women and children. Then again you may see a shabby Gipsy boy lying on the ground, crying for his mother, as his lean, frost-bitten hands shield his head from the boot of a stall owner from whom he has just stolen a bunch of cracknels. A round-faced, smiling policeman looks on indifferently as the boy bleeds and groans, for this is how people treat juvenile thieves in Babadag.

Maybe, however, you will succeed in crossing the town without seeing anything of this sort. Then, climbing by the steep path to the top of the Father's Mountain, you may see a great expanse of the land of Dobrudja reaching towards the Black Sea. It is a country white with snows, wide and rambling, belted at the horizon with the golden arrow of sea.

There, far in the distance is the port. And in the port there are ships which will sail to France.

I, too, wanted to go to France, but things took a different course. In the first days of January I received an order to change into civilian clothing and to move to Targu-Jiu as "director" of the British Relief Fund for Polish Internees. So instead of going east to Constanza, I went westwards, to Bucharest. There I was equipped with documents, instructions and money, and on a frosty January morning I alighted from a train in the small station of Targu-Jiu where I met Alois T., and where, later on, I learned to work as hard as he did.

8. Targu-Jiu

I MET ALOIS for the first time in 1938 at Lodz. He was then the director of the Y.M.C.A. branch in which I gave a lecture for young men. We liked each other at once and I was eager to see him in Targu-Jiu.

There he was on the platform of the station standing in the crowd, slim, modest, vivacious, watching the windows of the train with dark eyes under reddish eyebrows. For all his homely figure he has a lion's head which he carries high and with dignity. A wrinkled, broad forehead with a large mane of golden hair, deeply sunk smallish shrewd eyes, always blinking a little, and a triangular, too thin face with a wide mouth. He seemed to me even stranger than when I first saw him at Lodz.

I jumped out of my coach; he noticed me at once, and without any introductory remarks, took me in his sledge to the camp, explaining on the way what kind of work awaited us.

When we arrived at the camp, the situation seemed hopeless to me. A whole village of wooden huts, surrounded thickly with barbed wire, stood in an open, snow covered field. No light, no water, no drainage, no stoves! Here were six thousand Polish soldiers, in rags, desperate or

resigned, without officers, left to their fate under the guard of rough Rumanian soldiers. We found a total lack of organisation, no medical care, miserable food supplied by crooked attendants, lack of even the most primitive sanitary installations, lack of newspapers or books, no hope of improvement in their lot: in one word—misery.

Nearby, in a Rumanian military barracks of brick, completely separated and also behind barbed wire, was the camp of interned officers, not very much better than the soldiers' camp. It sheltered three hundred Polish officers of all regiments.

The Commandant of the military region was General Oprescu, a short, fat, merry man, an officer of the former Imperial Austrian army. He smiled at us with kindness mingled with suspicion when we reported to him to present our authorisation issued by the "Ministerul de Razboi"—the war office, and by the British Embassy. He listened with one ear while Alois spoke to him in German, shook our hands distractedly and sent us off to Colonel Dumitrescu who was in charge of the camps.

Colonel Dumitrescu was a man of quite a different type; different from the general and different from the majority of Rumanian officers; a European and a gentleman. In addition, his heart was in the right place. His appearance awoke respect and sympathy. The colonel was tall, rather heavy, but not fat, ruddy, with greying hair, handsome, with clear, sincere eyes and a pleasant smile on his aristocratic face. He spoke excellent French, and as I learned afterwards, was president of the Royal Hunting Club, received at Court, a very rich man, educated, and widely travelled.

He listened to us attentively and kindly and promised

help, but it was apparent that he realised the difficulties which we would encounter.

"Your soldiers are demoralised," he said. "The conditions of their life here are bad, and I can well understand it. Our soldiers are used to this. They live and eat just as the Poles do who are interned here, and besides carry on their service duties. But you have a different element in your army; men who are accustomed to clean barracks and to a comfort undreamed of in Rumania. They are intelligent and ambitious, but unruly and, under the existing conditions, very difficult to cope with. These men are at present left all to themselves, embittered and in a state of bad morale. Anarchy reigns in the camp. They do not want to work, they do not listen to orders, and when I summoned a few Polish officers and asked them to introduce some sort of military order, the soldiers almost wanted to lynch them in the barracks. Maybe you will achieve better results."

Then he introduced us to Colonel Porfirianu, a choleric, fat man who was commandant of the soldiers' camp.

He was an officer on the retired list, called up again, and by profession a croupier at the casino in Sinaia. If he earned as much money out of the gambling at the casino as he earned here, thanks to the opportunities of his position, I am sure he must have amassed a nice little capital. He was a typical Rumanian officer. He slapped the faces of his soldiers, shouted at them, quarrelled with junior officers in front of them, was fond of speeches and made them at every opportunity in a fluent, and correct, French; with all this he was quite accommodating with small sums of money or presents in kind. He was fond of food and fonder of drink, he liked having a good time, worshipped

pretty women, promised whatever you asked him and never kept his promises. He was hospitable and effusively cordial, and he at once took a great liking to me. I must say that I liked him too, and pretended not to know about his petty grafts and thefts. I even promised him solemnly that I would try to get him a high decoration in recognition of the sympathy he showed in matters concerning the "evacuation" of the interned Polish soldiers. However, as I gave him four pairs of English shoes and two blankets from a supply sent by the British Embassy, I consider the account to be settled, the more so since I never had any intention of getting him the decoration, nor the authority.

This, however, bears on much later events. My first meeting with Porfirianu went off smoothly, in the polite atmosphere of mutual compliments, then work at the camp began and it was much more difficult than the initial conversations with the Rumanians.

Our soldiers did not attack us when we entered with some apprehension, into their crowded, stuffy and foul smelling huts, but they ignored us completely. It was all very simple; no one wanted to talk to us.

I intended to tell them about our army which was being reformed in France, of their duties as soldiers, of our fatherland, but Alois pinched my arm:

"Not a word about these things!"

He was right. How could one demand anything from these neglected beggars, the three hundred of them crowded in a dark, stinking hut where there was room for less than half that number? What could I tell them, when in all this time no one had shown the least interest in them?

So Alois spoke to them in quite a different mood.

"You are covered with lice," he began. "You live in dirt

and stench, lying one on top of another. It is as dark as a cellar and this ramshackle iron stove gives about as much heat as a candle in church."

Silence fell. They knew very well that this was their position, but no one had said it out loud to them, so they listened ready either to applaud or to throw their hobnailed boots at the speaker.

"The Rumanians have put enough huts at your disposal for you to live more decently," Alois went on, not caring that there arose at once a murmur of fury. "There are enough barracks. There are bricks to build stoves, if only . . ."

Here a clamour arose:

"What? Do you want us to build stoves on an empty belly?"

"Where are the bricks? A mile from here!"

"You build the stoves yourself!"

A well aimed boot from an upper bunk somewhere near the ceiling shot through the air, but Alois saw it in the twilight and caught it swiftly.

"Have you got any cigarettes?" he cried through the din.

"No, we have not!" they shouted back.

"Leave the fags and scram!" a hoarse bass voice said.

"I'll leave them in a minute," said Alois. "And now one more thing. There are 5,000 bricks lying near the stores, next to the second gate. For every brick any of you brings here, I will pay 5 lei in cash."

A roar of laughter and jeers was the only answer. Not a man came forward.

"Where are those fags?" they asked, this time threateningly.

"The cigarettes are in the sledges. Come on, you will get them."

We went outside the hut and close behind us followed its inmates, blinking in the light. There were a lot of cigarettes—one hundred twenty thousand of them. We divided them among the twenty huts, not caring much about a fair distribution, for that was not important at present. For Alois it was important that the men should move from their bunks, that they should come out into the fresh air.

He climbed on to the sledge and repeated his promise about the bricks. For answer he got insults, jeers, or at best, incredulous smiles. But at last one of the privates started towards the stores and returned in some ten minutes, carrying three bricks.

He was greeted by a murmur of interest.

He was somewhat wary of his comrades, afraid they would laugh at him if it turned out that he had been "had," so overdoing his insolence he threw the three bricks at our feet and extended his hand to get the money.

With no special hurry Alois produced fifteen lei, put them on the soldier's outstretched hand and clapped his palms loudly.

"Here it is," he said. "Who's next?"

Then it started. It was not the fifteen lei that shook these men out of their apathy, nor the many thousand lei that followed (the next morning we paid only two lei for a brick, and the next evening one lei). No, you could not buy these soldiers. You could only persuade them that we had really come here to help them. Alois succeeded in doing this in a very short time.

On the third day we had twelve officer-volunteers from the neighbouring camp who answered our summons and

formed a Polish command of the camp. The Rumanians promised to send us another hundred from Rosiori de Vede, Targoviste and other camps.

The fourth day we were able to organise a Polish commissariat, six field kitchens with Polish staff and one canteen. A "cultural section" was formed for which five officer cadets volunteered; they were the "general staff" and the executives of the whole extensive programme of reforms. The same day we began to organise the first canteen and recreation room in an empty hut.

The Rumanian command looked at these endeavours of ours with a tolerant incredulity. No one except Colonel Dumitrescu believed that they had any real meaning. No one supposed that our work would bring results or that it would last more than a few days. Dumitrescu doubted whether we would be able to cope with the soldiers who in their great majority, remained apathetic or even hostile to us, to the officers, to any kind of work.

A week after our first conversation, the colonel suddenly arrived at the camp in his black saloon car and invited us to the office of the Rumanian command. He was rather self-conscious. He declared that he would like us to help him, but anticipated great difficulties. He doubted if we would be able to deal with this "unexpected cataclysm," as he put it.

I said we would try and asked him to give me some details.

"This is quite extraordinary," said Dumitrescu, anxiously rubbing his forehead. "This is so unlike Rumania that . . . Well, to put it briefly, I addressed myself to your officers at Rosiori and elsewhere and asked them to come here to care for the soldiers; to exchange voluntarily their present

comparative freedom for work in a camp behind barbed wire. And do you know what happened?"

Probably no one has volunteered, I thought.

"Nearly all of them volunteered," said the colonel after a dramatic pause.

I felt ashamed of my distrust and then I was very pleased.

"Tomorrow a hundred and twenty will come here," said Dumitrescu. "A hundred and twenty," he repeated with emphasis. "The barracks are almost ready for them, but where will they eat? Do you understand, I must give them their dinner tomorrow at 2 P.M.? Dinner for a hundred and twenty men! A hundred and twenty officers. It is impossible to have them in the officers' mess, for they get their meals there in three shifts and besides . . . You understand, gentlemen; your officers here, with the exception of a few, have signed a declaration that they will not attempt to leave Rumania. The others did not want to sign. I know that there is a certain measure of antagonism between the former and the latter. Besides I, personally, have more confidence in those who have not signed. So . . ."

We said we understood. Personally I wanted to hug the fine colonel who had been entrusted by the Rumanian government with the task of guarding interned officers and soldiers, and who treated with apparent sympathy those from among them who did not want to give up the possibilities of escape.

Alois blinked, blushed, swallowed hard and declared: "Tomorrow at 2 o'clock dinner will be ready in the officers' mess here for 132 Polish officers and for the Rumanian Camp Command. It will be done, sir."

Dumitrescu did not seem to understand.

"In which mess? But I . . ."

"There will be a new mess," declared Alois. "We will arrange it."

The colonel looked at us in apparent doubt, then showed us the empty barrack that we could occupy. At last, very worried, he left us and drove away, while we took possession of it.

To be sure it was nothing to write home about. The floor was covered with rubbish, there were no stoves, the walls had cracks through which snow had blown in, even the ceiling was not covered with tar-paper. It was all coldness and desolation.

I said to myself that Alois had overdone it. I looked at him and met his shrewd black eyes gazing at me. He lifted his eyebrows, blinked, stood on tip-toe, and repeated with conviction:

"It will be done."

And so it was; we worked thirty hours, together with five officer cadets, who found a few specialists among the soldiers; a carpenter, a slater, a potter and a cook. A dozen other soldiers volunteered as waiters.

The following day, before 2 P.M. the barrack was scrubbed, hung with tar-paper and whitewashed, decorated with paper garlands, flags, portraits of Marshal Pilsudski and the President, furnished with tables and benches, and with a fireplace on the mantle of which stood a model of a sailing-boat made of cardboard. It did not look in the least like the rubbish heap we had found. In two iron stoves and in the fireplace fires were laid. Behind a wooden partition we made a cloakroom. In a small room near the entrance was the larder with provisions, a weighing machine, wine and tinned foods. On the freshly built kitchen range a

three course dinner was cooking in two enormous cauldrons which, I believe, had disappeared mysteriously from the Rumanian military stores. Various hors d'oeuvres, glasses and bottles stood on the tables.

At 2 o'clock sharp, the officers and the Rumanians with Colonel Dumitrescu arrived. We were triumphant.

Alois foresaw and assessed rightly the value of our success; if the 120 officers had nowhere to go on their arrival, if they did not get a dinner or had to eat it at a late hour two kilometres from the camp, frozen and tired from their journey as they were, this would certainly not have influenced favourably their enthusiasm for work. The first impression sometimes decides the whole attitude towards the place to which you are assigned. The officers were prepared for the worst; instead, they found a working organisation, billets and a mess. This meant a great deal in a camp.

And as far as Dumitrescu was concerned, at one stroke we gained his confidence and goodwill. It must be admitted that he knew how to show it and consequently helped us much more than he should have.

With a good supply of money from the British Relief Committee and the help of Dumitrescu we went on working. After Alois left for Bucharest, I worked alone, helped by an organised staff of officers, N.C.O.'s and privates.

When I left Targu-Jiu in April, the whole camp was so changed that it was unrecognisable. Out of the British funds I had spent about three million lei, not counting various gifts in kind for the soldiers, such as for instance, 2,500 pairs of boots, 1,200 suits of clothes, 6,000 pieces of underwear, 1,000 towels, 2,000 sweaters, 2,000 blankets.

We arranged and equipped nine canteens with tables

and benches, stoves and lamps; with a library, a reading room, a wireless set, a set of games. We opened nine soldiers' shops with adequate equipment and large stocks. We organised a hospital of forty beds with an out-patient department for skin and infectious diseases, as well as a surgery and dentistry; there was also a bath house with two bath tubs and a water-heating installation. Attached to the hospital was a dispensary with stocks of medicine, a supply of linen, bandages, and so on. One of the empty barracks was transformed into a chapel. The altar and all the decorations for it were made in the camp.

The camp had its own shortwave receiving station, unknown, of course, to the Rumanian authorities. By listening in, we were able to issue a daily news-sheet which we stencilled ourselves. It was quite a large affair, two sheets on weekdays and four or five on Sundays. We organised a section of culture and education which occupied a separate building.

When I left the camp there were seven permanent schools and four specialised courses with 1,800 students and forty teachers. The lecture section had organised over a hundred lectures, and the theatrical section had given twenty-six performances at the camp theatre which had its own workshop for making costumes and decorations, and movable scenery. We had made three sports grounds with a sprinting track, a football and basket-ball ground, and a hall with boxing equipment. We organised a meat-preserving factory, a carpenter's, cobbler's, tailor's, locksmith's, and sculptor's workshops. They employed over two hundred specialists and apprentices.

We built a water supply and drainage system all over the camp (2,500 running metres of ditches and pipes). We

planted 3,800 fruit trees and shrubs, we dug up 16,000 cubic metres of earth for vegetables and flowers, we planted grass on 30,000 square metres of sports grounds, and we made 1,800 metres of roads. And the most important thing, we sent about 3,000 men to the Polish Forces in France.

It is quite true that we had enough money from the British. It is true that we had 120 officers to help and 6,000 soldiers to do the work. But the enthusiasm for work, the fact that we could start from a deadlock, the initiative, are to be placed to the credit of one man only; to a homely, modest, and later on a wronged and persecuted man, a man of volcanic energy who never hesitated before any task and who always said "It can be done," and worked as much as ten men, carrying others with him by his example. That man was Alois T.

9. Pryszczyk Escapes Again

I MET PRYSZCZYK in the camp at Targu-Jiu during the first few days of my stay there. He hugged and kissed me in the presence of the Rumanian staff, embraced me so vigorously that I lost my breath, and began to cry from emotion. Then, completely ignoring the Rumanians, he dragged me to his barracks where he had an upper bunk in a corner. He smoked one after another of my cigarettes, treated the soldiers all around to them and talked.

He had been caught; "they" caught him; not any Rumanians, a German "secret agent." And everything was our Embassy's fault. If only he had travelled alone, he would certainly be in France by now and maybe he would be driving the car of General Sikorski himself.

He looked at me slyly to see whether I would defend the Embassy and whether this assignment to the General's service did not seem too incredible to me. But I was highly amused and had no intention of doubting his words though it clearly appeared from his story that Pryszczyk was suffering not through the Embassy's fault but because of his incurable gallantry toward the ladies.

This is what had happened.

In Bucharest Pryszczyk was given a passport by ser-

geant Krowka, who was "well connected" with the Polish military attachés. He received the passport illegally, of course, but, like Krowka himself, he did not want to await his turn.

As for Krowka, I had known him when he was a sergeant in the Pilots' Training Centre at Cracow in 1919. At that time he was a chief sergeant or staff sergeant as they were called then. I was not surprised that he had not been promoted since but I often wondered who could ever have made him an N.C.O. in the Austrian army from whence he came to us.

Krowka was big, sturdy, red in the face, with a reddish growth of beard, dumb as a log, but he had a very high opinion of his intelligence and military knowledge accumulated through the years he had spent in the regimental office. Actually his knowledge was limited to the service regulations which he knew by heart, and his intelligence was mostly displayed in the use of expressions straight from the official correspondence. What is more, he did not always understand these stylistic fineries and applied them in his speeches rather freely, when giving us moral lessons, admonitions or reading out the daily orders for the training centre. We were all fond of him for he was not a bad fellow and treated us with a kind of fatherly indulgence.

Once he said to me when he saw me sitting on a table in the N.C.O.'s mess: "You, volunteer Herbert, what is the matter with you? Yesterday I saw you eating at the above mentioned table; today I see you sit on it; and to-morrow? To-morrow maybe I will see you making a latrine of the above mentioned barracks piece of furniture, what?"

"The above mentioned volunteers should be shaved and

have their hair cut in their own capacity," was the phraseology of one of his famous orders.

And this was the companion whom fate gave Pryszczyk at the beginning of his escapade. Judging by the further developments, Sergeant Krowka had not changed much since the days when he was our staff sergeant. This good heart and knowledge of service regulations would not have helped him much in Rumania, but Pryszczyk promised to guide him, in gratitude for the illegal passport which he supplied.

They learned that in order to obtain a foreign visa you must first have a "plecara" or Rumanian exit permit, so they went together to the police station and insinuated themselves into the presence of the chief dignitary who was signing these "plecaras."

The dignitary, like all of his kind, took enormous bribes wholesale, per head, and did not care much who left Rumania. Seeing Krowka and Pryszczyk he took their passports, looked at them, read in the column "profession" that both Pryszczyk and Krowka were engineers, smiled kindly and expressed astonishment that there were so many engineers among the Poles leaving his country. Pryszczyk also smiled and—so he told me—answered in French that there were many of them. Krowka did not answer anything; he did not understand what it was all about and besides he could not speak French.

Then the dignitary discreetly mentioned the Polish forces in France. Pryszczyk developed goose flesh; the topic was a dangerous one.

"Tell me openly," the dignitary said to Krowka. "You are not an engineer at all, only a major or a captain in the Polish army?"

"Everything is lost," thought Pryszczyk, and seeing that Krowka could only stare and breathe heavily, he answered resignedly:

"This gentleman is a general."

This made a big impression. The police official became at once extremely courteous. He leaped to his feet, gave Krowka a chair, stamped the passports at once and handed them with a bow to the astounded sergeant. He was so respectful and talked so much and so quickly that Pryszczyk felt quite dizzy. He nudged his companion and murmured: "Serge, let's go!" And went out with him, forgetting to say goodbye to the high official.

But this was the best move; the dignitary followed them, scolded the porter and the gendarmes, told the customers to make way for the honorable general, and loudly apologized for being so late in recognizing the high quality of the officer.

Krowka, convinced that he wanted to take the passports from them, dragged Pryszczyk along and ran at full speed down the marble stairs.

Nobody followed them, however, so Pryszczyk began to act again. First of all he exchanged all the Polish currency they had into lei at a good, official exchange rate, presenting six official documents in several banks; then he bought food for the journey, raising money wherever he could, at the Red Cross, at the military attaché's office and at the Embassy. At last he brought Krowka to the station, bought tickets to Constanza and occupied a whole second class compartment, locking the door from inside.

They arrived at Constanza without mishap; and this is where our Embassy exposed Pryszczyk to danger, for he

let himself be persuaded to travel with a whole transport of Poles.

It must have been easy to persuade him, for such a trip cost nothing. The two men received accommodations and food for three days, and on the fourth day they were sent to the port, together with forty other "engineers."

At the maritime station there was a crowd of policemen and gendarmes, but Pryszczyk did not care, for he knew very well that they were paid by our officials. However, he was worried by the German secret police in mufti whom he could not tell from other civilians. "Mr. Ambassador" from the consulate at Constanza warned every one not to talk Polish before embarkation. So Pryszczyk set his teeth and decided not to open his mouth. They stood there for perhaps an hour and were terribly bored. Then a boat came alongside and the passengers began to land. And misfortune had it that a girl passed near Pryszczyk.

"She had legs, sir, I tell you! Krolikowski here can witness to it."

Krolikowski confirmed the fact.

"And, of course, she let her glove fall when she passed me. So I pick it up and say: 'Pardon, sil voo play!' And she says, 'merci bien!' Then I say: 'Please, madame, it's quite all right.' When she hears this, she begins to shout: 'Vooz êtes Polonais' and something else about this nationality business. And Krolikowski here gives me a wink to remind me we are not supposed to say anything about it. So I says to her calmly: 'But no, madame, no Polonais.' But it was too late, for one of them agents, a secret German, approaches us and starts a terrible row with those Rumanian bastards."

The row finished fatally for Pryszczyk. They found a revolver and a military identity card on him, and as his passport, too, was not quite in order, the "engineer" was walked off, under escort, straight to prison. He spent almost two months there, then was transferred to Targu-Jiu under a special guard, robbed of his money, beaten and left thin as a stick.

In spite of this, Pryszczyk did not lose his natural spirits. He did not even bear a grudge against the Rumanians but he was more infuriated with the German secret police than ever before.

"And I don't want to have anything to do with any ambassadors," he declared finally. "When we escaped with you, sir, and with Captain Wasilewski, no ambassador had anything to say and everything went O.K., didn't it?"

I asked him about his plans for the future and expressed some astonishment that he had not attempted to escape yet. With an expressive gesture he pointed to his rags and to his pockets full of holes.

"But since the captain is here, everything will be fine," he assured his companions.

I could not protest, so Pryszczyk became quite enthusiastic and began a laudatory oration in my praise. I left the room after the first few sentences, not wanting to tell him plainly that he was lying, for in this epic he had adopted the very convenient plural form. I did manage to hear, however, how the two of us had evacuated the whole depot of Deblin and how in the thick of the fighting we had crossed the bridge on the Vistula and almost reached the German positions.

Soon afterwards I gave Pryszczyk a decent uniform in exchange for his rags and tried to do something for him,

not only to justify his high opinion of myself and the confidence he had in me but also because I had a plan with regard to him. These favors to him benefited his whole company, for Pryszczyk was a good comrade, cared a lot about his pals and always wanted things done for them. As to the plan, I wanted him to become the driver of Colonel Porfirianu's car.

Porfirianu had a service conveyance, an enormous Chevrolet, which in the hands of his Rumanian chauffeur was constantly out of order and mostly under repair. Porfirianu felt strongly that everything Polish was infinitely better than anything Rumanian. He believed that a Polish driver would know how to cope with the old car but was afraid that he would escape at the first opportunity even if there were two Rumanians on guard. All this would have been of little concern to me were it not for the fact that the Chevrolet had an enormous luggage hold at the back.

A man whom we wanted quickly and safely out of the camp could easily get into the hold, I thought; and in such a hold I could bring a whole mass of civilian clothes into the camp.

So I offered Pryszczyk to Colonel Porfirianu, guaranteeing that he would not escape as long as he held this post. Porfirianu accepted my word of honour.

Pryszczyk himself presented a more difficult problem; he did not want even to hear about it.

"So you have helped me, sir, only because you want me to sit here indefinitely? So now I am to drive this Rumanian monkey and cannot budge because of your word of honour? Where is the sense of it?"

At last he let himself be persuaded but he made me promise that every other passenger in the luggage hold would

be one of his pals. I had to agree to this; what could I do?

"But no silly tricks, Pryszczyk," I said. "You are not to escape without my permission. Will you promise?"

He was indignant.

"What are you saying, sir? Would I make a fool of you, sir, just to pull the leg of the Rumanians? When I am ready to escape you will see a good performance, I promise you, sir. It will be great fun, sir, you will see!"

I must say that he kept his promise. He pulled the leg of the Rumanians as no one else could have done it although the organisation never lacked ideas for single and mass escapes. He made a laughing stock of the Rumanians and it was great fun. It will pass, I am sure, if not into history, at least into the authentic anecdotes of the country.

The men escaped from Targu-Jiu by all possible means. The simplest and most usual method consisted of digging at night through the snow under the barbed wire and crawling out of sight of the closely posted Rumanian sentries. The fugitives used white sheets stolen from the hospital during their flight. They wore, of course, civilian clothes. Then across fields and untrodden paths they reached the town, went into "evacuation" outposts previously organised by us, left the sheets there, received the prepared passports, money and railway tickets, and were forwarded farther on from railway stations chosen by our intelligence.

Apart from this, mass escapes always happened on occasions such as a common march to the public baths or funerals of soldiers who had died in the camp. From such ceremonies only half of those who took part in them came back, in spite of strong Rumanian guards who were there

to prevent escapes. A terrible row would ensue. Porfirianu would forbid any more baths or attendance at funerals, after which complaints would be sent to Bucharest on the "inhuman" treatment of the Poles; the Polish, British and French Embassies would intervene, and everything revert to its normal order. The Polish commanders of groups within the camps impatiently awaited their turn to take their men for a bath or quarrelled about delegations to the funerals of "their" dead. In one week as many as three soldiers died (which in a camp of five thousand men was not so extraordinary as it may appear). An officer who had succeeded in getting rid of a large number of his men stood rubbing his hands happily.

"Well, well, this is quite nice," he said. "If only we could have three funerals every week!"

But Pryszczyk smiled contemptuously when any one mentioned these ordinary escapes in his presence.

"That's no fun," he declared.

Individual exploits ranked higher in his estimation.

To these belonged the "kidnapping" of a whole detachment, some 120 men, by their Polish commander, a young officer who some time earlier (probably not fully realising what he was doing) had signed a declaration that he would not leave Rumania. This officer, in accordance with the regulations, marched his detachment every day to drill exercises. This practice was much admired by Colonel Porfirianu and all the other Rumanians, for the young officer was the only commander who scrupulously conformed to the regulations. The uninitiated Poles wondered why these soldiers wanted to drill, for none but this detachment had any sort of physical training.

After a fortnight we began to change the drill enclosure

into a sports ground and the detachment had no place to drill. The dutiful commander lost no time, led his detachment, singing loudly, through the camp gates, to the meadows. The sentry, seeing a marching formation, did not protest, satisfied that everything was in order since Porfirianu stood near the gate and looked on with satisfaction at the martial appearance of the parading soldiers. He continued to look on while the lieutenant drilled in the fields; "left turn march" and "two first rows turn right," then he nodded his head in appreciation and went to his office. The lieutenant, however, once more ordered "four turn right," then "follow me" and "march"—which was against the rules.

They marched across the field, reached the highway, passed the town, turned into a road and, after a nineteen hours march, found themselves at Turnu-Severin, very close to the Yugoslav frontier. I need not add that not a single one of the soldiers returned to Targu-Jiu. They left quickly for France, for our evacuation office at Turnu-Severin acted very efficiently.

I must say, however, that the lieutenant commanding the detachment did return. He returned via Bucharest where he spent three days, drinking, eating and generally enjoying life. Then he reported dutifully to Porfirianu who almost had a stroke on seeing him, and explained calmly that his detachment had definitely refused to stop their march.

"And you will understand, sir, I am sure, that I could not possibly leave my soldiers. I had to follow them, and follow them I did to the bitter end. I only stopped at the frontier, but as I had signed this unfortunate declaration, sir, here I am. Were it not for this . . ."

"Then what would you do?" shouted Porfirianu.

The lieutenant straightened himself, clicked his heels and said:

"I must say, sir, that I would have followed them to France!"

All these methods of escape must pale into insignificance when compared with the incredible exploit of Pryszczyk. The recklessness of it, when you consider the simplicity of the means he employed in preparing his escape is typical of his deviltry and also of the intelligence of the Rumanian army. For Pryszczyk did escape or, more accurately, did walk out of the camp in his uniform, accompanied by three of his closest friends under the very noses of the Rumanian officers, the commandant of the guards and the sentries who made way for him. No one realised that Pryszczyk was actually escaping. No one tried to stop him. No one even protested.

Beyond doubt the prototype of Pryszczyk's plan was the "kidnapping" of a whole company by its commander. I remember that at the time Pryszczyk was full of praise for the lieutenant.

"Very analogically thought out," he declared, and falling deep in thought, he was silent for a long while, which was for him a very exceptional thing.

I am not sure whether he elaborated his plan then, or whether he did it later; in any case he had to concoct a more complicated plan in circumstances much less favorable, during a period of temporary deterioration in our relations with the Rumanians.

It happened three months after Pryszczyk was entrusted with the driving of Porfirianu's car. One day he came to

me very worried and began to talk about the weather. Spring was near, he said, and there was almost no snow; never in his life had he seen so much mud. He then informed me that spring air was very treacherous for it was full of "rheumatisms" which attack people, and he, Pryszczyk was very prone to "rheumatisms."

I knew of course what was the purpose of this speech so I asked him straight away what was on his mind.

"On my mind?" he wondered, lifting his eyebrows and wrinkling his brow. "Nothing of the kind, sir. I have nothing in particular on my mind, only I think . . . that one fellow here would be very suitable for my place; I mean as chauffeur to Colonel Porfirianu, so I came to ask you to release me."

"You have probably sent away all your cronies, and now you want to go away yourself, don't you?"

He said that it was "nothing of the kind," but it was true. Only Krolikowski, and two more colleagues from Warsaw were still left with him.

"And as for the other hundred and twenty, we did quite a good job of shipping them away, Colonel Porfirianu and I, didn't we, sir?"

He looked at me searchingly and scratched himself behind the ear. It was obvious that one way or another I shouldn't be able to keep him long, so I had to agree. I did, however, tell him that I would need a few days for the formalities connected with the change of chauffeurs.

Somehow I succeeded in arranging the whole thing, a couple of days later a new driver sat at the wheel of Colonel Porfirianu's Chevrolet, and Pryszczyk, much to my amazement, began to work enthusiastically, digging a

draining ditch along the main street of the camp, though nobody asked him to do it.

I saw him at work the next day also and was even more puzzled, but had no time to enquire into it. I noticed that Pryszczyk acted as foreman of the diggers. He had under him not only Krolikowski and the other two men from Warsaw, but also several others. He talked without interruption, criticised, corrected them and generally behaved like a great boss, making a lot of noise and fuss.

The next day I had a few things to talk over with Porfirianu. I sat in his office, the windows of which looked out on the gate and the central street of the camp along which the digging of the ditch was just being finished. The conversation with the colonel went smoothly enough. There still remained to be settled the question of some boards which we were to receive "immediately" as usual, and the delivery of which the Rumanian quartermaster postponed from day to day, promising that "myine diminata"—tomorrow morning—they would certainly be there. I had the impression that Porfirianu had sold these planks, in conspiracy with the quartermaster for he tried hard to change the subject. Nevertheless I wanted the planks badly and was thinking how to put on the pressure, when suddenly my eyes, looking for inspiration through the window, perceived the scene which was taking place below.

Pryszczyk and his three colleagues were "measuring" the street, using for the job a stick with a piece of string some twenty yards long, at the end of which the silver watch belonging to Krolikowski was dangling. The latter drove the stick into the middle of the street, another man stretched the string, a fourth lowered the end of the string

with the dangling watch which acted as a weight and plummet. As for Pryszczyk, he first saw that the string was stretched parallel to the ditch, then stood behind Krolikowski and corrected the position of the stick and lastly ran to the third man, solemnly took the watch in his hand, looked at the time, shook his head, noted something in a copy book and told Krolikowski to drive the stick in again, some distance away.

Porfirianu turned the conversation to a party in the Rumanian officers' mess to which he invited me. I answered that I should be pleased to come and ceased to talk about the boards. I sat there nervously, looking stealthily through the window and with pounding heart waited to see what would happen next. However, I had to go on talking to keep from arousing suspicions in Porfirianu, so I asked who would be at the party and what would be served for dinner—anything to make conversation.

Meanwhile a few officers and N.C.O.'s, sitting in the sun in front of the barracks of the Rumanian command of the camp, came nearer to the road, probably to look closer at the engineering endeavours of Pryszczyk who just then was reaching the gate guarded by the sentinel and corporal on duty. The corporal stood on the only dry spot in a fantastic sea of mud and stared at the clouds, leaning against a transverse plank fixed to the gate, which was thickly reinforced with barbed wire.

I thought that Pryszczyk had not taken into consideration all these accidental items; that he had overestimated his possibilities; that soon a row would start, or that there was some trick in all this, hidden to me, which would begin to work in a moment. Maybe the barracks at the other end of the camp would catch fire. Or perhaps the lorry

with foodstuffs would drive into a post and smash the gate. Some sudden alert would surely occupy the Rumanians' attention.

Nothing of the kind happened. There were no hidden tricks.

At the very moment Porfirianu began to describe how hot "tsujka," a kind of vodka, ought to be prepared, Pryszczyk called aloud from under his measuring stick:

"Hey! Corporal!" and in an expressive gesture bade him to step aside.

The corporal hesitated for a moment; the mud was ankle deep.

He will be caught, I thought; there are the four of them against the whole guard, the officers are present. . . . He has gone too far; this cannot succeed! The corporal will arrest him at any moment.

"Well, hurry, move along, old man," called Pryszczyk resolutely, beginning some mysterious manoeuvres with the watch.

The corporal still hesitated, but suddenly one of the Rumanian officers shouted at him not to interrupt the Poles in their work. Pryszczyk saluted smartly and smiled at the officer. Then he measured the gate crosswise, asked the stupid corporal to help him, opened the gate and began to measure its length. He looked every now and then at the watch, then let it hang on its string, drove the stick into various places, scratched himself behind the ear with the end of his pencil, counted, wrote something, wrinkled his forehead and behaved generally like a surveyor. At last he shook his head contentedly and began to measure again, this time beyond the gate.

He returned once or twice inside the camp enclosure;

he counted the posts of the fence, scolded Krolikowski, then one of the other men, pushed the onlookers aside and was so visibly engrossed in the importance of his task that everyone had to give way to him. He played his part excellently, with a true actor's temperament and the gusto of a Warsaw street-boy.

When at last, still fiddling with the stick, the string and the watch, he walked out of my sight, I was somehow full of misgivings and of curiosity.

What will happen next? They cannot allow them to walk into the town in this silly way! They will tell them to turn back; or ask what is the meaning of all this; or simply stop them.

I was prepared to hear shots at any moment, noise, shouts, a general row and I answered Porfirianu's questions ever less intelligently. At last he noticed my absent-mindedness and seemed to be a little hurt. He looked out of the window and I too looked in the same direction, unable to conceal my embarrassment.

But there was nothing unusual to be seen through the window: the corporal was wiping his boots with some straw, putting one mud covered foot and then the other on the transverse plank in the gate; the sentry walked slowly backward and forth on the other side of the barbed wire, with his rifle hung on his shoulder by a piece of string; the officers sat on a bench beside the ditch, smoking quietly.

I breathed more freely. I said something about a headache to explain my behaviour and thanked the colonel who wanted to give me a lift to town in his Chevrolet.

"I would prefer to walk, sir. The fresh air will do me good."

I left Porfirianu in a hurry, and nodding to the corporal who knew me well, I passed the gate. I saw the four "surveyors" some five hundred feet away, still measuring the road. I hurried toward them; Porfirianu was to pass them in a few moments in his car.

After one minute I realised that I would never be able to warn them; I heard Porfirianu's car just behind me.

I was furious. Why had I refused the colonel's offer? I could have retarded his departure; I could have talked to him longer or occupied his attention while we were passing the fugitives.

Maybe he will stop and ask me once more to drive with him, I thought.

But the Chevrolet passed me without stopping. Porfirianu looked the other way and did not see me at all. I stopped and looked to see what would happen.

The car speeded ahead. The claxon sounded. Pryszczyk and his companion made way for it together with their measuring instruments. The driver slowed down. The four men in uniform stood to attention, saluting smartly. In the open window of the car I had a glimpse of a sleeve with a colonel's stripes. Porfirianu saluted nonchalantly and drove on!

But Pryszczyk's adventures do not end here for on the next day when I arrived as usual at the camp, the first man who reported to see me was Pryszczyk. He knocked on the door, entered the room and, furiously clicking his heels together, stood before me with a gloomy and set expression.

At first I thought that he had been caught on the way to Turnu-Severin, where he and his three companions

were to be sent from Targu-Jiu after their safe arrival there. But Pryszczyk said "nothing of the kind."

"So what has happened? Where are the others—Bison, Krolikowski and the third man—what's his name?"

"They went off," he declared with bitterness. "They got Jewish passports, sir. To prove that they are going to Palestine, as Jewish emigrants."

"And what about you?"

He pulled a terrible face, meant to be a smile of embarrassment.

"I brought back this stick and the string, sir, that the Rumanians should not suspect me . . ." he started, as usual, foolishly and from the wrong end.

"What stick? What on earth are you talking about?"

"The stick we measured the road with. Just then three men were coming back with the guard, some of those who go to town for the mail-bag. So I joined them, and the corporal did not recognise that we were not Bison and Krolikowski and the third man; quite the contrary, he answered our 'good day' very civilly, and so here I am back in the camp."

"But why didn't you go with your pals?" I asked. "Have you changed your mind? Do you want to stay here? Don't you want to go to France any more?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir! Only this passport . . ."

"What passport?"

He produced a sheet folded into four, with a coquettish photograph of him taken in Bucharest, in a dinner jacket, a tie the width of a string and a checked skiing shirt. He handed it to me resignedly.

"How could I have gone with such a passport, sir?" he asked with bitter irony.

I unfolded the document and read: Isidore Buttock. Born on such and such a date at Lida. Religion: Jewish. Profession: Peddler, and so on.

Pryszczyk went on with sincere affliction: "For you see, sir, if I pretended to be the peddler Buttock, this would be the end of me. Such a name would even infuriate a Jew. This is a dirty trick. Imagine! Buttock! Wouldn't the boys laugh at me! So what could I do? I took the passport and came back here again, to ask you not to allow them to treat me like this."

I felt sorry for him. I thought dispassionately that I would not care to travel under such a pseudonym myself.

"Well, what would you like to be named?" I asked him seriously.

Pryszczyk was pleased.

"Ignace Paderewski, if I may, sir!" he said without hesitation.

I had to explain to him patiently that although the Rumanians had difficulties in remembering Polish names, there must be a few who would be familiar with the name of Paderewski. He agreed at long last to Korzeniowski, on condition that his Christian name would be Ignace, and as far as profession was concerned, he might be a mechanic, and not necessarily a civil engineer.

"And what about escaping from here?" I enquired after settling these personal details and making a note in order to supply him with a passport the next day.

"There will be a way," he answered. "I will manage somehow. If you would only give me some civilian rags, there would be plenty of opportunities, sir."

An opportunity arose during the inspection of the camp performed by General Oprescu. This took place, as I have

already mentioned, during a temporary deterioration in our relations with the Rumanians which brought with it a more severe supervision and a more ruthless enforcement of rules by the Rumanian military authorities.

Such periods lasted for several weeks, passed and recurred. Just then, at the beginning of a new wave of hostility towards us, we were plagued with inspections of the internees and frequent roll calls. Severe punishments were administered to the Rumanian guards, N.C.O.'s and officers who did not guard the Poles conscientiously enough or could not resist bribes.

That day the General in person visited the barracks, shouted, gave vent to his displeasure, scolded the aide-de-camps, quarrelled with Colonel Porfirianu and vented his anger on the reddened and well-slapped faces of the sentinels.

At this moment Pryszczyk, clumsily, without wit or talent, tried to slip away in a civilian suit through the gate at which reinforced sentries were posted.

Of course he was caught and brought before the general. The latter looked at him with blazing eyes and asked what was the meaning of this.

"I, sir, am a 'refugiat,'" Pryszczyk declared boldly. "A mechanic by profession. I am looking for work. I thought that maybe you, sir, could find something for me."

The general got even more angry. What cheek! There were enough unemployed in Rumania, and why should he give work to Polish vagabonds? To refugees!

"Throw him out of here!" he ordered. "Who let him in here, behind the barbed wire, without a pass? Men like him smuggle prohibited papers, spirits, civilian clothes and

passports! Have the camp commandant report to me at once! Jail the sentries."

The Rumanian N.C.O. began to explain something and got his face slapped at once. Porfirianu looked more closely at the Polish craftsman, recognised him, I think, in spite of his civilian clothes and was just opening his mouth to say something when the general turned on him with all the impetus of his fury.

"Porfirianu! This is your fault, too! You will be responsible for this! For such a state of affairs! For the bribes! For everything!"

Porfirianu hesitated. Suddenly his eyes glittered shrewdly. He nudged me and blinked, pointing imperceptibly first to the general and then to Pryszczyk.

"Idiot," he said in a whisper. "Il s'enfuira, ce gamin."

"Throw this refugee out, I said!" shouted Oprescu. "At once!"

The order was complied with hurriedly. The "refugee" ran towards the town, and the general went on introducing order and discipline in the camp so as to make escapes impossible.

10. On the Way to France

MY DEPARTURE from Targu-Jiu was accompanied by great pomp, according to all the rules of the Rumanian protocol. There was a farewell supper in the Rumanian officers' mess at which Porfirianu made a speech clearly stressing his belief that if, after the war, Poland and Rumania should have very close neighbourly relations, this would be the result of my activities in the camp. There was a Rumanian delegation to see me off at the station; there was also a farewell address of the Straja Tsari, the youth organization. I was far more impressed, however, by the modest reception in the Polish canteen of the camp and the warm handshakes of the soldiers who had helped me from the very beginning, and also the restrained words of appreciation of Mr. O'Donovan, the president of the Polish Relief Fund, from which I had drained the millions of lei for the needs of the camp.

I was to remain three days in Bucharest, to arrange all the necessary formalities before my departure for France. But I spent a whole month there, for I was assigned some "highly important" duties in the capital.

Unfortunately I cannot disclose what duties they were, though I would like to do so; they would have been the

funniest chapter of this book. Tragic inefficiency and stupidity, comic situations, ridiculous conversations and fantastic projects mingled in such confusion that you must either expire out of sheer despair or break into hysterical laughter.

I chose the latter alternative, but could not stick it for more than a month. During the first days of May, 1940, I rebelled definitely and declared that being an airman I was under the direction of the military authorities who had been summoning me to Paris for some time. I would no longer play a part in an affair which was considered serious only by the author of the incredible project, so I parted angrily with the dignitary who tried to keep me and went to report to the office of the Polish Air Force, two blocks away.

Here there was work and real work. Thousands of airmen, mechanics, pilots, observers and gunners were "emigrating" to France. We had to supply them with documents, provide them with clothes, food, billets, and organise the transports which went westwards by various routes.

In the noisy crowd I found a great many friends and colleagues, and among others Zygmunt, whom I had left at Sarighiol in Dobrudja. Of course we went to "drink a bite," the two of us, and decided to go to France together.

Zygmunt had come to Bucharest from Rosiori di Vede where he had spent several dreary months in the officers' camp, as aide-de-camp to the Polish commandant. He had escaped a few days before in a taxi and was hiding in the capital, expecting to be caught at any moment. I succeeded in persuading him to come with me to a first class restaurant and afterward even to have coffee with me at a fashionable café, but he refused to move to a better hotel and returned

at night to a hotel in the suburbs where he was living without having notified the police and without a passport. And paying dearly for it!

The next day we got the remaining visas, our orders, our tickets, money and—farewell Rumania!

We were given the choice of a land route via Belgrade and Milan or a sea route across the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and chose the latter. Zygmunt left his uniform and a pair of old trousers at the Embassy to be sent to Paris in the diplomatic pouch and regaled me with the picture of the diplomatic courier hurrying from Bucharest to Paris, carrying his trousers carefully across the whole of Jugoslavia and Italy.

We made the seven-hour train trip to Constanza without incident. It was beastly weather, rain and wind, so we got drunk in the evening and went to bed in a cold room of the miserable hotel "Moderne." In the morning we prepared to board the *Transylvania*, the largest ship of the Rumanian merchant fleet. At this Black Sea port our consulate organized mass transports of a hundred to a thousand men; Polish was heard everywhere, and our men were betrayed at once by their clothes, jackets with belts too high and caps that didn't fit. That there had been no mass arrests was due to the fact that the Rumanian police were bribed wholesale.

As for the German agents, our consulate, naturally in collaboration with the Rumanians, made lists of transported men, giving them such unmistakably Jewish first names as Isaac, Abraham, Moses or Saul. The Germans had no doubt that the thousands of Polish citizens leaving Constanza were settlers going to Palestine.

Never did I imagine that I should be sailing to Beirut as one, Abraham Spillman.

When Zygmunt and I saw our first-class double cabin on this fine ship we were overpowered by its elegance. We had stopped at a bar for a bottle of rum with Turkish pepper and were in high spirits, prepared to like everything, but we were not expecting pale yellow upholstery, an orange sofa, comfortable beds, mirrors, mahogany wardrobes, curtains, carpets, not to mention a china chamber pot decorated with pale flowers that harmonized with the color of the walls.

For two weeks we saw tourist snatches of the Near East like a couple of schoolboys on a holiday cruise: three hours in Constantinople; the Bosphorus at dawn, white villas and palaces, white tall pointed towers of minarets and black slim cypresses; Istamboul. The Turkish police at Istamboul relieved Zygmunt of a goose that he was trying to smuggle ashore as a gift to his brother-in-law. The salami-sausage and chocolates in my pockets were not discovered but when Zygmunt's turn came he walked with such mincing steps, clutched his belt so tightly and blushed so furiously that the official grinned. The Turk made a sign with his finger and said something in Turkish which Zygmunt interpreted as "Give me the goose," so he pulled it out of his trousers and handed it over without a word.

Piraeus was sunny, almost hot and very green. There we took on a few Jews going to Haifa, some Greeks bound for Cairo and a number of pretty little dancers going from port to port. Zygmunt was amused at the names of the streets, such as "Hotel," "Phillips" and "Cognac."

Two days later we sailed into the territorial waters of

Egypt, and a green flag with a white half-moon was hoisted on the foremast. From a distance we saw the low sandy beach and the thousands of grey houses of Alexandria. It was hot and the glare was so strong that we had to close our eyes. In the morning we stood alongside and looked at the city from the harbor, for the Egyptians did not want to recognize our Polish passports. Zygmunt, infuriated, watched the Levantine dancers put off in the launch and would not be consoled until at dusk we sailed along the coast so near that we could hear the exotic tones of an African flute.

On a lovely sunny morning we sighted the mountains of Lebanon and about two hours later saw the white buildings of Beirut at their feet. In the harbor the Polish consul and a group of French officers were awaiting us. While we loaded our men on a fleet of motor lorries, they stared at their exotic comrades at arms; the black Senegalese in red trousers, the tiny Indo-Chinese, and the tall Malayans with teeth painted black.

We drove to the barracks on a beautiful road along the sea, passing orange groves, groups of lovely palm trees, tall cacti of strange shapes, enormous flowers surrounded with clusters of richly colored butterflies. On the way we met a caravan of camels starting their journey across the desert.

After settling our soldiers in the barracks we returned to Beirut, to the hotel "De l'Europe" in the Rue du Port. Let it be said at once that the hotel had little in common with Europe. The lounge was a large hall like the courtyard of a block of flats, with a glass roof at the height of the second story. Around it ran two galleries from which the rooms opened. These tile-floored rooms were windowless, and the beds were covered with mosquito-nets.

For a day we toured the city. The European district was not particularly interesting; palm trees, wide streets, modern buildings, big stores: but old Beirut was magnificent. At every street, every mews, every corner, we came upon new and fascinating pictures: walls, buttresses, columns, flat roofs, terraces, barred windows, sharp shadows, bright exotic crowds moving languidly in the blinding glare of the sun, veiled Arab women—Zygmunt says that Mahommet did well to cover their mugs with a veil.

We sat for a long while on the worn steps leading to a steep little street lying in the shadows. At its end, in the blazing sun, was a wide palm-lined avenue along the sea. The tall chocolate colored stems of the palms thrust sharply into a violet sky. At the farther end we could see the Lebanon mountains.

A donkey loaded with fruit brushed past us. Among the palms of the seaside avenue a long row of camels appeared with white silhouettes of Arabs crouching on their backs. Zygmunt was so intoxicated by the colors that he tried to cover his emotion with a facetious phrase.

"What luck," he muttered, "that the monkeys don't sit on the palm trees, elephants don't follow the camels and boa-constrictors don't bask in the sun! I would certainly go mad."

The French proposed that we make an excursion to Baal-bec to visit the ruins of an ancient temple. We left in the morning in buses driven by tiny Annamites who were excellent chauffeurs. The road which climbed nine-thousand-foot mountains, was the main road to Damascus and Baghdad.

Baal-bec appeared before us in the distance, white, surrounded with palm trees and cacti, shining in the hot sun.

The buses stopped in front of the barracks of the Foreign Legion in which a battalion was preparing to leave for France.

Our arrival caused a sensation and especially pleased the soldiers of Polish nationality. They surrounded us and began to ask feverishly where we came from, where we were going and—why the war in Poland was over so quickly. Zygmunt and I wanted to visit the temple but we wanted even more to talk to the Legionaries so, while our colleagues went to admire the ancient columns, frescoes, arches, sculptures and other debris, we went to the inn with the Legionaries. From the windows of the bar, they pointed out, the temple was plainly visible.

Zygmunt stood with one group at the bar and I sat with another at a table. We told the Legionaries as best we could why it all happened and how. Perhaps it was better that we drank not wine but rum. It was somehow easier for us to talk and them to listen.

Later on we exchanged our small glasses for larger ones, and our hats for kepis. But for a straw, the Foreign Legion would have increased its effectives by two gallant, experienced soldiers. Unfortunately Zygmunt was soon tight and began to make speeches in Russian. Furthermore, he insisted that he must go to the temple and see the priestesses of Vesta! Soon we left the pub and all directed our steps toward the ruins, led by Zygmunt singing "Tell me of happiness and delight, O Fatima!"

When we had worked our way through only fifty pages of our Baedeker out of a total of three hundred, we sailed for Marseilles on a big French trans-Atlantic liner which was painted khaki, even the brass rails and metal parts.

The cabin portholes were the only relief—they were painted dark blue.

The passengers were a mixed lot, most of them soldiers, several hundred French, of whom some two hundred were officers. There were also two or three dozen Britishers, a few Negroes in red trousers and a number of Czechs.

There was nothing to do but attend lifeboat drills and lie on wicker chairs on the hot decks holding unintelligible disputes.

"Look at these sea-gulls," one of us would say. "They fly and fly and never get tired."

"Eh, but they do get tired."

"Do they?"

"Of course they do. Look there! One is tired already. It's sitting on the water."

"So it is, but it's running a risk. A crab may pinch its tail and what then?"

"Crab? There aren't any crabs in this sea."

"Of course there are. Don't you see how shallow it is. Have a good look. You can see the bottom."

With such brilliant conversation we whiled away the days as we passed the straits of Messina, brushed past Corsica and Sardinia and at last one day, a little after dawn, saw Marseilles from afar. Excitedly we began to dress. Zygmunt hummed the Marseillaise but he was singing out of tune.

In a few days we would be wearing uniforms again, we would have machines, we would fight. Long live France.

11. La Douce France

LONG LIVE FRANCE! Yes, long live France but not the France of June, 1940. Not that one!

For a long time there were no aircraft for the Poles. For a long time the Poles were distrusted; the French did not believe they would want to fight or know how to fight. Finally in March, 1940, a few fighters arrived as training aircraft for the Polish group at Bron (near Lyons) but there were no machine-guns available for them until the middle of May.

Instead, somebody obstinately spread rumours that whole Polish squadrons with tanks full of petrol (!) were flying over to the German side. Whole squadrons—whereas not a single one was yet in existence!

And later came the fateful month of June. The Poles were divided into groups of two or three and assigned to the defence of industrial objectives. Then they proved that they could fight and fly better than the French; then, at last, they began to be respected, but it was too late.

We were entrusted with the task of defending Lyons, then Paris, then the region north of the Seine. The latter was extensive and difficult, but a number of French squadrons were to help us defend it. We had been accustomed to

facing an enemy many times stronger so—why deny it?—gratitude to the French filled our hearts. We felt like brothers at arms, fighters for the cause of our freedom and theirs, and all that.

If only the machines had been better.

Caudron's "Cyclone" refused to climb. It could develop considerable speed, looked pleasant and shipshape, even the armament was not too bad. But if the enemy flew two thousand feet overhead, it was impossible to attack him.

Then the defects became apparent. The engine overheated, the automatic airscrew governor unit stopped working, the stabilisers and instruments got out of order, the retracting mechanism of the undercarriage got clogged, the engine cowling swelled when at high speed.

At last the control surfaces began to fall off in the air.

The factory sent its mechanics, for—of course—they said that our ground crews were "unskilled." The experts first of all had their "dejeuner," then a short nap, then they had a look at the defects and at last they helplessly shrugged their shoulders.

What could be done?

"Your mechanics are marvellous," said the engineer at the head of the group. "This is not their fault. Quite between ourselves, this is my advice: stop flying the Cyclones."

The French military commission stopped the flights, but the next day the Poles went up for an operational flight; we thought it was better to fly in coffins than not to fly at all.

Much later we learned that the French could have given us the Curtiss or Devoitine machines which were burned some time later in the depots of Bourges and Toulouse. We

could perhaps forget everything else but it is difficult to forget and forgive them this.

Many of us have probably forgotten a lot. I mention here only a few of the facts—without anger and without pain, rather with a smile of compassion. For what else but a smile of indulgence can one have for the phrase in one of the last orders of the French High Command, to the effect that the "Polish soldier has proved worthy of the French soldier's tradition"?

The Polish soldier did not deserve to be likened to the French soldier of 1940. The Poles paid for their honour with their lives. And Warsaw fought to the last, although, like Paris, it was an "open city."

But never mind; these are important matters and it is none of my business to deal with them here.

There are, however, smaller, more personal things, which are more difficult to forget, even though one would like to. The comradeship of the air, the solidarity between airmen is one of them. . . . I cannot help it, but these things still haunt my memory.

Two days before the withdrawal of the Cyclones, our patrol of three aircraft encountered twelve Messerschmitts 110 in the air. Some 4,000 feet lower down a squadron of French Curtisses was on patrol, but not a single Frenchman interrupted his routine work in order to help the Poles. After landing they all unanimously agreed that the Polish patrol shot down four German machines.

I remember that the French command of the fighter group not only did not credit the Poles with the four destroyed Me 110s (the fight took place in the operational area of the Curtiss squadron), but blamed the patrol leader for attacking an enemy force that was four times superior.

The French group commander warned the squadron leaders at briefing about the harmful example of Polish lightheadedness. He quoted another Pole, Major W., who that very day, leading three Cyclones and having behind him only one French formation, of three machines, attacked eight Me 109. The French fighters did not deem it necessary to intervene in a purely Polish scramble and landed on their aerodrome, while the Polish trio has not landed yet. It is doubtful whether it will ever land at all.

The next day after flying on the Cyclones was stopped, a Polish squadron attacked some eighteen Messerschmitts and fifty Dorniers over the Seine near Rouen, expecting no help from the local French patrols, flying here and there. The French again loyally reported that the Poles had shot down five Germans in their region. We had to take eternal leave of three of our colleagues who paid with their lives for this victory. A few days after this battle we had to listen to a communiqué from Paris about "the heroic attack of a Polish squadron of ten machines which engaged a hundred German aircraft and shot down several of them." There was no time to rectify the version.

I remember also the German air raid on Rochefort on June 18th, after the news of the armistice had spread. Two Polish machines took off alone into battle. The Poles at last had good machines: the "Bloch." The French—all of them—looked on from the ground at this last engagement. They looked on with interest, were much impressed, but did not one single thing to help.

One of the officers began to applaud when two Heinkels crashed from under the clouds, shot down by the two Polish madmen. I looked into his eyes. He blushed and went away ashamed.

The squadron won its fifteenth and sixteenth victory on this last day of the French campaign, and the total of German machines shot down by the Poles in France was over fifty.

I wonder whether the French will remember this. Perhaps they will.

On June 23rd, after many adventures which I have partly forgotten because of recurrent attacks of malaria, I found myself in the small port of St. Jean de Luz and boarded the British transport "Arandora Star," which after a voyage lasting two days made port at Liverpool. I was numb as a log and moved mechanically, not noticing what was happening around me.

We landed on a black, smoke covered quay. With effort and resignation I dragged along my suitcase. Suddenly, from somewhere a commotion started and a hum of voices.

"Vive la France!"

I looked around. Down the gangway of a small ship, black with soot, French volunteers were marching. They too had arrived in this Island of the Last Hope.

Long live France! The France that fights on!

12. The Island of Last Hope

As we marched through the streets of Liverpool in fours, the British shouted "Long Live Poland" and held up their thumbs. Every moment new cheers greeted us. Why? What for? I don't know. Anyway we were very touched by this cordial reception after our last experiences and the sight of the gloomy, offended faces of the French.

Our train started from one station and after a few hours stopped at another. We marched again a few miles, to a large park surrounding a lordly estate, in which a whole city of tents was erected. We lived for three days in these tents, and then another train took us from the camp to an R.A.F. station.

There we had to make lists of effectives, divide the flying and ground the personnel into groups and sub-groups and such work. At last my group—in yet another train—went to a town by the sea. This was towards the end of August.

It was an ugly town, stretching along the sea front, built of red brick, with a magnificent "pleasure beach" and an assortment of innumerable hotels in which we were billeted. We had no occupation apart from the morning roll-calls of the detachments and nothing much was happening.

From London came rumours about the re-organisation of our Air Force in Great Britain. What we wanted was to fly and to fight.

In the end, our Air Force was organised better and quicker than in France, but time at the seaside weighed heavily on us. That is probably why our first impressions of England and the English were rather too critical. We did not know the language, and even had we spoken it, it would have been difficult to find a common speech with people who knew even less about Poland and ourselves than we did about Great Britain and the British.

From my notebook I transcribe some of my first impressions of this period:

"The British would probably be terribly bored during their week-ends, were it not for the Pleasure Beach. There you can make friends with fair English and red-haired Irish girls. When it grows dark, couples sit in embrace on the benches facing the sea, while lonesome Polish Lovelaces sit in front of the closed doors of their boarding houses.

"There are other pleasures on the beach in addition to making love to girls who are spending their holidays here; and one of them is the gambling machines. These are exciting both for the British and the Poles. For one penny you may win a pair of cuff-links, a bottle of 'Eau de Cologne' or five cigarettes. For threepence, even a watch. Zygmunt is of course a master at these games. Today he won two ostriches, a box of powder, a china ink-stand and a salt-cellar which he generously offered to our landlady, for the top did not screw on tightly.

"The sea is rough; it spits foam which falls in clusters all over the wide avenue. The waves roll in, the wind

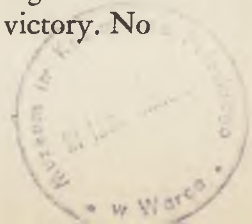
lashes the spray from their tops and scatters it on the red pavements. Sea-gulls, like buckles clasping the steel-blue sky, lie in the stream of the gale, bending their elastic wings. The tramway wires hiss, whistle and buzz. The wind howls in the chimney, but the British are bathing. Brrr!

"The British. How far removed from reality were our ideas about them! Or perhaps what we knew about them was merely a legend from olden, more lively times. In any case we are rather disappointed.

"But we are guests here. I am not going to speak ill of our hosts. Instead I am thinking of Poland. I am thinking about it not with the warm emotions of a Pole for his country, but with pride, with an ever growing respect for my own people: for the workers who work so splendidly; for the shoemakers who know how to make good shoes; for the tailors who make excellent clothes, for all these craftsmen, among the best in the world, capable, industrious, intelligent. For the peasants who toil and love their land; for the engineers who are really good technicians; for architects who are artists; for the tradesmen, friendly, efficient, modern; for waiters, quick, amiable, able to remember many different orders at once, for cooks who have taste; for dentists who know how to cure teeth, and not only pull them out or make false ones; for gardeners growing vegetables and fruit; for all working people.

"It is not we alone who can learn from the British. They, I think, could learn quite a lot from us.

"This Island of the Last Hope fights on alone after the fall of France. They take calmly the bombings of the German Luftwaffe because they are certain of victory. No



one here cares a hoot about the war of nerves or about German propaganda. And the Royal Air Force is magnificent!

"And besides, people here are kind to each other, smiling easily, forgiving us, the foreigners, the innumerable silly faux pas and the thousand transgressions that we commit daily. Here the cats, dogs and birds have confidence in man; they are never afraid, for no one will harm them. The honesty of the British is amazing, their friendliness, heart-winning. And this is what *we* must learn from them."

Zygmunt is the only one who does not want to learn anything. Scornfully and pessimistically he looks at this Island of the Last Hope. Once, when he was in a brighter mood, he did admit that in England there are three things better than ours in Poland—tea, roads and the sea all around.

"But if Poland were in England," he quickly added, "we would have even better tea and still better roads. And of course, there wouldn't be any Germans at all."

13. Genevieve's Sting

Time passed. During the windy and rainy English summer an imitation sun made rare appearances. On these occasions it was "a lovely day" all the natives informed me, beginning with my landlady, Mrs. Stevens, and ending with the tram conductress and the attendant at the Casino. The English summer was slowly heading for autumn and the faded sky took on a permanent cover of windswept clouds. The sea was breaking against the wall of the Promenade; the Pleasure Beach was deserted on week-days, but crowded as usual during week-ends; the four trees in Southern Square, tousled by the wind, ill-treated and cold, began to shed their leaves; in the fire-place of the sitting room coal was burning and filling the whole boarding house with smoke. From a cupboard Mrs. Stevens pulled her fur, smelling of moth-balls and hung it in the bathroom to air.

Meanwhile we had news about the formation of new Polish bomber and fighter squadrons. Every day we would meet a few of our younger colleagues, all smiles, leaving for their stations. The older men, such as I—close on or over forty—looked at them with envy, or thanked God that they were not allowed to fly, according to their temperaments.

I belonged to the first category, though I had little hope. After twenty-two years of piloting, after my last accident in the September campaign in Poland I was considered suitable only for instructing others. I was promised a "post" as instructor, and told to wait until a new training center for pilots was organized.

Zygmunt left rather suddenly and unexpectedly. He did not even say goodbye, and it wasn't until a week later that I received a letter from him.

"My dear Herbert! Judging by the state of my kidneys, I expected an order running more or less like this: Captain-observer Zygmunt W. assigned to hospital so and so for cure. Meanwhile an order came, running thus: Pilot-officer Zygmunt W. is posted for duty to a bomber unit at Bramcote, where he will report on . . . etc. I was rather puzzled to be addressed as a "Pilot officer" but it proved to be a British rank, corresponding to the Polish second lieutenant, for in the R.A.F. the ranks correspond to duties.

"Now I think that, as it were, they overestimated me, but to start with, being a good soldier, I lost weight round my hips, combed my hair up, packed my suit-case and reported 'at the front.' We are on the prowl near one of the large industrial cities and we keep quiet as mice in their holes. For the time being the Germans leave us alone, but they fly all around us every night. There is much fire; the noise is terrific, and worst of all is the incessant roar of engines overhead. For the first two nights I could not sleep at all, but now I have invented an excellent means of defying the enemy; I turn on the taps of my basin, go to bed and quietly fall asleep, dreaming of rivulets and picturesque waterfalls.

"Everything would be all right if it weren't for the

shortcomings of my English. I am deputising for an Englishman who is in charge of equipment, but I cannot talk with him properly. I know quite a number of technical terms; I know what is the English word for screw, spring and pin; but I don't know what they say for 'give me a kiss,' a 'cutlet' and 'go to hell'—important words without which life.is difficult to bear."

The second letter from Zygmunt arrived in December, from an operational airfield, but this, too, sounded pessimistic. Zygmunt wrote that finally they had found another genius in the technicalities of equipment to take his place, and he had become a navigator. Even so he did not fly on operational duties, for the squadron was still being organised, and the weather conditions were rather bad, lastly, he had met Pryszczyk again. Pryszczyk had passed a training course for mechanics, had learned to swear and flirt in English (by private tuition) and was one of the ground crew assigned to Zygmunt's machine.

The letter ended; "I hope the coming holidays will not be too sad for you. I am feeling rather low; for the last two weeks we have been sitting here doing nothing. My colleagues rejoice in the capture of Sidi Barrani. I think, however, that this Barrani business will have about as much bearing on our future as a successful catch of salmon in the waters of Alaska. And you—what do you think? I am sick of being here alone, without you. I have always dreamt of having a liberal profession. I would like to purchase an accordion and learn to play duets. I am writing about this because we need a rear gunner for the crew of our bomber. Perhaps you would like to chuck your promised instructor's job and come?"

The minute I read the last sentence of the letter I began

taking steps to get the job. This was none too easy. First of all, it was an N.C.O.'s job, and I was an old flight lieutenant; secondly, there were about twenty candidates for the post. But at last, after many weeks of pulling wires, I received my orders, went to S., and have been here for the last month.

I don't play the guitar, or the ocarina, or any other instrument, so we do not play duets with Zygmunt. He has, however, purchased an accordian which helps him a lot in his courting of our squadron's godmother, "Miss Lord," as she was nicknamed by Sergeant Koza, our wireless operator, historian and poet.

Here, I think, I must describe the crew of the Wellington "Genevieve," for this is what we call our old twin-engined machine.

As I have already mentioned Zygmunt more than once, I will begin with him. He is the oldest of us—forty-two—and served in the last war. He knows the military profession by heart; he learned the art of being lazy in the infantry, and during the long period of his service in the Air Force has become expert in it, but he is, nevertheless, one of the best air observers I have ever come across. He is a big man, rather broad-hipped. His pock-marked face is not in any way striking but his eyes are merry, and he has an easy pleasant smile. Now he is in love with "Miss Lord," in partnership with Goral, who is a first class lady-killer.

Goral would be really dangerous if he could sing, for he wears his hair long, like an artist, and has a sad romantic face. But women—Englishwomen especially—are fond of singing. He and "Miss Lord" and Zygmunt are fond of sitting in the darkness near the fireplace in the mess; Zygmunt plays his accordion and alternately he and Goral assure the

girl that "life is so beautiful." Goral is our commander on board Genevieve and the first pilot of our crew.

Our second pilot is Mercury who in civil life was an agent of some business firm in Gdynia. He is—as he says himself—a "little over average height" and has bandy legs and arms like an orang-outang. His rather long business career has washed all traces of romanticism away from him. Only his thinning reddish hair and his goat's eyes led one to suspect that he, too, must have had a stormy and disturbed youth. Now he regards women as so many trees in a wood. But how he can drink! After he has had a few double ones he recalls the brighter pages of his past.

Sergeant Koza has had a beautiful and rich life, and a service book full of exploits. He is very fond of bodily pleasures and is popular in the region of S. He is a bit of a dandy, too, for he presses his trousers under the mattress. He also represents the intellectual life of the squadron. He writes sonnets and keeps a diary, in order to leave to posterity some of his less palpable possessions, as he spends all his money on women, wine and song. The sonnets are pretty rotten, but the diary is quite good. With radiotelegraphy he is a wizard.

Buyak our gunner, cadet-officer, is not such a grim figure as the rest of us. He has a ready tongue and is an optimist, Pryszczyk says that "unfortunate are the parents whose children serve under Joe Buyak," for this man is purity itself, spiritual and bodily alike, and he is madly in love with his fiancée who has remained in Poland. Gin, whisky or sherry are all one to him, ginger beer makes him dizzy and he does not drink anything but tea. They say that he used to be quite normal in the past, but military life has utterly corrupted him.

Last, is the author, the rear gunner of Genevieve. Just imagine a long and bony man, not quite decrepit, rather silent; on the whole with no striking characteristics.

Then there is the ground crew. There are six of them, just as there are six of us; six permanent ones, not counting the "temporaries" such as electricians and fitter armourers. Sergeant Talaga I know, he used to be an engineer in my Flight. The two engine mechanics and the two Flight riggers are from Vilna, and I have not yet looked at them properly. I only know that when there is nothing to do no one can surpass them in avoiding work; but when the need arises, our Genevieve has the most reliable, I would even say, the most loving care. Then, of course, there is Pryszczyk whom I have described.

We work in close cooperation and contact with the British. The service cooperation has, for some time past, given excellent results in the bombing of German occupied Europe, and the social cooperation, it seems, will give Great Britain quite a number of new citizens, in spite of the fact that the Polish member in the partnership is inclined to view matrimony with ill-concealed coolness. More than one man however would like to marry Miss Lord, but others will certainly try to prevent this, for she is in a class by herself. Besides, no one wants the squadron to lose its godmother. And as for the other girls, they try hard to sweeten the lives of our warriors, but as Koza picturesquely expresses it, "this is English saccharine, and not Polish sugar."

Our alliance with the British Army has another basis, a much more serious one. There are in the squadron a number of British officers who are on the operational and administrative staff, and we have formed a real friendship

with them. Sometimes we have difficulty in understanding their slow way of thinking and their lack of imagination. They differ from us, but we try hard to enliven them and try also to make certain that they shall retain something more than a memory of us as romantic and fiery soldiers without a country. And we will learn from our British colleagues some of their great virtues in which we are lacking, particularly perseverance and power of resistance.

We talk to them about Poland, about ourselves and our shortcomings, quite openly and frankly. We buy them English books about our country and teach them our history as well we can, speaking in our ridiculous English, but straight from our hearts. Our British friends worry along with us about our families who have remained in Poland, are nervous when we are on operations, are glad when we come back and sad when we don't return—in quite an un-British way. Maybe they have softened under our influence; or perhaps they have always been like this.

I felt self-conscious before my first bombing operation. We were to fly over Boulogne, a mere 420 miles there and back, out of which only 100 miles would be over the Channel and the French coast. But for the first time in my life somebody else was to be at the controls; for the first time I was to defend my aircraft by the fire of machine-guns placed in its very rear, at the end of the tail, in a revolving turret. And in addition, after briefing, Zygmunt behaved as if he were looking for bridge partners, instead of sitting down to work out the route, which made me very angry. The navigators of the five remaining machines sat over their maps, traced something, calculated, were deep in thought. Zygmunt just strolled between the long tables of

the operation room, stopped and talked to one or another, then read a newspaper, dozed off near the fireplace, and at last began to teach himself the German words for bandit, swine, thief, thug and gangster. Only after having mastered this information did he jot a few figures on the margin of a newspaper, look over someone's shoulder at a map and then declare that he was ready.

Darkness fell just then, so, we took our bags of dry fruit and chocolate and went to the aerodrome.

Genevieve stood first in the file, looking like a pregnant woman, low over the ground, her belly heavy with bombs. Talaga crept from the cabin and sat on the swollen tire. Every now and then he looked at us, then at the starting line where the last lights were lit. When we began to climb into the machine, he got up and came close. I think he was very excited; he wanted to say something and didn't know how. He stretched out his arm to help us climb in, to hold us, and again withdrew it half way; would we mind?

He pressed my arm above the elbow. Then I felt how this strong, knotty hand trembled and saw in the darkness the worried look on his face. I stopped for a moment and looked at him. He let me go at once.

"All right, sir, all right."

I leaned on his broad shoulder and dived into the cabin. I saw his face through the square opening; then someone pushed away the steps and the door shut with a bang, separating us for four hours from the outside world. Getting caught in the joints of the fuselage, the ribs, the bonds and spars I reached my post just as the engine puffed, cackled and started. Close upon it the starboard responded, and then together they shook the whole fuselage in a tremor of vibration.

Folded in two like a penknife I settled in my turret, switched on the microphone and the earphones, found the end of the oxygen apparatus by touch and heard the signal to take off.

We took off with a rattling and jarring of the skids, with a smacking and beating of the tail elevators, as if Genevieve were in the last stages of rheumatism that had affected all her joints. Goral was turning right on the port engine, then he started both. I saw through the transparent turret the figures of the mechanics, dissolving in darkness. Each of them held his thumbs up.

"Good luck!"

As we rushed past, the red light on the roof of the hangar flashed warningly, a motor-car blinked with its squinting lights, the signal of a torch glowed for a second. Turn to start!

"Hello, hello, Genevieve."

The last sentence, always the same before taking off, and again: "Good luck!"

Genevieve makes an effort, groans, wails, roars and trembles. We are air borne and after a little while we turn about. The sky, still light in the west, heels, as if it wants to look into the cockpit, but Genevieve sweeps with her tail (and myself) over the horizon and climbs up after the turn.

"We take the course to the target" Mercury reports, then a long silence falls. This silence seems particularly strange to me. As a pilot I was used to talking all the time, not with people, yet it was a conversation of a kind; with the dials of the distribution board, with the engine, the compass, the map. The pilot, wireless operator, navigator and front gunner have somebody to talk to, and have a

subject. The rear gunner rarely has either, especially in the flight to the target. The former see what is happening in the direction of the flight, and the wireless operator is connected with the earth by his wavelength, but the rear gunner acts as a sentry; he constantly keeps watch. Besides he is alone, far from the rest of the crew and only in moments of attack from the air does he become indispensable. He has something to say only immediately after bombing when he reports on the results.

The fighter pilot is the most important one in the flying team. The engine, the wings, the controls, the machine guns and cannon are the organs he uses. He has full control of them, he makes turns, he points one of his wings landwards and the other towards the zenith of the sky, he draws a roll and makes a loop, he falls down, he makes a spin, he zooms up.

But I—the rear gunner?

It seems to me now that I am part of the organism of this Wellington, this powerful flying beast. Its brain is the navigator. Its nerve centre, coordinating its movements, is the pilot. The wireless operator is the organ of hearing. The front gunner, its sight. I am the sting in the tail; the organ of defence against the attack of other similar creatures.

No, I do not feel a separate, self-contained unit any more; I am merely *a part*. I am an organ, just as a sting is the organ of a bee. It is not I who am going on an operation, but Genevieve. Genevieve who, consists of every one of us.

This feeling is strange and very new; inhuman in a way. It is against nature; against my nature, the nature of a pilot. The last time, in Poland, I possessed a machine. Now Gene-

vieve possesses me—her back gunner. She is a whole; I am merely a fragment, not even the most important one; a fragment vital only at times. One can probably get used to it. One must not even notice it. Goral for instance says "This good old Genevieve" and treats the beast like a tame animal which carries the whole crew, the bombs and him, Goral, over the target, obedient to the pilot's will.

But I, in this first operation, cannot think of Genevieve in these terms. For me she lives her separate life. And it is not we who are flying over Boulogne; it is she making use of us; of us, who are her brain, her nerves, her sight, her hearing—and her sting.

From time to time I hear Zygmunt naming the unseen towns, over which we are passing in the deep impenetrable darkness: Ely, Cambridge. . . . Then London and Chatham.

A little later Buyak, Genevieve's eye, says, as if speaking directly to her: "We are over the Channel. The sea is underneath."

After a while the Wellington recalls my existence and asks, in Goral's voice: "Herbert, are you awake?"

"Yes, I am," I answer with a lump in my throat.

"Could you fire your 'spittoons' to see how they work?"

I comply. I am performing the functions of its organism.

The short dry rattle of a burst—this is my voice; a quiver of the twin machine-guns and a half-turn of the turret; left, right—this is my action—the action of the sting.

But what is this? A shadow, blacker than the night, looms up above me and to the left. It vanishes and is there again straight opposite, behind Genevieve's tail.

Is it there really?

Yes, it is! It comes nearer! it is growing!

Quite mechanically, or perhaps, instinctively, I lift the coupled barrels of the machine guns to its height and at the same time I see four little tongues of fire showing as if from the snouts of four lizards sitting in a row before me.

Correction? Unnecessary!

I press the trigger, and follow the shadow and the fire. A second passes, then two seconds . . . three. . . . The lizards have closed their snouts, the shadow has dispersed and disappeared.

"What was it?" asks Goral. "A fighter?"

"Probably," I say hoarsely.

"And what happened?"

"It went away after the first burst."

"As usual," Zygmunt grunts; I do not know whether with real or feigned boredom.

And again a long silence. Again the calm, even throb of the engines. Only I—the aircraft's sting, its organ of defence—I am still trembling with emotion. Maybe just like the sting of a wasp or a scorpion?

Somebody reads the petrol gauge, and then Mercury announces: "Fifteen thousand feet."

"The coast!" shouts Buyak from the front turret. "The coast!" His voice rings in the earphones.

Then events follow each other with such speed that in one short moment they compensate us for the long hours of waiting for something to happen.

"Course for bombing, turn, correction."

"Five degrees to the right. Keep it up. All right." The roar of the engines stops, the air whistles against the sides.

"Not even a single searchlight," says Buyak.

The artillery is silent; maybe this is the region of the fighters?

"We are going over basin three," says Zygmunt, lying on his belly with his eyes glued to the sight.

I look down; we are flying, it would seem, parallel to the coast. Where does he see the basin?

Yes, there is something that looks like a port. Now some indistinct spindle-shaped forms, like grains of corn . . .

Of course; these are the barges and ships the Germans are concentrating for the invasion.

"Attention," groans Zygmunt.

I hold my breath.

"Bombs away!"

One, two, three, four, five . . . Why don't I hear anything?

Six . . . seven . . . Here they are!

The Spirit of Destruction passed over earth and water! Wherever it trod the earth sprouted with light, fire, smoke! And then the night wailed with the sound of explosions and the artillery began to rage.

The blast of its shells reached the wings of our machine; she shuddered once or twice, jumped up, pancaked, turned on the wing, then went on gliding silently over the more and more luminous fires which were reflected in the dark, shining water below the quadrangles of the docks and between the crowded barges.

Suddenly someone began to speak in German. Speak? No, abuse. The stream of words was flowing quickly through the inter-com, swelling with passion, then rushing down in a waterfall of invective.

I was so taken aback by this truly devilish German litany that at first I thought it was sent up from the German-occupied French land, together with the gunfire. But later on the German abuse was followed by just as juicy Polish

and French words and at last, panting with fury, the voice declared:

"Know, you swine, that these bombs were dropped by Poles—and may God punish all of you, without exception!"

This was Zygmunt announcing our arrival to the German garrison of the port. Koza, having wired our set for transmission, looked at him as though he were bewitched. I wanted to laugh, to shout, to jump—and to scold as well. But just then I hear Buyak's voice:

"Careful, sir: the searchlights!"

I turn sharply, hitting myself on the chin, and grasp the handles of the guns.

From down below, two crossed streams of white light are piercing the darkness.

I try to sit more comfortably and turn the turret sharply to the left.

There is one; the light glitters on the barrels, it hurts my eyes.

I fire—nothing happens.

A second, a third squirt—nothing.

Too small a correction—the thought flashes through my mind. I try again and fire, taking a deep breath, and pressing, pressing . . .

"It went out!" cries Zygmunt.

So it did. Perhaps not because I hit it. You can never be sure.

Meanwhile the engines begin to purr and the fires we have started are fading behind us. I look at them all the time, my emotion cooling off as we near the English coast.

After twenty-five minutes we pass over Dover. Over

Boulogne we can still see the glare of fire, and Genevieve, the witch, gives roars of pleasure with both her engines.

I look at my watch; it is getting on toward midnight. Among the clouds under which we are carried in gusts of wind, stars shine feebly. It is raining, I think.

In the cabin it is cold. The cold creeps under my collar, and wanders down my back and my arms. My hands and feet are freezing.

Oh how I wish the aerodrome was nearer!

But the way back seems longer than the way to the target; in addition we have a north-westerly wind.

Goral again begins to ask me and Buyak whether we are asleep.

Actually I am very sleepy and would go to sleep if it weren't for the inner nervous vibration after these first emotions of a night operation.

Again half an hour passes and at last Zygmunt says: "The aerodrome is near."

"I cannot see anything," says Buyak. And adds almost at once: "There it is!"

Genevieve swerves in an arc of 270 degrees, lets down the paws of her undercarriage, opens the wing flaps and begins to sink. At the very bottom of darkness a stream of light appears—the landing area floodlight.

We land with the inevitable clatter of the whole machine, as if a house was falling in ruins, and we taxi, following the winking light which is guiding us to our usual parking place.

From the dark the corner of the wooden hut emerges now, and the fir tree next to it. Port engine, starboard engine, brakes! Genevieve's tail jumps over mole-hills, is

thrown about, then stops. The tired motors slow down, then stop one after the other, and I can hear Talaga's voice: "Steps! Quickly!"

I tear myself away from the organism of the machine. I undo the cable of the earphones, put in its place the navel-string of the oxygen apparatus, picket down the machine guns . . .

We get out cold and in high spirits; I, at the tail, with stiff legs, feeling as if I had soda-water in my muscles and veins. I see Talaga counting us with his finger and I feel him touching me.

"Everybody all right, sir?" he asks in a stifled voice.

"Yes, yes. Everything O.K.," I answer, clattering melodiously with my teeth.

"And the machine?"

Goral says the machine is fine, and I can see how the faces of the mechanics light up in a smile of pride and happiness. This is their merit!

Then all of the crew surround me and everybody asks how I liked it. I answer more or less coherently and then all of us begin to relate our impressions. At last the bus comes along; we climb into it and are driven to the "intelligence" to make a report.

Then hot cocoa, a cigarette and—to bed!

14. Sergeant Prot, Night Fighter

Boulogne for the second time; Calais; again Boulogne, Brest, Ostend; a week of bad weather and—again Boulogne, and Brest and Le Havre . . . Genevieve takes off heavily in darkness, flies, finds her way across cloud, reflects rays of moonlight in the glass-panes of her turrets, wriggles away from the searchlights, evades the flak barrage, drops her bombs and—returns.

One may get used to it. One can believe that this will always be so, though other crews have been wounded and killed, and sometimes failed to return.

"Sophie" lost her rear gunner over Brest; "Helen" brought two wounded back from Calais; "Cicely" did not return from Bremen. . . .

Only in her tenth flight with us did Genevieve have to make a forced landing. She landed without accident near the English coast, on one of the fighter aerodromes. There was something wrong with the oil feed pipes. We dropped our bombs into the sea instead of on the Ruhr, and Goral turned back cursing the engine mechanics, Talaga and British equipment. Zygmunt alone of the whole crew kept an Olympian calm; according to him, the responsibility for the mishap rested with a certain priest who on that day had turned up at the aerodrome; a priest, as everybody knows,

brings bad luck, so something had to happen. And we should be grateful to be out of it so cheaply.

Finally, even Goral's anger passed when he succeeded in landing Genevieve smoothly and when, to the pleasant surprise of the whole crew, we heard in pitch darkness, a Polish voice demanding "Who the hell comes here at night?"

It appeared that we had landed on a Polish night fighter station and that it would be possible to repair the damage to our machine within a few hours. Goral stayed in the machine; Zygmunt and the others went to the mess, and I —I met Sergeant Prot.

It was one of these unexpected meetings, which seem suddenly to turn back a great number of closely filled pages of one's life and take one straight into the past—not so very distant, but separated from the present, cut off by a number of events completely different from those that belonged to the past.

When I saw him in the hut, this turning back to the last years before the war was so sudden that for a long while I could not master my emotions. I shook Prot's hand without a word, trying to bring some order into my thoughts, to stop the memories and the pictures which were stirred. Somewhere outside me they rushed like wind, sweeping away with them my whole consciousness.

But at last I succeeded in connecting the past with the present. We began to talk in undertones, separated from the rest of the world—or so it seemed to me—by the immaterial wall of common feelings.

"News from Poland?" Prot repeated the last words of my question. "News from Poland; you mean from my people?"

I nodded and looked more carefully at his face, aged somewhat, the familiar scar across the chin, the distinct furrows running in an arc from his nostrils to the corner of his lips.

He wrinkled his brows and fell deep in thought, as if the question concerned distant and ancient matters which were first to be conjured up from memory before they could be discussed.

I was puzzled. I knew Sergeant Prot's wife and their two children in Deblin. She was a school teacher. His boy was then about three, and the girl—Sophie, if I rightly remember—yes, Sophie, after her mother—was four or five. This Sophie, Prot loved most. More than his wife and his son. More than can be expressed.

Mrs. Prot sometimes came to see us, to ask my wife for advice about knitting. Unintelligible terms they spoke; purl, knit, moss-stitch, cast off, shape . . . She was pretty, quiet and kind. Under her influence Prot, who as bachelor had been fond of lifting his elbow and making occasional rows, became a model N.C.O. The children were always clean and nicely dressed. I was fond of this family and especially valued Prot as one of the best instructors in the training centre where I myself was chief pilot.

And now it seemed to me that he had forgotten them.

He sat before me on a soldier's bed in the corner of the hut. facing the light of a bulb under a dusty tin shade, and looked with a frown towards four pilots who were playing bridge at a small, rickety table. He looked and probably did not see them at all, just as he did not notice the two other airmen stretched on the neighbouring beds. They, to be sure, did not take any notice of us. Their unbuttoned overalls hung on them in folds, and the yellow rubber Mae-

Wests deformed their figures, indistinct in the semi-darkness of this hut where "Flight B" awaited the order to take off.

The two men on the beds looked at the low ceiling on which flies walked sleepily and spiders hung. The other four smoked and played intently, uttering every now and then the magic words of the bridge liturgy. And Prot looked beyond them, far away, and did not answer my question, as if he were unable to visualise those about whom I had asked him.

I did not speak. You can never tell what is hidden behind a silence of this sort. Despair? Forgetfulness and indifference? A tragedy of which you know nothing? Maybe simply an unwillingness to talk about these things with a man you used to know at a time when everything was different?

"What sort of news can I have, sir?" he said suddenly in a low hoarse voice. "Do you remember, sir, that meadow in the park which we had to cross on our way to the river?" He took a deep breath as if he wanted to tell me everything at once.

"I remember," I answered softly, and he held his breath and looked straight into my eyes, searchingly now, as if waiting for me to visualise that meadow.

But I remembered it perfectly. It spread wide, was wet, covered with tall grass which no one cared to mow, and full of flowers. Lapwings and our aircraft flew over it, and children always went there in summer to pick flowers and make bouquets and wreaths. Farther on were the tilled fields of the farmers, and beyond them, between sandy banks and shallows, flowed the river, its banks overgrown with reeds. There we used to bathe.

"This was on September 3rd," Prot started again. "On September 3rd, a Sunday. Deblin was so heavily bombed by then that it no longer had any military value. Only a few houses were left intact. Among them the one where you, sir, used to live, next to our house. In the early morning we collected our men and organised our squadrons afresh, and about noon our families began to return from Masow, from Golab and from wherever they had taken shelter from the bombs. I went to fetch my family and wanted to look for a place for them to settle, because we were shortly to be moved from Deblin. I was just crossing this meadow, sir, when I saw all three of them in the distance. Sophie saw me too, and began to run toward me. And then a formation of Dorniers came along—some thirty of them—and began to fly over the field! We all stopped on the spot; no one knew what to do—it was so sudden. Between me and my family there was a distance of about 500 yards. Sophie was running towards me in a little red frock . . ."

He looked at me again, as if wanting to make sure that I was listening. I offered him my cigarette case; he took a cigarette and pressed it between his fingers.

"One of these bloody bastards saw her, for they were flying low, at less than a thousand feet. He dived on the meadow and began to fire with his front machine-guns. He was coming lower, just over Sophie, and I felt as if someone had scorched me. Out of breath, unable to cry, I could only look . . . I looked on, until she fell. How I have survived it, I promise you, sir, I do not know. Even now it sometimes seem to me it is not true. . . ."

He looked again across the hut to somewhere very far, and I had the feeling that he was not really here although he

was sitting in front of me and very slowly lifting his cigarette to his lips. He inhaled deeply and came back; he looked again into my eyes.

"I had to leave," he said apologetically. "Those were the orders. I hardly had time to bury her; the burial was without a priest."

"And your wife?" I could not help asking. "And your son?" He spread his arms, turning his head to one side and shrugging.

"I don't know," he whispered so softly that if it were not for the movements of his lips, I would not have understood what he said.

We again smoked in silence. I did not know what to say, nor what to do. Besides—what could I say, or do?

I had not heard anything about him for a long time. Only here, in this night fighter squadron in Great Britain did I learn that Prot was alive, and that he was one of our best pilots. He had shot down at night nine German machines, apart from the ones he shot down in daylight over France and in the autumn during the Battle of London.

I wanted to ask him about his night flights, but after these words of his, I had no courage to ask him anything.

After a while he began to speak again. First of all slowly, with interruptions, as if it were difficult for him to turn back to that meadow on the River Wieprz, where a German pilot had killed his child—then more coherently and without those moments of absent-mindedness.

"I finished off quite a lot of them, sir. Not in Poland, for there was precious little to fly in. But in France, and here, last year. I did not spare myself and yet I am still alive. Maybe I will be able to return one day—to the grave in the cemetery at Deblin. . . . Then I was posted to a night

fighter squadron. I had difficulties at the beginning and I wanted to go back to flying in daylight, for I somehow could not hit any Germans. But one can learn everything, and now it is all right. I even prefer the night hunts; you can advance closer and attack the Hun from twenty yards."

He stopped, for at the table a quarrel flared up about a bridge move. He suddenly became animated, lit a new cigarette and, moving nearer to me, began in a completely different manner:

"I remember my first encounter at night, after many failures. You know best, sir, how it feels when a man cannot understand how to do things in the air. Just like a young pilot who doesn't know yet how to land, or how to take off. It seems that he will never understand it, though you do your utmost to explain things to him. And suddenly an inspiration comes—once—and afterwards everything seems easy and simple."

I nodded, and he sat deeper in his chair and resting his elbows on his knees, smiled for the first time. He smiled not at me, but probably at his thoughts, as he used to smile in the old days when he wanted to tell me something he considered interesting. I remember that he used to smile like this when as a young instructor he confided in me his "discoveries" in methods of training and asked what I thought of them. I liked to listen to his confidences and to observe the ripening in him of the true talent of a pilot. And I think that he, too, was fond of me, for I had never tried to impress him, but tried to help him in thinking independently.

Now he smiled in the same way and I—as in the past—looked at him with encouragement and attention.

"We took off with Pilot-officer Rutecki; I don't think

you have met him, sir, for he is a young pilot, of the 1939 class. He is the one playing bridge over there, with his back to us. So we took off late at night, or rather at two in the morning. There was no moon, but plenty of stars, and the air was clear. I hardly had time to draw in the undercarriage and to report by wireless to the station when they gave me the course and the altitude; four thousand feet. We began to climb. At six thousand, a new course, with a change of forty-five degrees. At ten thousand again, a change of ninety degrees. We reached fourteen thousand when they told us to turn by one hundred eighty degrees. All right. 'Keep to the level.' We were flying and flying and nothing happened. After ten minutes I heard Rutecki reporting:

" 'Hallo, Cora, Cora.—Red section, Flight B. We have the right course and altitude. Nothing in sight. What are we to do? Reception . . . reception . . .'

"The answer came immediately:

" 'Enemy aircraft in front of you, facing you.'

"I have heard this phrase more than once, sir. And I felt the worse for it; just dying to see something—yet unable to see. I thought to myself that there, in the operation room, they know where I am and where 'they' are, maybe three hundred or two hundred yards from us, but I cannot see them. They are probably lower down outlined against the earth.

"I went down looking above me, head on, left, right—nothing. And the minutes are leaking away slowly, one after the other. Each of these minutes means more than six miles, and the Germans are not fixed to one spot either but may fly at an angle. Now they can be on my portside, now on my starboardside. Maybe they are just over their target?

Perhaps they are dropping their bombs? Perhaps they are already escaping towards the Channel?

"And if only I knew where the Channel was. . . . There is no time to look at the compass, to find out. There is no time for communicating with my number 2, for just when I would be looking for him, I might brush past a German and not see him at all. . . . A sort of game of hide and seek!

"But suddenly I saw them at once; they were flying in front of me, a little higher up. I did not exactly see their machines, only glimpses of new stars, showing from behind the wings. Only later did I notice a black shadow outlined against the navy blue sky and I also saw the stars disappear when it covered them.

"I reported to 'operation' that I had sighted the enemy. Slowly, carefully, so as not to lose him in darkness, I climbed above him. I saw him all the time, ever more distinctly, though now he flew against the background of the earth, almost as black as the machine. *I had learned to see him.*

"The moon did not shine, but on the wings there was a pale glare from the sky, lighter than the night down below. I knew that from now on I would always be able to see them, from above and from below. I knew it, but I did not think about it. Only one thought crossed my mind: I have lost Rutecki somewhere; I am going to attack alone.

"Then I practically stopped thinking. The process which takes place in the brain before the fight and during the fight, is, I think, only some mechanical work of a group of cells, destined exclusively to figure out the distances and the corrections of fire. The whole organism, all the muscular reflexes and all the senses are concentrated in that one direction so that there is no room for any other thoughts.

"I came nearer; 300 yards, 250, 200. . . . A lighter star reflected itself in the glass panes of their astro hatch. 150 yards. I could open fire. I could see distinctly the shape of the wings, of the fuselage, of the tail. This was a Do. 215. It swayed in the space before me lazily, gently, as if floating in some dark though transparent oil. It was growing . . .

"100 yards . . . I skidded flatly to the right, to have them aslant, for then the target is bigger. I reduced the engine speed to have them as long as possible in the range of my machine guns and my cannon.

"50 yards. Now! I could feel a light trembling of my machine and I saw the tracers in front of the wings of the Dorniers. I pressed lightly on the controls. One second, two—she entered their range—three—it seemed as if tiny sparks, as from a tinder box, were jumping on the fuselage. I throttled down; I held the Dornier in my tracers, though it made an avoiding turn right, then left. Suddenly a red gleam, enormous, on the spot where the wing is joined to the fuselage—and ribbons of metal falling down!

"I tried to follow him and dive, but what was actually falling was a heavy, hammered rag of metal and iron; it fell like a stone. So I only told them what I told every crew I had shot down. I told them that . . ."

He hesitated and suddenly fell silent. He looked at me as if awakening from sleep, turned to look at the players, at the other two men who seemed to be dozing stretched on the beds, and with a quick, rather nervous movement he pressed the end of his cigarette. His knitted brows trembled lightly. He turned his head aside and his face was dark in the shadow of his forehead. The white scar on his pointed chin grew red.

No one took any notice of him. No one heard what he

was saying and the sudden silence hung between the two of us only like a pause before the last chord of a tune.

It was blatantly interrupted by the ringing of a telephone, loud, insolent, obtrusive. The operator on duty lifted the receiver. From the bridge-table four faces turned towards him. The men in folded overalls put their legs down on the floor. Somebody stifled a yawn.

The operator said: "Red and yellow section—to their machines."

Prot swelled his cheeks and sighed, as if in relief.

"I must go," he said to me cheerfully. "Will you stay here for a while, sir?"

"Yes. I will see you later. Good luck."

He shook my hand and held it for a moment in his hard, bony hand.

"I feel better now," he said. "Thank you."

I went into the operation room; three telephones were ringing alternately:

"Hallo, Cora, Cora . . ."

Someone was reporting, someone asked for a fix, another one wanted the time, the Q.D.M., the weather . . . Then expectantly: "Reception . . . reception . . ."

They were given courses, altitudes, orders. On the blackboard appeared little crosses and little dashes, marking the route of the aircraft; red, yellow and blue, green and white . . . On the large square table with a sector of the map traced on it little signs and coloured darts were moved by several telephone operators with headphones. Everything that was happening in the darkness of night, far away, over a large area of land and sea was reflected here as in a diagram, in the bright glare of lamps, under

a large clock with a dial divided into coloured sectors.

The British Squadron Leader, a bony, tall, completely bald man looked through some papers and mumbled in turn "yes" or "all right" in answer to reports of his deputy who was constantly communicating with the officers at the three operational telephones. A sergeant was marking positions on the map and making notes. Occasionally someone came in, put some papers on the table, took others with him and went out again.

There was no room for feelings here. Fear, sacrifice, fury, hatred and heroism remained there, in the dark night, in the air. Here were only the dry, cold facts. They arose from blood, from nerves, from heart-throbs, but were expressed in numerical symbols and geometrical diagrams.

A young flight lieutenant with fair curly hair was on duty at the telephone to the left.

"Ada, Ada. Red section flight B. Reception . . . reception . . ."

I came nearer; this was Prot's section. I heard his voice:

"Hallo, Cora, Cora. Here's red section, flight B. Reception . . . reception . . ."

The curly-haired young man looked at the blackboard. Red crosses were mounting in an arc towards the white dashes, running from south to north.

"Hello, Ada, Ada. Enemy in front of you, fifteen degrees to the left. Course one, seventy. Reception . . . reception . . ."

The flight lieutenant put his left hand on the table. He was waiting and listening.

Silence. Five seconds, ten seconds, fifteen seconds . . .

The large hand of the clock moved in tiny jerks, trotting on the blue sector of the clock-dial and I, looking at it,

saw Sergeant Prot's eyes, attentive, tense, piercing the darkness, looking for the reflection of starlight on the wings of a German machine. Now darkness became more dense in one spot; "a black shadow on the navy blue sky." A black shadow, which, in fractions of seconds, "extinguishes, passes and then lights the stars. . . ." And one of these stars reflects itself in the "astro" turret!

"Hello Cora, Cora, I've sighted the enemy. . . ."

The flight-lieutenant winked at me with a smile. We listened.

The clock went on measuring time at a trot; white sector—yellow sector . . .

"Fifty yards . . . I open fire," reported Prot, as he might say: "I open the book at Chapter Ten."

On the blackboard the red crosses climb over the white dashes. The hand of the clock reaches the red sector. It is at its centre; this means seven seconds; or almost a kilometre of flying; and some fifteen hundred fired shells. . . . Is Prot still alive?

He is. I can hear his hoarse voice: "This is for Sophie's death! For my children and my wife. . . ."

The curly-headed flight-lieutenant is somewhat shocked; such words are not mentioned in the King's Regulations as the code of pilot-to-ground conversation.

"Number one, red section, flight B. Ada has shot down a German," he announces indifferently, and the row of white dashes disappears from the blackboard.

15. Thirteenth Operation: Osnabruck

The trains of low four-wheeled bogies look like monstrous caterpillars with large heads and yellow tracks. They wind around the airfield and creep with their parted, yellow-spotted bellies on the asphalt run-ways. The yellow spots on the bogies are bombs.

The caterpillars creep towards the Wellingtons, get under their undercarriage and stop. Suddenly they are assailed by groups of mechanics resembling ants. Then the thin lips of the bomb-doors slowly open under the fuselage of the aircraft and the yellow spots disappear from the back of the caterpillar, carefully lifted into the black abyss by the hands of the industrious "ants."

This is how it looks from the distance in the falling dusk. But from close by . . .

A thousand-pound bomb standing upright on the ground is almost the height of a man. Big at the bottom, slim at the top, it is finished with a collar of metal-plate which, with the narrow stabilisers, is its plumage and corresponds exactly to the feather on a wooden arrow shot from a bow. The plate collar serves another purpose also, probably not thought of by the designer; on it the mechanics and armourers write their short worded but vigorous messages

addressed to the Germans in general and their leader in particular. This time our bombs bear the modest inscription; "With greetings from Hess to Hitler." It is not impossible that someone in Germany may read this, if the collar is not blown to pieces.

Briefing the crews; hour of start, route there and back; position of the target, altitude of bombing, position of A.A. batteries, of searchlights and fighters of the enemy defence; lights; weather report; special information . . .

Discussion of the operation ahead; the course to the target and back, the probable time, the method of climbing, the method of bombing . . .

The sleepy eyelids of the night begin to drop on the airfield. Shadows are spreading below; the red of the sunset is obscured by mist, like a dying fire covered with ashes; only at the zenith the sky is still light, but from the east and from the south a thick veil of cloud is creeping up. The hangars, the building huts, trees, bushes, until now outlined sharply, seem to be melting away in the dusk.

The engines begin to roar in a bass-voice. The silence trembles with their rhythm. What for other people might seem an unbearable noise, for us seems to be only the throb of the silence. The roar of the engines accompanies us incessantly, so it does not exist as a sound. A sound in the air is only the stifled noise of bombs exploding down below and it is much less loud than this roar of the engines which for us is "silence." A sound is also for us the voice in the earphones; and it is everything that one may hear when the engines are switched off.

"Crew to their aircraft!"

In darkness I feel my way up the rungs of the ladder; one, two, three, four . . . I climb higher and higher and

begin to see. Inside the cockpit it is lighter than outside; the luminous figures and hands on the dials of the clocks and instruments throw a dim, dull glimmer on this interior, similar probably to the inside of a whale.

The lamps and globes of the wireless-station shine like protuberant glands; the nerves of the aerial tremble; the duraluminum ribs of the fuselage protrude; along them run the entrails of the controls, arranged into coils and twirls, interwoven with red wire as if with a net of blood-vessels; the membranes of the rubber covers, the strained diaphragm of the partitions, the kidney-shaped rubber dinghy—all this seems to be the living organism of some monster.

I slip through the narrow gullet between the pilots' cabin and the wireless-operator's post. Behind me Koza slips in and then Buyak, the front gunner. I can see the backs of the pilots and Zygmunt's figure.

The mechanics close the access-door. We taxi up to the start.

I know the thoughts of the whole of our crew; today is Friday June 13th; this is the thirteenth operation of our Wellington and the thirteenth operational flight of Goral, who is now at the controls.

All our mechanics and ground crew think about this too. The two engine repair mechanics think about it, the one big and the other who is thin as a stick. Both of the airframe corporals remember it, the one always stares from under knitted brows and is silent, but works with a fierce fury, and the other who chatters away for both of them, swearing, joking, and sighing for the red-haired English farm-girl whom he wants to marry notwithstanding the fact that this would be the second bigamy in his young

life. Sergeant Talaga thinks about it. His breath is strong with drink but he knows this Wellington as well as he does his own ten fingers, his ten thick fingers scarred from hard work, the fingers of an engineer with hard nails and skin corroded by oil and petrol, skillful fingers strong as tools. Pryszczyk, the reserve mechanic, is worried about it too but none of us and none of them would dream of mentioning this fateful thirteen.

But on the head of the machine, next to the twelve small bombs painted in yellow paint, there was no thirteen. And this afternoon there appeared on board a silver-engraved picture of Our Lady, fixed with four screws.

Goral noticed it at once.

"Where does this come from?" he asked gruffly.

The mechanics looked at each other rather self-consciously, then Talaga coughed and said:

"From the ground crew."

"You have too much money, I suppose . . . ahem . . . It must have cost a fortune."

"We smoked a little less and saved up," said the big mechanic.

"Fool," growled Pryszczyk. "The ground crew has bought it, and that is all there is to it, sir. We bought it for our machine."

Nothing else was said. And now all of us probably think about Our Lady and the unlucky number while the Wellington is rolling heavily to the fringe of the airfield where the flash lights are glimmering and from which a straight line of sparsely placed, widely spaced lanterns shows the direction of the take-off into the wind.

Far away, at the end of this line, a red lamp glows. There the Wellington must take off from the ground, for other-

wise . . . Beyond this lamp there is no airfield; only trees, bushes, a road, a wall beyond the road.

The voice of the squadron leader is heard in the earphones:

"Hullo Genevieve, taxi a little closer. Turn left. O.K. now. You may go. Good luck!"

At the same time we get the signal with the green light, and with the roar of engines we start into the darkness.

Taking off takes a long time. We are carrying the maximum load and there is practically no wind. The machine starts slowly, lifts her tail reluctantly and rolls, rolls, jumping, falling back until the shock-absorbers shriek, rolls again, clings to the ground, cannot lift the undercarriage, reacts lazily to the controls, gains speed only half-way through the airfield and still moves heavily, still vibrates at every unevenness of the ground, while the black mass of the hangars with their red warning lights emerges from the dark, growing, coming up at us . . .

Goral forces the machine into the air, but at the same time she loses speed and drops, the tires and shock-absorbers screech on the ground, and the ribs of the cockpit shiver.

The last red lamp of the flare path is facing us, a little to the left. It is nearer. Now it falls aside. Now . . . The machine goes up!

Not only the earth remains down below, at the bottom of the night; but also its unrest. Under us the tops of the trees brush by; now the flight begins and now—let those who have remained behind worry about us.

I know that the officer commanding will not go to bed. He will wander about his room; he will look into the de-

serted mess; he will wait by the wireless; he will look out on the airfield and watch the sky.

I know that the mechanics will wait until dawn; will we turn back? Will everything be all right? In four or five hours time they will begin to grow restless; why doesn't Genevieve come back? Then they will chase away all their thoughts about the machines that did not return and will never return. They will look with anxiety at the sticky fog rising from the ground at dawn and certainly one of them will say that there is no fog and that the weather is going to be lovely.

I know how tired these men are; they have worked all day long to prepare the machine for the operation. To-morrow they will have to work hard again. They may have had no time for dinner; certainly they have had little sleep. But—someone must worry in our stead tonight.

Zygmunt gives the course and Goral lifts up the machine in order to gain height before reaching the thick layer of cloud over the sea. He doesn't want to ice up in a cloud.

I go to the rear turret, to the far end of the tail, and sit in the glass cage in front of the coupled machine-guns. We fly over England, which slips underneath shapeless and dark, crushed under the depth of the night. Only once the light of a beacon, winking to us in Morse, pierces the darkness. Then we see the outline of the coast, and the sea marked by the lighter lines of its waves.

Clouds begin. Some are just below us, some are rushing against us, growing, towering, swallowing up the aircraft and rushing past it. Suddenly they break apart and disappear like ghosts, leaving only a thin layer of ice on the

glass plates. Their top layer, thin, half opaque, half in open-work is very high, perhaps thirty thousand, perhaps thirty-five thousand feet. It seems to be immovable, while we, together with the moon, are flying east. This pale moon shines shyly through the screen of thin clouds. Just as if she had rubbed herself against them and sprinkled them with a dull powder of light.

Mercury reports from time to time: "Ten thousand feet . . . ten thousand five hundred feet . . . eleven thousand feet."

Then Buyak: "I can see the coast."

This is the coast of Holland. We can see in the distance the German beacon and a couple of searchlights, scanning the sky.

The order comes: "Try out the machine-guns!"

I turn my turret to the left, then to the right. I grasp the guns and press on the trigger. Through my hands clasping the cold handle, through the muscles of my arms, through my back goes a shiver. They bark evenly.

Now I must watch the sky from the side of the moon; a night fighter may emerge from there. But the sky is empty and the cloud grows more dense and covers us with shade.

After a long while, I, too, can see the coast. It comes under the tailplane of our Wellington in an even, almost straight line, passes slowly and again breaks up. We are passing the island of Texel, then we cross the straits of Wadden exactly on the outlined course.

A new land—this time really land—now looks into the sky with the eyes of numerous searchlights. They increase; they cut the darkness in strips with scissors of white light, in obtuse and sharp triangles, into diamonds and irregular

polygons; they form cones, pyramids and sheaves; trace arcs, ellipses and parabolas. Time and again they brush the wings or the tail of the machine and, not seeing her at the altitude of fourteen thousand feet, they continue to trace their lines.

And suddenly this eerie geometry descends from the dark space to the earth, piercing out from the dark the shapes of the ground, fragments of roads, trees and buildings, then suddenly and unexpectedly it goes out.

Now the darkness of night is deeper, velvety, but before our eyes we keep for a while this last picture of confused crossed lines. Then one silver blade lifts up, another crosses it, then three cut the black velvet into pieces and the mysterious manoeuvres begin again.

Somewhere from the side, down below, little fires glitter, and before us hundreds of smaller and bigger stars are showered; the Germans are putting up a barrage.

Goral plays on the engines as if they were an organ. The interferences of their rhythm follow one another, evade one another, beat separately. The machine twists and turns, descends, climbs, changes her course.

We pass the Dutch-German border at a height of fifteen thousand feet and at the end of ten minutes we take a new course. There are more searchlights; not hundreds but thousands of them. Flak of all calibre fires many-coloured shells blindly. Quick-firing guns throw toward us rosaries of coral-coloured beads; batteries of medium guns grouped in a semi-circle hang up in space a fringe of purple sausages, held together by an invisible string; heavy long-distance guns spit fire and send up greenish or yellowish shells which grow before our eyes, approaching with unbelievable speed and bursting like soap-bubbles at the apex

of their parabolas. Our eyes cannot absorb and follow all these changing colours, flashes, serpents of fire, flowering and fading against the black background of the night, cut into white strips and wedges by the swords of the searchlights. We lose the consciousness of the position of the machine and forget where to look for the sky and where for the earth.

I feel that there is something the matter with me which I do not like. It is difficult to tell what kind of feeling this is. It is as if I have grown stiff in an uncomfortable position, or cannot straighten my tired legs, or cannot breathe freely. But it is not any of these. Neither is it fear, but a sort of inner strain which I feel physically. What the dickens is it? The stubborn consciousness of this something which I cannot describe tears me away from external things and then—I have it! I realise suddenly that I am setting my teeth with all the strength of my jaws. So I let my muscles relax and feel better instantly.

My attention has been turned for a while from the wartime illumination; with my mind I see in the semi-darkness of the cockpit the silhouettes of the rest of the crew, set, strained, immobile. Maybe they too have been dazed by what was happening all around? Perhaps they are digging their nails into their palms or setting their teeth without realising that they are doing it. Perhaps they too are experiencing a state of strange hypnosis when you do not think of anything; when your brain becomes merely a mechanical recorder of impressions. No, Zygmunt is telling Goral something. Goral nods assent and puts the machine into a deep turn of 180 degrees. I see; we have passed our target; we turn back and prepare for the run-up.

Now Zygmunt lies down on his belly and, glueing his

face to the glass, directs the pilot over the target. In a moment, in a second 3,750 lbs. of bombs will fall.

The engines slow down; they hum; now they are silent. We dive lower, for below us there is a delicate layer of cloud, like a veil woven of white gauze. Now we can hear the guns and the noise of the speeding machine. The elevator tabs on the controls over my head tear through the wind with a scream and a whistle. Splinters of shells rattle on the wings.

We keep going down. Mercury reports: "Fourteen thousand five hundred feet . . . thirteen thousand . . ."

The white veil envelops us, falls apart and disappears. Down below we can see the dim outlines of a town. On our course, as far as I can see from my position, a few fires are burning. Probably have been started by those who have been here before us.

We are not yet over the target. Each second now is terribly long, and the splinters clatter and rattle louder and louder.

"Twelve thousand five hundred feet . . ."

A searchlight has licked the bottom of the fuselage all along from the front turret to the tailplane, has hesitated, returned, lashed the right wing, returned again and missed. But already a second has cut the darkness aslant, three others have joined its trail, thin like a spear, have groped above us, and under us—and now begin to seek. After a couple of seconds, twenty more are directed at us. . . .

"Dive! They are 'coning' us!"

All the guns are firing at the spot where we were a moment ago. All the searchlights are crossing their lights five hundred feet above us, luckily too much to the right and to the rear. The cone of light flattens, then becomes sharp

again. Its apex moves here and there; now it is higher, now lower; now nearer, now farther away.

The flak rattles and drums and rings on the cockpit and on the wings, as if you knocked so many tin-cans down stairs. All my nerves are strained, waiting for the explosion of a shell that will not miss. Noise, flash, hit . . .

But there is no explosion, instead Mercury says aloud: "Eleven thousand five hundred feet."

The bomb doors have been open for some time. We are waiting, waiting, waiting, when at last Zygmunt shouts:

"Bombs away!"

The machine seems to sigh, and with this sigh the unbearable expectation of an artillery shell comes to an end. I cease to hear the rattling of the splinters, I do not see the searchlights, nor the artillery fire, I have no thought in my head and I do not care about anything except what is going to happen in the fraction of a second. Down below, in the glittering light of the fires, the narrow strips of the railway tracks are twinkling; the railway station and the buckle of a bridge spanning the branch line are looming from the dark. . . . There the bombs should fall.

Flash! Flash! Three more! Another two!

At every one of them the earth glows with an orange light. The fire spouts with a column of smoke, dust, debris, and something which from this altitude looks like rubbish blown apart with a powerful bellows.

In a split second I see a house on a corner crumbling into the narrow passage of a street; a chimney bending slowly and then breaking in the centre; coaches and trucks piling up into a stack in front of the ruined station and an open abyss of fire in a block of many buildings. Only afterward

comes a dull thud, like a sevenfold echo. And then a fierce fire lights up the earth among the ruins on the other side of the track.

I report about what is happening. I cannot see the faces of my colleagues but I know that they are lit by a cruel smile. We remember—they and I—Warsaw, Westerplatte, Siedlce, Kutno . . .

I cannot help looking towards the east. There lies Poland—some 350 miles from here. In two hours and a half we could reach Poznan, in less than four—Warsaw or Cracow; in five—Lwow or Wilno. Which of us does not dream of such a flight! There are some who have their courses and times all worked out to the minute. But before we go there, we must first of all destroy more German cities, and now—we must return to our own airfield which is more distant from here than the Polish border.

We rush at full speed towards Holland, not climbing much higher, and again we must take cover in cloud. We fire a little at the searchlights from our machine-guns if they pester us too much in the gaps between the clouds, and at the artillery which is firing heavily but not accurately always far behind our tail. The German crews will not suffer greatly from our fire, but we may succeed in putting out some of the searchlights, and frightening the gunners a little.

We fly over the Zuyder-Zee, pass over Alkmaar and leave the land behind, blessed by the last shells of the coastal batteries. Now quickly down, under the clouds, which here are seething in a thick layer. We stay just under their ceiling in order to jump up if a fighter on patrol should turn up.

In the east, the first dawn is greying, but the sea is still dark, and so is the English coast which we see on our left one hour after we left the Dutch coast.

We establish contact by radio with the ground, recognise the familiar beacons, report our presence at the access point, then we eat the remainder of our dried fruit and chocolate and begin to long for our beds.

It is cold, though we are flying very low. Fog lies on the ground like ragged cotton-wool. The clouds part and we can see the stars, which are paling in the brightening sky.

Suddenly the front gunner reports:

"The airfield in front, to the right."

And then:

"A Wellington, in front of us, some two hundred feet above."

Behind us there also comes a Wellington—two. We get into position in the circle, one, two, three, four, five, six machines. Three have already landed. One is preparing to land and the white light of the landing spotlight catches the grass under her lowered undercarriage.

We are circling with our lights lit, waiting for our turn and meanwhile other Wellingtons are coming back. I count them once more. There are eighteen of them. All our machines have returned safely.

16. A Different Species

You go to this hospital by bus, over a winding road between yellowing hedges beyond which are farmhouses of stone standing here and there among unkempt service-trees covered with red berries; then you enter a vast park. On the right, on stubble-fields, there are rows of stacks; on the left, enormous, old, spreading oaks. Further on, groups of firs, bushes and, of course, rhododendrons. Still further on there is a spring and a muddy pond, from which a stream starts and descends into a glen, overgrown with a jungle of grass, herbs, bushes, hawthorns and weeds, where pheasants and rabbits have their hiding places. But the jungle becomes civilised immediately beyond this glen; the meadows are mowed, the trees trimmed, the hedges cut short, like recruits on the morning after they are called up. At last, somewhere down below you see an old and very ugly castle, the quarters of the Polish hospital, and beyond the castle a well kept garden, full of shady paths, of chestnuts, lovely hillocks, velvet lawns, roses and flower beds in bloom.

It is calm here, quiet and lovely. You feel far removed from the nervous bustle of the camps, from everyday affairs, from the noisy stream of days, far away from the war—though this is a military hospital.

There are very few patients here. The majority are elderly gentlemen with chronic gastric trouble, gall stones, rheumatism and such bourgeois complaints. When the victim of a motor-car accident is brought in, the hospital is full of excitement. When they bring a soldier wounded by a shell-splinter during manoeuvres or with abrasions from the explosion of a mine on the coast, it is an extraordinary event. And when a man is brought who was wounded by a bomb from the air, it is a festive occasion.

However, Stephen, too, is here. Flight Officer Stephen L., a fighter pilot, who has on his conscience seventeen German machines (which God will probably forgive him and perhaps even write unofficially to his credit). I have come to visit him, having learned about his badly broken arm.

Every doctor, every nurse, every hospital clerk, every attendant and every patient knew about this exceptional case, although, as Stephen had complained in his letter to me, no one visits him here, for our boys were too busy.

Though they did not visit him, every day one of them flew over the hospital, dived in a sudden spin from 3,000 feet, pulled up in front of the second floor windows, scared the doctors, set the hearts of the nurses and the window panes trembling, caused bilious attacks in a few splenetics, frightened away the pheasants, the sheep and the rabbits, and alarmed the local Home Guard; all to inform Stephen that the Squadron remembered him and wished him a speedy recovery.

That is why I did not even have to ask for him; the first medical orderly on seeing my Air Force uniform and noting superficially that my hands and feet were whole, and that there was no trace of bandages or dressings on

my person, guessed immediately what brought me here.

"You wish, sir, to see Flight Officer L.?" he asked a theoretical question. "Second floor, room number 37. This way, please."

I knocked at the door of room 37.

"Come in," Stephen growled from behind the door.

I went in.

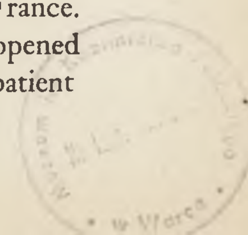
He sat in an easy chair, in the midst of newspapers and books. His left arm was fixed to a rail, bent at the elbow, thickly bandaged, and outstretched horizontally in what seemed a terribly uncomfortable position. In his right he held some magazine. Sitting with hunched shoulders, his head down, he looked out from under his brows as if preparing to leap on anyone who entered. When he saw me he was overwhelmed. He blinked, wanted to get up, hissed in pain, scowled and then his thin, dark face lit up in a smile.

"It is you!" he cried. "Have you come all this way to see me?"

He took my hand and shook it strongly.

"I thought it was one of these people here," he spoke quickly, not leaving me time to answer. "They keep coming here and bothering me. Do sit down. Cigarette? Did you find your way easily? This place is at the end of the world; even the Germans cannot find it. You are a swell fellow to have come. I am going crazy from being all alone. We have not seen each other . . . wait a minute . . . probably since Rumania."

He was right. I had not seen him since my stay at Tulca, from where he had been one of the first to escape to France. We began to tell each other everything that had happened to us, making numerous digressions, putting impatient



questions and interrupting in the middle of an answer, speaking in a chaotic, disorderly way, as you often speak about matters which contain too much substance to be packed into the first few sentences of a first conversation.

"How are you? Are you all right here?" I asked at last. "How is the arm?"

He looked at his arm, at me, then he looked at the blue ribbon of the Virtuti Militari Cross, which was showing on his coat hanging on a chair. He smiled, with a smile that had in it a shade of irony.

"Well, you see I can talk to you as I always did," he said after a while. "You will see for yourself how much it is worth. Whether it is worth . . . this," he nodded his head toward the coat of his uniform.

I did not quite understand what he meant.

"You have seventeen Germans to your credit, haven't you?" I asked.

"Seventeen," he said, with animation and a shade of pride in his voice.

"Well, then . . ."

"This is quite a different matter," he interrupted impatiently.

He knit his brows and passed a finger along his upper lip.

"I am acting the part of a hero here," he said suddenly and angrily. "Of a hero! Do you understand?"

I did not, and this must have been apparent. He saw that he would have to be more explicit.

"I would not try to explain this to any of the fools here," he began in his usual, bright voice, in which, it always seemed to me, there rang concealed laughter. "First of all, they don't understand the simplest things about fly-

ing and aviation in general. Secondly, they don't understand *us*. They put silly questions and, as you know yourself, you must explain the simplest things; and at last they gather a few false notions, make false conjectures about what you tell them. No, I cannot speak to these people any more; they bore me stiff. Even if you were Homer himself you couldn't describe everything so that a man who had never flown could get a proper notion of flying."

"I think you exaggerate," I said. "Homer was no airman, but had he been one, he . . ."

"He would write about it a lot. But his readers would not know how it feels unless they flew themselves. However, Homer was no airman, as you have so very cleverly observed. And he did not write about flying, which some lesser authors and non-fliers attempt to do. I can spot such an author after his third sentence and I fume; the same false notions, the same ignorance of everything that is flying. I just do not like to speak with non-fliers about flying. Just as a doctor would not like to speak about medicine with me, or some other layman.

"As to this particular flight, it was like this. I used to fly over France in a Mosquito— We flew in sections, of course. Every other day we went for sweeps, or as escort for bombers. A few times we went over with your squadron. These are operations you know all about beforehand; there is no room for surprise. We have had no sudden alerts, when you had to take off with the whole squadron since last autumn, for the Germans have not been back here for quite a while. However, that day they did come."

He laughed at an amusing memory, looked at me from under his brows, changed the uncomfortable position of his arm, passed his hand over his cheeks, which were blue-

ish from the dark growth of beard, and inhaled his cigarette deeply.

"We were in readiness. Long Joe—do you know him? —had just declared a slam in no trumps, though I, being his opponent, had the ace of spades, and my partner had previously mumbled something about three diamonds when they rang from operation room. We had just time to pass, when the telephone operator began to cry 'Scramble!' Joe is always in luck; he did not see my cards, but later he refused to believe I held the ace of spades, for Foka, who was his partner, did not return from the flight."

"Killed?" I asked.

"Missing. Nobody knows what happened to him. I personally think that he pushed too far beyond the Channel and there . . . But who knows? . . . It's a pity: he used to fly like a man and was full of beans at bridge."

He thought deeply for a while, and I recalled Foka, a nice fellow, always ready for fun, a drink or a take off. Foka! There were few people with whom he would not drink or whose leg he would not pull or from whom he would not borrow money. Everybody liked him. Cocky, short, fat Foka with his hair standing up like feathers at the top of his head, with a small pug-nose and vivid black eyes. He was fond of dance-hostesses in second class night clubs, a pest for commanders at briefing, a goodhearted scoffer, a protector of the destitute (about which no one but myself knew), and an excellent fighter pilot with a stout heart and a truly Polish imagination. So he was missing. . . . At best he will spend the war in a prison camp. . . .

"Well then, so we took off with the whole squadron,"

Stephen went on. "They gave us the course as soon as we were airborne, and the altitude, twenty thousand feet. We circled round London from the south and went on east, flying over the sea. I knew that this would be some bigger fun, for Czepik had dreamed of his aunt. He told me about it in the morning, but I recalled it only in the air, after the take off."

"Who is he?" I interrupted, much intrigued by the prophetic dreams of this Czepik.

"Who, Czepik? He is my mechanic. Whenever he dreams of his aunt, who I think must be a terrible shrew, we have a hard job with the Jerries. Last autumn he dreamed about her continuously, but when he had a quiet night we all knew that we should have a rest. We used to say 'no aunt today,' and many of us even sneaked away to the city, for we really had quiet nights then. It was as infallible as if it were printed in the King's Regulations. And this time also it came true. Too true, damn it. There were some twenty Ju 88's, and above them a considerable number of Me 109's. I led our last formation. I had Gordon on my left, Foka on my right but he disappeared somewhere at once. The two of us caught up with the last three Junkers flying into the sun and we attacked them from a slightly higher altitude.

"Everything went quickly and well. Two Junkers, the squadron leader and the left hand one, began to let out smoke after the first burst. So Gordon went away, and I followed lead. But, before leaving, I looked back at the smoking Junkers. I saw that they were flying on with the Messerschmitts high above them as if they did not care a hoot about us. It was a bloody pity; the damn things might

cross the Channel, although smoking, and then they would not be credited to us at all, or perhaps only as damaged ones.

"Gordon was already getting at another squadron, so I said to myself: 'Well, I will have to finish them off.' I made a backwards turn, felt a little dizzy, gave a boost and again found myself at the tail of my victim. This time I was close behind, at some twenty-five feet. I felt a little nervous when I saw that the right hand German, the one who had not been touched by us, began to fire at me. But I saw that he was missing, so I took the man in my sights and gave a long burst at his engine and his fuselage until it sparkled. After a while I looked; he was on fire! Well and good. I ceased fire and waited. And lazily, as if in thick oil, he began to fall over his wing straight into the sea. Then I saw that the left hand one, the one Gordon had attacked, was smoking, and the right hand one, the bad shot, was escaping. I forgot everything else and followed him. And I kept thinking: I will have the left hand one for my dessert. I approached from behind and above; pressed the release, and suddenly felt something hit the fuselage of my machine from below! You know how this feels. For a couple of seconds the bravest man becomes a coward. Good God! you think, get away, for this means death! It feels as if someone had poured boiling water on you.

"I don't know when I turned right. I had just time to see if my legs were whole, when I saw four Messerschmitts coming from behind me. I don't know which of them played this trick on me, but I felt furious with the four of them. When I saw I wasn't wounded, I felt strong as a lion again. I knew of course that the machine had been damaged, but I thought nothing much had happened to

her, so I climbed up past them. She took fire however; first the tanks, then the cockpit, then my trousers. And mind you all this happened on time; one, two, three!—as when you drill with firearms at an infantry cadet school. I felt rather shaken—you can imagine.

"But this fear was not so odiously violent; death was still a few steps from me, anyway not closing in on me, or sitting on my neck, or my knees, and I still had a chance. So I began quickly to open the sliding hood and turn the burning machine on her back, for I had to bale out. The machine responded beautifully to the controls. I pushed the stick forward, unbuttoned the belts and—instead of falling out into the fresh air—I hit my head hard on something so that stars began to dance in front of my eyes. This extraordinary astronomical phenomenon took me so much aback that I felt queer for a good while. The flames brought me back to my senses; they were reaching my eyes."

He blinked and turned his face with an expression of pain.

"Did you ever burn?" he asked me.

I nodded. I had burned. I stood in flames at an altitude of six thousand feet. This was in the year 1919 and I had no parachute. I was eighteen then and wanted to live at any price and I thought I was going to die. And then—oh, yes, I do remember!—the flames also looked into my eyes.

"I know how it feels," I said. "Go on."

"It seems that when I handled the stick, the sliding hood shut. I wanted to push it back but it got jammed. I had to get it up quickly if I was to bale out raw and not roasted. This was none too easy, for I was standing on my head,

my back against this devilish hood, with nothing to rest my hands on and unable to change my position. But at last I succeeded by sheer pushing with my bare hands. Meanwhile the machine got out of control and began to dive, to fall down on her back at 45 degrees, towards the earth or towards the sea—I did not know.

"Through the hole I had pierced in the hood, air blew in as if a typhoon wanted to penetrate into the cockpit. The flame receded overboard and was raging outside. And now I was pushed inside—and felt a burning pain in my eyes. I ceased to see and was mad with fear. My eyes!—can you understand? I don't know how I managed to get out. I pushed as hard as I could and suddenly felt I was in the air. I was falling. I felt a roaring in my ears; I could not breathe; the air, pumped out of my lungs, was stifling me. My left arm ached terribly. It felt as if someone was twisting and tugging at it. I pulled the cord of the parachute and felt it opening. Suddenly it began to unfold. I did a somersault; the silk swished, swelled, stopped—and I howled with pain . . . my arm. But at once I forgot all about it, somewhere close by I heard the engine of an aircraft. A thought crossed my dazed mind—a German . . . he will fire at me—and I waited for a burst which would pierce me like a sieve.

"But the roar receded and the arm again ached terribly. I tried to open my eyes, but my lids were stuck. The lashes were burned—they would not open. I had to force them open with my fingers. I began to see again at some three thousand feet and then I saw I was falling on land. The wind must have blown me in from the sea, together with my machine, for it was from the south-east and even when I was chasing the four Messerschmitts I was heading

towards the coast. My arm was aching. It was limp and swung here and there with the parachute, so I tied it to my coat with a piece of wire. Then I landed and—don't laugh—fainted like a virgin. And now, as I told you, I am considered a hero here . . . and that's what makes me so mad. Can't you see?"

He stared at me as if he wanted to find out whether I took this wrath seriously; whether I understood what he had said.

No, I did not understand. He had never been exceptionally modest; quite the contrary, he thought he was a better flyer than most and knew what he was worth. What is more, he boasted more than once about the Jerries he had shot down.

"So you think you don't deserve your decoration?" I asked him.

"And do you think I do?"

"Yes, I think so," I said with conviction.

He blushed, a smile lit his eyes, and then disappeared.

"Listen," he began seriously, with no trace of the cheerful tone which used to ring in his voice. "I was in Warsaw until the end, and I know. I have seen enough. For instance . . ."

He stopped and seemed to search his memory for something both formidable and magnificent.

"That time, for instance, at Okecie near Warsaw. There were trenches there, you know? Already there was a shortage of water. The soldiers were thirsty. For days on end under fire, you know. In a terrible heat . . . at night women and children carried the water. And the Germans —who probably knew about it, the swine—turned on searchlights and fired at them. There was one girl—a com-

mon girl, as we graciously and haughtily used to describe her kind. She was sixteen, perhaps a little more. She was carrying a can full of water. They sighted her and a couple of boys and fired an artillery salvo in front of them. The boys somehow escaped but she didn't. The shell tore off her foot. She fell but didn't spill the water and began to crawl. She made it. "I've brought you some water," she said. The next day she died from loss of blood. I don't suppose you think that such girls as she received decorations, do you? And what decorations ought they to get? The Virtuti? If *I* got the Virtuti, they certainly deserve something more, don't you think so?"

I did not know what to answer, but Stephen did not wait for an answer. He spoke on, without paying any attention to me, as if he wanted to get rid of the thoughts that had fermented in him during the past two years.

"What are we? What am I, and Foka, and Gordon and all the rest of them? Everyone of us on joining the air force knew that we would have to fight one day—that we would have to shoot and be shot at. Everyone of us had made his choice a long time ago. This is why they invested money in us, why they gave us training; this is why we wore our uniforms in peacetime, and walked in glory. What we do now is nothing but our elementary duty. But they? That girl—what did she ever get on account? What did she ever receive? When did she make her choice? What debt was she paying? Tell me?"

Again I did not answer and again Stephen moved his eyes from my face.

"Do you read all these papers?" He swept the floor before him with the paper he was holding in his hand. "Do you hear what they say in London? Do you know what

they are quarrelling about? Do you understand these hints, these innuendos, these phrases about creating a legend? Can you see this horrible fear lest we should grow too strong, we—the airmen? Lest we should reach for—for power, or for the horn of plenty? Lest we should weigh on the scales of Poland's future with the blood shed here? A new legend, indeed! Let them leave us out of it! We do not want anything for fighting now. We got our wages, and now we are paying them back!

"We'll fight against anyone who lifts his finger against Poland. . . . If need be against the whole world, not only against the Germans. We demand one thing only: to be able to liberate those who are in Poland and later to be able always to defend them. Not as in this war. There will be no more women and children dying under the fire of enemy artillery. No Polish cities crumbling in ruins under enemy bombs. No Polish professors shot and no mothers and sisters tortured. No people deported or sent to concentration camps. . . . We want only one thing—to remain in the Polish Air Force and make it powerful. We want to guard our frontiers. We don't want any laurels, decorations and rewards. We are not creating a new legend. There are no men with such thoughts among us, and if there are . . ."

"If there are?" I asked.

He got up to his feet and hit the table with his fist. The torn newspaper fell with a rustle to the floor. He stood for a while cursing, until suddenly a smile lit his face.

"There will be plenty of time to deal with them," he said in his usual voice, "if they don't die out earlier, of some solid, civilian disease. And you needn't worry about the fighting personnel; they are a different species!"

17. Buyak Fails

LET NO ONE THINK that what happened to our front gunner was the fault of our mechanics. It is said of them that they "muck about the machines." Muck about. Work of this kind cannot be described otherwise.

Take the engine, for instance. So many nuts to be tightened, so many metering jets; so many clearances of a definite number of hundredths of a millimetre; a tangle of cables of which every one must be connected to a different segment of the magneto; delicate contact breakers, commutators, coils, like organs of the senses; hundreds of gaskets, terminals, and insulators to be cared for constantly; and carburetors with jets sensitive to the slightest impurity. And what about the valves, the ignition regulators, the pistons, the oil pumps, the glycol pumps and the superchargers? What about the piping, the various circuits, shafts, springs, feeds, rings?

Steel, nickel, duraluminum, brass, copper, are unyielding, difficult, exact, hard—and you cannot use strength against them. What you need is intelligence and skill.

The hands of the Polish mechanics are skilled and intelligent. They are used to the unyielding, sharp-edged metal, shaped into nuts and bolts, milled into strange shapes,

coiled into springs, cut into threads. Their hands are strong as tools, black from work, with thickened skin and scars from splinters and from deep cuts reaching to the bone. They find their way blind fold, can tighten or loosen the screws, know by heart everything in their engine.

And the airframe, too, has a thousand secrets from everyone but the mechanics. The mechanism of the landing gear, the shock absorbers, the controlling surfaces, the containers, the doors, the wing flaps, the ailerons . . . Each of these organs consists of many parts; each has its defects and bad habits, each must be controlled, overhauled, oiled and repaired.

While the British have specialists for the undercarriage, for the carburetor, for various shock absorbers, for the magnetos and almost for securing the nuts—the Polish mechanic does everything. If there is anything he does not know, he will learn it in a few days, for his colleagues will help him.

The Polish mechanic is resourceful. He has an inventive instinct, he improves all the time, and learns incessantly. He has already serviced Polish and French and British machines. Is there a shortage of proper tools? He will manage somehow. No parts available? He will make them. Does he find a structural defect? He will correct it.

He will invent a new ejector so that the pilot may bale out without effort if the machine takes fire. He will improve the mechanism of the landing gear or the wing flaps. He will make everything the builders have not foreseen and—contrary to the famous King's Regulations—he will at once remedy by his own ingenuity defects which could only be removed by a whole Areopagus of engineers.

If there are no operations, no one can force the mechanic

to "duties" required by the regulations. He then becomes a lazybones of the first grade and wastes his time as no one else. He is not to be found anywhere, not to be persuaded to observe the fixed order of the day. But during emergency he never fails; he is capable of dismounting, repairing and overhauling a smashed or holed machine thoroughly and at an incredible speed. He is priceless, irreplaceable.

For the Polish aircraft mechanic has a heart and an ambition. He considers the machine and her crew as something of his own. He says: *My* machine. *My* pilot. *My* crew.

His pilot must have the best equipment, in the best repair. *His* crew goes on an operation. In the fighting of his crew the mechanic takes part by virtue of his work. This part is not a small one either. The machine, which has been prepared for an operation with his own hands, is in perfect condition. The crew may trust him blindly.

The crew need not have any doubts or fear about the equipment, for if it had to overcome doubts it would not perhaps have enough moral strength to fight against the real enemy. There is no time during war operations to think about anything but victory. The mechanic is responsible for not only the equipment, but—and it amounts to the same thing—for the composure and the life of the crew. With the greatest anxiety he awaits the return of the machine; he rejoices most when the aircraft returns undamaged; he suffers most when the crew is killed.

Yet few people apart from the flying personnel know about his work and its toil, its importance and responsibilities. Few people realize how much of the fame of our airmen is due to the ground crew, armourers, electricians, technical N.C.O.'s. Their part in the fighting duties is un-

spectacular, unknown, usually overlooked by the press, passed over in silence in the communiqués.

But the mechanics are only human, after all; to verify everything in a machine is beyond their powers. There are gadgets or mechanisms which cannot be tested every day. Only a periodical inspection by technical experts can expose some of the defects, the omissions and the damage. A periodical inspection—or an accident, always more or less dangerous to the crew. . . .

Such an accident happened to Cadet Officer Buyak, Genevieve's front gunner.

It began when he ceased to talk. He became silent and somnolent. Especially in the air.

"What is the matter with you?" we asked him in turn.

"With me? Nothing is the matter. Why?"

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"Certainly I am."

Zygmunt decided that it might perhaps be connected with bad news from Poland. . . . "His fiancée is there."

But this was not very probable; such news does not make you somnolent. Buyak had become nervous, suspicious of the rest of the crew, somehow insincere, as if he wanted to hide something from us and was afraid we might try to find out what it was.

Koza declared that our front gunner had nursed a secret grudge against Goral ever since the day the King and Queen had visited the station. Buyak was to hand the Queen a bunch of flowers when greeting her and—he overslept. He overslept even then!

Goral had to be sent to bring the flowers, for there was no time to look for Buyak. He came back just in time,

when the black Rolls-Royces were stopping in front of the squadrons ready for inspection. We presented arms so smartly that our joints cracked, and Goral, a little breathless, mumbled something in English and, blushing to the roots of his hair, handed the Queen a magnificent bunch of freshly cut white and red roses with pearls of dew on them.

The Queen beamed and seemed to be pleased and the King, who already knew us from a previous visit, smiled graciously. Then there was the parade. The squadrons marched, and the ground rang under their feet. The hangars shook from these steps: one, two! And the Queen spoke to Goral and looked at the Polish airmen, smiling in such a motherly way, that it warmed our hearts.

Buyak didn't appear until all was over. . . .

That same night we went over Mannheim. Buyak did not report the coast although he must have been the first to sight it. (The night was light and the sky cloudless.) Then he did not answer Goral's remarks and to Zygmunt's direct question he answered that he was not asleep, and that something must have gone wrong with his inter com.

But on the way back he was silent too, or else answered reluctantly as if he was doing us a favor by answering at all.

A week passed and the atmosphere became unbearable. Some of the crew defended Buyak, while others were cross with him for holding silly grudges which he refused to bring out into the open. What irritated us most was the fact that on the ground he pretended not to remember that his behaviour during the flight had not been normal. He was kind and tried to efface the bad impression he had made by unnatural cheerfulness. Then we would im-

mediately begin to pity him. But during the next operation the same thing was repeated.

"What has he got against us?" wondered Zygmunt.

Goral shrugged impatiently: "Hysterics."

"Virtue," corrected Mercury. "Virtue has affected his brain."

But this state of things could not go on. No crew would put up with it. We held a meeting and I was appointed to settle the matter. This was one of the most unpleasant missions of my life.

I was writing something in my room, after tea, when there was a knock on the door and Buyak came in. I blushed, feeling guilty somehow. He asked:

"May I talk to you? Am I interrupting you?"

"Of course not," I said embarrassed. "Do sit down."

I offered him a cigarette, forgetting that he did not smoke. Then I noticed that there was nothing to sit on, because the second chair was loaded with a stack of papers, so I put them all on the table—and we both sat on the bed close to each other.

For a long while I searched all my pockets for my lighter which was lying on the top of the table; I lighted my cigarette and did not know what to do next.

"I would like to ask you something," Buyak said at last. "I would like you to help me."

He looked at me, lifting his head a little and moving the tip of his tongue over his upper lip.

I said something which sounded like; "Of course, with pleasure."

"No," he interrupted with a bitter smile. "This will not be a pleasure. Neither for you nor for me. You see . . . I wish to remain with you."

He spoke the last sentence with a special stress, with determination and strength, which gave it the accent rather of a demand than a request.

I understood that he knew about everything and that he would defend himself. Moreover that he was expecting help from me.

"You should take a holiday," I began, putting my hand on his shoulder. "You should rest because . . ."

"I am not tired. I can go on flying. I will not go on leave," he interrupted vehemently. "I am a member of your crew. Have been from the very beginning. I fly the same as all of you. I am strong and fit; the strongest of you and the youngest. So what is the matter? Tell me what is the matter?"

He looked straight into my eyes and I knew that he was awaiting my answer partly with fear, partly with a sad certainty that I would not tell him the whole truth. But he had come to talk it over. I had to tell him the truth, I could not help him against the rest of the crew.

"Listen," I said. "Don't you feel how very different your attitude to the whole crew is now compared with what it used to be?"

"*My* attitude?" He wondered so sincerely that I had no doubt whatsoever he did not realise it. "I am trying as well I can to reestablish the bond which has been broken between you and me, I don't know why. *I* am trying and not you; not the rest of them," he corrected himself. "And always one of them is rebuking me. As if I had wronged them. As if I were a stranger. As if I did not belong to you, body and soul. And yet . . . I would let myself be killed for each of you. And yet . . . our crew used to be

a real crew! And we did understand each other and we were a good team, and you used to like me. . . ."

He spoke with sorrow and with the conviction that he was being wronged without being able to defend himself. He fell silent for a while, and I pondered how best to explain the whole thing to him. I wondered whether I ought to mention those roses for Queen Elizabeth after which he began to ignore Goral's questions in the machine. I had known him for a relatively short time, but long enough to be sure that he was not the man who had flown with us a couple of weeks before. Then he would have been the first to admit that he was wrong in sulking at the crew. It would have been unimaginable then for him to sulk on an operational flight, in action! And now—now he was becoming unpleasant in the air, and it happened on every flight, every night. What was behind it all? What could account for such a change? And was it true that he did not realise this at all?

I put out my cigarette and, getting up from the bed, sat on a chair in order to face him.

"Are you being quite sincere with me?" I asked.

He knitted his brows as if wondering—or perhaps hesitating—for a while. He got up suddenly, walked up and down the room and stood facing me, on the other side of the bed.

"Listen," he said in a low voice. "I will tell you why I came to see you."

He leaned forward, putting both hands on the back of the bed and looked straight into my eyes.

"Do you think I would not leave you on my own account if it were possible to join another crew? But can I

go on 'leave' while my crew will go on flying? Before we have flown our minimum flying hours? Now, when things are moving? When we are gathering momentum? Do one thing for me. Tell me, what is it all about? What have I done that you cannot fly with me? For I—I don't know."

I believed him. I told him about the roses and about our conjectures. He looked at me in such amazement that I felt ashamed that we had ever suspected him of bearing us a grudge because of these roses. It must have been something else.

"Well, you see," I began to justify myself, "in this flight over Mannheim, directly after the Royal visit, you spoke to Goral as if bestowing an honour on him; just like an offended star. And later you either did not care to answer or else mumbled something under your nose. And generally speaking you are quite impossible in the machine. Quite different from the way you used to be. Don't wonder that later on, on the ground, we are not so kind perhaps, when your bad mood has passed."

"So that's how I behave upstairs," he said slowly.

He said this as though my words confirmed his own conjectures. Had he not realised it at all?

I decided to clear the matter up thoroughly. I told him that he did not work as well as before; that he did not pass his observations of the earth to Zygmunt, that he brought us straight into artillery fire, instead of warning the pilot about the barrage; that on the way home he did not answer our questions at all; that he handled the machine-guns as if he was firing from them for the first time.

"The rest of the crew have an impression that you don't want to fly with us any more," I added. "And this is not the only thing; can we be sure of you at all? Can we count

on you as before; I do not know what the devil has gotten into you, what ails you and what nags at you. Apparently you can't or won't tell me. But there must be something the matter. And in that case . . ."

"You are right," he interrupted me. "It is my fault. But listen. I will try to master myself. I will try to change. I will force myself to change. Let me stay with you. For a trial. This is why I came to see you; to ask you for this favour."

I could not bear it any longer. I felt terribly sorry for him. I realised how much such a request must have cost him.

I agreed at once and sent him away to change into a new uniform; I had decided to take him with me to town. I did not wish to leave him alone that night.

I settled the matter within five minutes with the rest of the crew. Then, with Buyak, I went to a cinema and to a snack bar where we had some ghastly milk shakes with incredibly coloured juices.

The next night we went over the Ruhr.

Genevieve climbed up very lazily although we flew into the wind. We had an unsatisfactory speed. Zygmunt swore between one and another bearing but this did not help. The witch drank petrol increasingly, roared in a bass voice and flew reluctantly into the even wind as if it were so much tar.

Buyak reported the British coastal lights, then the Dutch coast, and then was silent. We pushed on some fifty miles on our route, but it was clear that we would not reach the target.

Goral descended lower to fifteen thousand feet and said

something to Mercury which I could not hear. It was bitterly cold. The moon seemed to melt away in the transparent royal blue sky, studded with stars. The white glare, lightly tinged with azure and green by the glass plate of my turret, poured into it and hung on the deck and on the sides, falling on the coupled machine guns.

"Mind the moonlight," I hear in my earphones.

This is Goral, making sure that we have not fallen asleep.

"Everything O.K. here," I answer. "I am watching."

Nothing in sight. I am waiting for Buyak's answer. But Buyak is silent. He is silent *again*. To a renewed question he answers in a tired, hoarse voice that everything is O.K.

Meanwhile Zygmunt had calculated our position. (Quite a while ago we had cut off our contact by radio with the base.)

"We cannot make it," comes the decisive verdict.

Such a declaration is always followed by a minute's silence; everyone silently curses the wind and then realises with sorrow that we must turn back without having fulfilled our task. A wasted night, a vain effort, and bombs wasted, bombs which will not be dropped on Germany. This is worst of all.

"How far is it head on to this blessed Ruhr?" asks Goral.

"Over a hundred miles."

"And if we head for Dusseldorf, what is there on the way?"

"Wait a minute," says Zygmunt. "I will make sure."

This stirs the crew. No one says anything; everybody is waiting excitedly, hoping that perhaps the bombs will not have to fall into the sea after all; that perhaps we will find

another target in which factory buildings will crumble or railway tracks twist like so much spaghetti, or German stores and dumps flare up in flames.

"On the way there. The beauty spot is called Wesel. But they say better not fly there for the barrage is still heavier than near Dusseldorf."

Now the crew is in excellent spirits and Zygmunt's remark evokes a general merriment. Everybody has something to say and everybody adds his little joke to that of the navigator's.

Genevieve makes a sharp turn which almost throws me down from my seat. There is so much light that the earth is clearly visible: a river or a canal and a number of ponds; some buildings, a road, the irregular shape of a creek or a shoal divided by dykes.

Suddenly from the shoal a spark rises and jumps up in an arc. A bouquet of green flashes blossoms over the earth and falls down; a rocket!

"A rocket!" I cry. "Goral, a rocket."

"Where?"

"Underneath," says Zygmunt. "Buyak, attention! I believe an aircraft is landing underneath. Herbert, can you see?"

I cannot see anything for we are just coming out from the turn. Now only Buyak can see whatever there is to see. But Buyak remains silent though every one of us is calling him in turn. So Goral shuts the throttle and again prepares the machine for a turn.

I have another good look; a road, a canal, ponds, the shoal.

"Here it is again! They have turned on a light!"

It looks like an airfield beacon.

"Do we fire at it?" asks Mercury. "The Fritzes must have an airfield here."

"We probably do, Goral," says Zygmunt. "This is better than Wesel."

Goral begins to go down; thirteen thousand, twelve thousand, eleven thousand feet. We disconnect our oxygen apparatus.

A turn. Zygmunt lies flat on deck, looking into the sight.

"To the right. . . . Too much. Now to the left. . . . Keep it."

The bomb doors are open. Ten thousand feet.

The earth is silent, calm, farther and farther away. Not a single searchlight, not a single A.A. shell.

Nine thousand feet. Buyak should now see the target quite clearly. I shall see it after the bombing.

"Attention, Goral," says Zygmunt in a stifled voice. "Attention."

A second passes, two seconds, three . . .

"Bombs away!"

Three dark shapes separate themselves from the machine and go down, quickly diminishing.

Silence. Only the wind whistles in the controls. This is Genevieve's giggle.

I strain my eyes, quite unnecessarily, for the target will be clearly visible during the explosions.

Here they are! Three flashes which light the earth, the hangars, the shoal. After a while a triple detonation, like an echo.

Some one shouts: "Fire! the hangar is on fire!"

This is Buyak. He suddenly has become alive, he laughs and repeats once more that the hangar is on fire.

"One incendiary container was extinguished at once," says Mercury. "This one probably hit the airfield. And the third dropped on the hangar."

"Two hit the airfield, and the third the hangar," I correct him.

Meanwhile we turn back to release the remaining bombs.

The hangar is really on fire, and the earth is still silent. Nobody fires at us, although we fly low, at only six thousand to six thousand five hundred feet.

Buyak reports excitedly that he sees aircraft near the hangar and people round the fire. His machine-guns begin to bark in short bursts.

Then they stop, and Zygmunt again directs the pilot: "Left . . . left . . . again . . . O.K.! Keep it—attention! Bombs!"

Now my turn comes. From under the fuselage there emerges the red, increasing glare of the fire and the brightly lit airfield.

Three bombs are released in less than the twinkling of an eye. The aircraft grouped in front of the hangar are blown to powder, and in the far corner, a powerful whirl of flames and smoke spreads instantly. Petrol!

Genevieve makes a sharp turn three thousand feet over the German airfield and both Buyak and I begin to fire from our machine guns at the buildings, at the machines, at the motor-cars and huts.

We would doubtless have spent all our ammunition if Goral had not given Genevieve a boost and started home. It was high time too, for we had used more than half our petrol.

Now Mercury, our second pilot, takes over the controls to fly us home. He likes to fly high.

"Just for safety's sake," he says. "And there is plenty of oxygen in Great Britain."

The whole crew talks about their impressions. Only Buyak falls silent after a little while and does not speak until we arrive at base.

The fire behind us is growing and I can see it all the time. When we are flying over the Dutch coast, somewhere above Alkmaar, I still see the glare. Now we are chased by searchlights and A.A. fire, but Genevieve, having got rid of her bombs, is light as a butterfly; we are at over twenty thousand feet. Let the Germans fire.

When we landed on our airfield and Genevieve circled to her usual position at dispersal, Buyak did not move. No one noticed that he did not come out although day was breaking and we could see each other and distinguish the familiar silhouettes of the ground crew.

Pryszczyk was first to notice that one of us was missing.

"Where is Cadet Officer Buyak, sir?" he asked aloud.

Everybody looked round. Had he gone somewhere, without waiting for us?

No. I suddenly remembered that, getting out of the machine, I saw him sitting bent in the front turret.

Wounded!

This was what all of us thought simultaneously. We crowded round the steps. Goral got in first. Zygmunt was the second and he cried at once: "Don't come in, all of you. We'll take him out!"

We gathered at the access door, under the fuselage.

"Are you there?" asked Goral after a while, from the dark interior.

"Yes. What is the matter with him?"

"He's unconscious."

From the door two feet emerged in sheepskin boots.

"Are you holding him?"

Several pairs of hands lifted the limp body of Buyak.

"Call the doctor, Pryszczyk," said Zygmunt. "Where is the ambulance?"

The ambulance stood near by, under the hangar. Pryszczyk was already running to it. Meanwhile we laid Buyak on a spread greatcoat, putting a parachute under his head. He was pale as a sheet. His eyes were half-open and lifeless; his hands icy.

The doctor arrived; the medical orderlies brought the stretchers.

We looked at each other. No one spoke. The mechanics were silent, too. Only Pryszczyk kept repeating; "My Lord! My Lord!"

Our interview with the intelligence officers lasted interminably. They asked each of us about the smallest details; they were fussy, looked at the maps, traced and verified the location of the bombed objective, the direction of flight, the altitude, though Zygmunt had all the data carefully noted. Then: "When was the front gunner wounded?"

Mercury growled that this was just what we would have liked to know ourselves. We did not even know whether he was alive. And could they please release us so that we might see him?

The intelligence officer could not understand why we were so nervous, but he continued to be unruffled.

Suddenly the telephone rang. It was the doctor who spoke from the sick bay. The Intelligence Officer smiled,

said "yes" and "very good" then put down the receiver.

"Oxygen," he said to us. "Oxygen. He had no oxygen. He is all right now. Don't worry."

He had no oxygen.

Can the people from the earth understand these words? Can they realise what it means; not to have oxygen high above?

During the last five or six operational flights, since the time he had "changed" so much, at the altitude of fourteen thousand feet Cadet Officer Buyak had been slowly choking. While we turned on our oxygen apparatus and breathed normally, he connected his but breathed as if it were not on, for the apparatus was out of order.

First of all, he was overcome with drowsiness and apathy. His hearing was less acute, he felt weak and was incapable of making the slightest effort without feeling suddenly dizzy. He did not realise that his oxygen apparatus was not working. He fought against these feelings, not knowing their real reason and ascribing them either to a temporary weakness or to the laxity of his will. He did not want to speak, to listen, to fire, to observe. He felt incredibly lazy. Then he was colder, weaker, sicker. It made no difference to him what was happening and what was going to happen. He wanted to sleep; not to move; not to think; not to fight.

And yet over the target he somehow got over it, especially if we did not fly too high. How much effort these moments must have cost him! He felt like a man deprived for weeks of sleep and rest. He was frozen to the bone, deadly tired, exhausted. By a supreme effort of his will he

forced himself to aim, to fire at the German searchlights, to speak the few words of a short report.

This exhausted him so much that he fell asleep on the way home. He did not know this was caused by lack of oxygen. He was afraid to speak about his "illness" lest we forbid him to fly again, and his splendid young organism somehow had been able to endure all this for a long time.

At a height of eighteen thousand to twenty thousand feet the atmospheric pressure is half as low as on land, the temperature falls to —40° centigrades and the content of oxygen in the air suddenly diminishes. The carbon monoxide combines five hundred times as easily with haemoglobin as the oxygen of which there is so little. It was enough to fire only a short burst in order to be poisoned by combustion gases.

Buyak did fire. He used to take with him a whole bundle of rags, saying that oil splashed his glass plate so he must clean it.

"Oil? From where?" Talaga used to wonder.

Now we knew what he needed these rags for; he used to be sick after firing. In order not to leave any traces of it in the turret, he used the rags, and threw them away. Then tortured, half alive, he choked for two, sometimes three hours of the flight home.

We, who had plenty of oxygen, often felt very cold. How cold he must have felt, weak, exhausted, sick and deprived of oxygen!

And yet on land he was able to smile, to joke, to talk to us—and we cut the talk short, angry because of his "failing" us in the air!

Each new operation must have been worse for him than

the previous one. The thought of how he would feel during these five, six or seven hours must have been the nightmare of his leisure. Every day he was weaker, more nervous, more physically and morally exhausted, and every day he resolved more strongly to overcome his weakness and remain with the crew. He wanted to go on flying, although flying was torture to him. He voluntarily exposed himself to it, suffering our bitter remarks in silence and not once showing that he was not well.

Thus he held out for six operations. I don't know how many more he would have been able to endure if it had not been for the fact that, this time, Mercury climbed to twenty-two thousand feet on the flight home. At this altitude Buyak lost consciousness. We had dragged him out of the cabin half asphyxiated.

"He has some strength, I tell you," declared Mercury. "I would have passed out the first time."

We wanted to go to him at once, but the doctor would not let us.

"You almost killed him," he said reproachfully. "Now he is under *my* care. Come again in the afternoon, and maybe I will allow you to see him."

We did not protest; this kind doctor had fixed together many of our broken limbs. So we went to sleep, and at noon we and the mechanics met at the airfield, and went to visit Buyak.

Everyone brought a present. Mercury wanted to give him a bottle of whisky.

"But he doesn't drink," I said.

"Never mind. We will drink his health with it," Mercury insisted.

Pryszczyk snatched a bottle of oxygen from the dump

and wanted to give it to Buyak "so that he should have something to breathe with in the blinking sick bay."

"I have written a sonnet for him," said Koza modestly.

We were taken aback.

"That might kill him," mumbled Zygmunt unkindly.

But Koza declared that the sonnet was very beautiful. Besides, Mercury quite rightly said that a man who could survive so many flights without oxygen would be able to endure the sonnet.

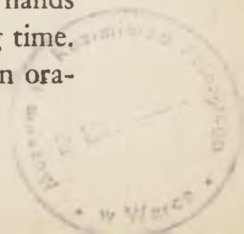
Besides this we decided to give some flowers to our front gunner. Each of us felt a little ashamed of going with flowers to visit a colleague, as if he were a young girl of a good family, but we knew this would make him happy. Our mechanics, led by Mercury, cleaned all the roses out of the beds in front of the mess and Talaga tied an enormous bunch of them with the oxygen feed which he dragged out from Genevieve—

So we went, almost in twos, like a nursery school to its first communion.

The doctor, a kind soul, did not say a word to Buyak about the oxygen apparatus, so we began to quarrel in front of his door as to who should break the great news to him. We agreed at last that Talaga should do it for he was responsible for the machine.

Buyak lay on a bed facing the door, still pale but "all alive" as Pryszczyk who was standing behind me said. He was stunned at seeing the whole deputation with flowers and the dangling rubber pipe of the oxygen apparatus, but he smiled anyway and stretched out his hand to us.

This embarrassed us. It was somehow silly to shake hands with him as if we had not seen each other for a long time. Luckily Talaga was the first to recover and began an ora-



tion; about oxygen, about the apparatus, about our not realising anything, for the periodical inspection of the machine was due next week, about our being pleased with the happy ending and . . . "Well, here are some flowers and the apparatus feed—as a memento."

Buyak listened, blinked from mental effort, and emotion until he understood. Oxygen! Oxygen was the reason, and not illness, or laziness, or lack of will power. Merely the lack of oxygen!

Then he began to cry with joy, while we shook his hands, talking all at once, and apologizing for our unjust suspicions. He was silent, smiled a little and pulled me by the sleeve.

"Does this mean that I may stay with you, Herbert?"

"Of course it does." I answered with conviction. "How could we exist without you?"

"Ouff," he sighed with relief and laughed. "The rotten time I have had with it! And how many rounds did I waste? My goodness!"

Zygmunt stroked his arm.

"Don't you worry. You will make up for it during the next operation. Don't worry."

No one of us could have known then that these were prophetic words.

18. Sacred Bombs

THE FIRST WEEK of August, 1942, was very tiring for us and for Genevieve. Hanover, Cologne, Lubeck, and Hamburg twice. Five operational flights within seven nights. In addition we had in these operations three different front gunners in turn, for Buyak was being "oxydized" in the sick bay under the care of our doctor.

The first of these gunners, a nice young boy, was unable to stand the strain and had to be relieved. The second was wounded by the Germans over Lubeck. The third, an old fox, a man of forty, caught chicken pox or measles. He was terribly ashamed of this childish disease, but it could not be helped. He was taken to the hospital immediately after the second flight over Hamburg, almost straight from the machine. Zygmunt asked him before he left to write and let us know if he wanted some diapers. Anyway, one way or another we remained without a front gunner and could not fly over Coblenz or Bremen. Mercury said so much the better, for several of our crews did not return, and we might not have returned. Besides, we had to rest, for Genevieve, too, was tired, and the mechanics were worn out. They had been working at high pressure with no time for sleep or food.

Goral got terribly angry on hearing this and told Mercury that we were there to fly, and the mechanics to work; and that no one could tell who would not return from the next operation.

This sounded like a threat or a warning, but Mercury remained unmoved, and asked Koza for a drink, because there was to be tinned salmon for dinner, and Mercury thought that in such cases you should by all means have a drop lest the salmon should think that he was being eaten by dogs. In this particular case the salmon could have had no doubts whatsoever about the human origin of its consumers. I saw Goral and Mercury that night when they were seeing each other to the hut, both listing heavily to starboard. Mercury was telling Koza how in civilian life he sold herringbone suitings and tweeds, and Koza was reciting sonnets of his own composition.

Zygmunt went with Goral to see Miss Lord, the squadron's godmother, to try another assault upon this unconquerable fortress, and I was writing something for the "Squadron's Chronicle."

At last Buyak returned. We greeted him with joy, for we were all sick of being so lazy. The squadron was to pay a night visit to the Germans at Wilhelmshaven where we had never been before.

In the morning we tried out Genevieve, tested the oxygen apparatus, the armament and the instruments, and after tea when we went to be briefed, we were in a fighting mood.

Briefing was just as usual. Each specialist thinks what he is talking about is the most important thing. But work—*important work*—begins only afterwards. We study the weather reports, we set the route, match the speed to its

various sectors, as a result of which hundreds of figures appear in Zygmunt's log.

Each crew has its own method of reaching the target and returning to base. Some always choose the same routes to reach the same places, like woodcocks in the spring. The others change the altitude of flight over the sea and the enemy coast, according to the weather. Still others rely on their instinct, jumping aside from their route, then returning; flying straight into artillery barrages to turn at the last second and brush them silently on throttled engines like shadows escaping the cones of searchlights. They twist among the clouds, descend below them or remain above; they return at wave level, or almost in the stratosphere. Everything depends on the day, the wind, the mood, forbodings, or even superstitions.

For a night operation is a gamble and the bomber crews are like gamblers. Some play "a va banque," others double their stakes each time, still others play carefully, try to elude changeable fortune, or believe in the blind fate ruling the game.

On board Genevieve it so happened that every one of us thought differently about the operations but we agreed beautifully on the whole. Beginning from the front, Buyak was an optimist; however we flew, we should strafe the Germans and return safely home; Goral firmly believed that the fact of our being still alive was due to his turns and twists and flights in thick cloud; Mercury said that it was best not to fly over the target, and if you had to, it did not matter how you did it, provided you got it over quickly; he liked, however, to return at a great altitude and by the straightest route; Zygmunt relied on his forebodings; Koza believed in his wireless and in Providence, he

swore and prayed in turn; and lastly I shared the beliefs of the five of them, and most of all I was confident that somehow we should manage, for—this must be understood—the crew was a good one.

It really was good. If it hadn't been, we might not have returned from Wilhelmshaven.

The weather report was none too pleasant; a strong north-eastern wind, very low temperature high above, hail, rain and magnetic storms.

"And how many bombs have we got this time?" asked Zygmunt.

Goral reluctantly named a heavy load.

"I have to climb with this to eighteen thousand feet," he added with bitter irony.

Mercury remarked that Genevieve would have to borrow 500 horse power to climb as high as that.

We recalled all the German beacons on the Dutch coast and islands, talked over the return route, had our dinner and went by lorry to the dispersal point.

After a while the night was shattered by the roar of the engines. Torches flashed by the ground crew, directed the machines to the lee side of the airfield. As if by witchcraft, all the red lights of the aerodrome obstructions on the roofs of the buildings and the aerials of the radio-stations flashed on.

"Hullo, Genevieve! Hullo, Genevieve!" we heard on the intercom.

I shut the armoured door of my narrow turret.

"Ready?"

"Ready!"

The ground began to move and to turn to the left. We

could see the silhouettes of the mechanics with the thumbs of both their hands lifted. The machine shook and grated; the pneumatic shock absorbers sagged on the uneven ground, then—the smooth concrete runway. Light glided on the grass brushed by the blast from the propeller. Far away the black shadow of the Wellington, severed itself from the ground.

And again: "Hello, Genevieve!" in the earphones.

The port engine roared, then the starboard; I was thrown about in the turns on the runway.

At last "Good luck"—and we were off.

The green light recedes. On the right hurricane lamps emerge, one after the other, marking the take-off run. The ground sticks to the undercarriage, does not let it go. From the straddling undercarriage legs, along the longerons of the fuselage a shudder passes to the tailplanes which shake my turret as if with convulsions.

I know that Genevieve is gathering all her strength. She must gain momentum! She must ease the weight on the undercarriage. She has to tear herself away from the ground! With all my nerves I feel this terrible effort and, unconsciously, I am taking part in it myself. I am holding my breath, my muscles strain, and there is only one thought in my mind, "Go on! Go on and up!"

The airscrews beat the air into a dense, hard stream which presses against the ground, trying to lift the wings. It pushes, compressed ever more heavily, more violently, desperately, for we are nearing the end of the runway. The engines complain bitterly. It seems that they will not be able to make it, for they still have insufficient power to lift the weight of the machine. The enormous planes of the wings plough through the compact stream of wind, and

trying to find support, strain, glide on its surface, wade in it, until they are again supported by the shock-absorbers of the undercarriage.

Genevieve sits down and rolls, shuddering all over almost defeated by the gravitation of the earth. But if she surrenders now, the airfield would be too small for the take-off. So, obeying the controls, she plods on.

The oleo-legs of the undercarriage bump against every uneven spot in the concrete. The bracing wires shiver and sound as if they were going to snap at any minute. The engines seem to be breaking away from their bearings, and the vibration of the fuselage shakes all the installations into a dizzy tinkle of glass and metal. Genevieve suffers, but she must come up into the air or be smashed to pieces.

Genevieve suffers with the enormous load. And we suffer with her, this terrible pain of strained joints, this groaning of her body full of bombs, heavy, shaken by the jumps over the pot-holes, this unbearable vibration.

Now she lowers her tail gently, as if she were standing on her toes to ease the undercarriage. The undercarriage legs cease to ram, the tires of the wheels scarcely touch the surface of the runway. Another moment . . .

I dig my nails into my palms.

Up, up, Genevieve!

I feel the wings hit against a stream of air, hard and elastic like an enormous steel spring. It gives way beneath their pressure, flattens, but carries them! It carries them! The tail lifts up to level and now we are speeding parallel to the ground, already air-borne. The air whines in the aerial, the elevator and rudder tabs on the controls begin to hiss, and we are pushed up; the last red lights come

forward, each more slowly, and disappear down below.

"Well," says Goral, "that's that."

We are plodding along blindly through the clouds. The northeasterly wind ruffles them here and there, tires and starts again as if prodded by some evil spirit. It treads angrily upon dense cloud, blows north, rebounds, rolls over to the east, and rushes down some aerial precipice into which Genevieve must follow. I feel as light as if I were made of paper. Instinctively I grip the sides of my seat to keep my head from hitting the top of my turret.

But at the same moment all my limbs seem filled with lead; I must bend double under this weight. Under the wings of the machine an enormous bubble of thick air bursts, pressed from two sides by the waves of strong wind. It squirts in the void, spreads, fills the deep gully and lifts us up, only to throw us into the twist of another whirlwind. This falls against the wing, escapes from under it, hits the other wing, tugs at the controls and again disappears in a void, carrying us with it.

We slither and bump through this wind for almost one third of the way. At some 7,000 feet it quiets down. It is pitch dark. We fly as if in sprayed soot, unable to see, not knowing whether we have pierced the layer of cloud.

But all of a sudden we see a bright light—blinding, blueish-white, enormous! The night wakens, blinks at us with a terrifying clear glance and again falls asleep.

Lightning lights the whirl of cloud immediately under the wings of Genevieve, the heavy, bulging roof above us, and a few single, frightened little clouds on our route. The earth has disappeared; so have the stars and the sky.

A new flash of lightning! We are rushing straight into an open gap in mountains of dense steam, enormous bags, bulging domes put one on top of another, swelling, twisting, steaming, devouring each other. We are in chaos, torn by the white teeth of lightning.

As the darkness is ripped along jagged seams the shadow of the aircraft appears on the clouds in front of me or at the side, near and almost black, then distant, misty and grey with a halo round it, according to the side on which the lightning flares.

Between the barrels of my machine-gun, sparks dance. Whenever I put my hand near metal, needles of electricity prick the tips of my fingers.

There is cracking in the inter-com. It is Koza's hoarse voice interrupted as if by hiccoughs: "I—I am dis—disconnecting the radio."

I try to turn the turret left, then right. It sparkles!

From the elevator tabs on the controls, beads of liquid light are streaming; they halt at the edge and fall into the darkness. The wings are phosphorescent, covered with a shining hoar-frost which spreads in irregular spots of brightness, disappears and then reappears. It shines white, greenish, blue. Snakes of light crawl along the fuselage, lick the sides of the machine, and dance on the ailerons. The upper aerial trembles and sheds beads of light that come from nowhere; the lower one, slightly bent by the force of motion, shines like polished steel. Genevieve bathes in the liquid silver of electricity and spatters shiny dust, herself in a halo of discharges.

"Eight thousand feet," says Mercury's hoarse voice.

Buyak declares from his front post that "never in his life has he seen anything like it" to which Goral replies

rather peevishly: "Nothing keeps you from looking at it now."

This short exchange brings me back to reality. We are flying over Wilhelmshaven.

Goral is angry for he cannot force the machine any higher. He is not in the least interested in the strange phenomenon of a magnetic storm in the gap between clouds. Koza is worried about the wireless which has gone crazy, and Zygmunt, with all his knowledge of navigation, is quite dumb now, unable to find the bearings, when he can see neither the earth nor the stars.

At last, at the end of an hour, we emerge from cloud.

"I see the stars!" cries Buyak.

I don't see them yet for I am sitting with my back turned to the direction of flight, but I can see down below something resembling waves on the sea.

"A beacon on the right," reports Mercury.

"How does it wink?" asks Zygmunt.

"K, I think, K for Kipper."

"You are a kipper yourself," declares Goral. "Dot, dash, dot; that's an R. R. for Rebecca."

"Well, now, Kipper or Rebecca?" asks Zygmunt again.

Koza decides that it is Rebecca and not Kipper, and after a while we know where we are; to the right we have the eastern tip of Ameland, and we are some ninety miles from our objective.

Down below is the sea dotted with islands, and to the right, some four to five miles away, the Dutch coast. We are flying parallel to this coast and only now do we gain height. Mercury reports: "9,000, 10,000, 11,000 feet . . ."

But this is not enough. All of us realize that we are still within range of the enemy artillery.

And what will we do above the target?

This is not a comforting thought. Each of us asks himself the same question and each tries to chase it away. Shall we manage to climb to fifteen thousand or sixteen thousand feet?

We all know that this is impossible; that we cannot climb so high, for our target is too near. Under these condititons we are not expected to fly over the target. We can turn ninety degrees north, and drop the bombs into the sea or we can turn back!

For nothing in the world would I be the first to say this aloud. No one of us will say it, though each is waiting for someone else. And even if anyone spoke such a sentence, all the others would protest. We may be frightened, but we will not admit it.

We will not turn back. We will not turn north. We will not drop our bombs into the sea; "these bombs are sacred," as Buyak said once.

Buyak was right; these bombs *are* sacred. They must fall on German soil and explode there. To bomb Germany is our privilege—no other Poles have this privilege—therefore we have no right to forfeit it as long as we live. These are our, *Polish* bombs, although they come from a British factory; therefore they are sacred. Therefore each must explode in the target. We will not drop them into the sea. That is why we will fly over our target at this impossible height, within range of every artillery shell.

The machine now flies more evenly, maybe because of greater altitude, and maybe because we have passed the region of storms. I look at the sky. The moon crawls slowly among the clouds, showing her egg-shaped, flat face.

Suddenly to the left, aslant, a little above us, two small stars begin to move. I rub my eyes incredulously. Yes, that's right! They sail along a great arc in our direction, grow, pass along other stars. . . .

"An aircraft astern! I can see her lights 500 yards away!"

"What? With lights on?" several voices ask at once.

I confirm it, trying to overcome the contraction of my throat.

"Careful, Goral!"

Goral says: "Give it a pill, but not too soon," and then silence falls.

The enemy machine approaches slowly. Her pilot probably does not see us for he appears on our left, then on our right, comes nearer, then withdraws, as if he was losing track and finding it again. At last he comes to level with us and skids lightly some 200 yards from right to left.

"Now!" I think.

A squirt! His lights go out. . . .

But at the same moment something bangs on the fuselage, Buyak's machine-guns resound, and a black mass, like a blind, cold meteor wallows over our heads.

Mechanically I pull the trigger. Too late! My burst misses the disappearing shadow.

"A second one!" I cry, trembling from emotion.

"He attacked from the front," says Buyak. "He had no lights."

"Attention Buyak!" shouts Mercury. "Attention! Lights to the right!"

Buyak fires and at the same moment from the darkness overhead four streaks of beady shells are spilt.

I pull my guns sharply, turn the turret—correction—fire!

Again too late. The streaks disappear, I hear someone swearing and then Buyak's voice: "This swine with lights on is a Ju-88. His lights are on as a decoy for us to fire at him. Then the other one can see his target and shoots at us from close up. We must . . ."

I don't hear the end of the sentence; a new burst deafens me. Here it is! The red and green stars approach to behind the tail. I shoot, directing the fire in front of them, and then I let them pass between the streaks of my shells.

He goes away. I loosen the grip of my fingers and hear Zygmunt's short bursts, then Buyak's—together, then separately. Koza swears: "They have smashed my set, the devils. . . ."

Again something brushes past us, at perhaps some hundred or only fifty yards away. . . .

Buyak fires and . . .

"Attention, Herbert! On your left!"

I want to leap, my eyes feel as if they were starting out of their sockets.

Here he is!

I shoot. Buyak does, too. Between the spurts I can hear single words, cries, exclamations, and at last: "He got it! Look at the explosion!"

"Hurray!" shouts Koza.

They all speak at once. I cannot understand a word of it.

"Tell me. . . ."

Again several voices at once: "Buyak has shot him! Went to pieces! Is on fire . . . just smithereens! Buyak . . ."

"Searchlights in front," says Buyak.

The machine is full of smoke and burned gases which

slowly escape through the wind screens and fissures. I feel sick, in spite of my oxygen. We have lost some two thousand feet, and the searchlights are groping around; below us, left, right, higher up. . . . We are over land.

Zygmunt asks: "What course have you got?"

"Eighty," says Goral. "They are making it hot for us!"

After a while Zygmunt states: "We have passed Emden. Take seventy-five." And again: "Take seventy."

The earth bombards us with hundreds and thousands of shells. Down below they are born as sparkles and flashes and rush up to expire at the end of their trajectory or else explode in flashing splinters. We are tense; every one of us is waiting, holding his breath.

Searchlights, fire barrage, cones. The shells fly high over us, the splinters bang on the wings. I can see the outlines of a bay, so we must be somewhere south of our target.

"Yes, that's right," Zygmunt says in a choking voice. "Course three fifty. Throttle back."

The coast studded with searchlights recedes, turns away. The fire is so dense that it is hard to understand how Genevieve avoids the explosions.

Suddenly a sharp light plays through my turret. One, two, three searchlights. They all are turned on us; from every side. Genevieve shines like a silver dragon-fly; hundreds of beams concentrate on her and glide with her across the sky. Over the whole enormous bottom of the night there is nothing but our machine, descending lower and lower down over these hundreds of guns which are firing at her, all of them—all of them at once! When will she be smashed.

The whole sky, crossed by the lines of searchlights, is coning towards one point. Genevieve seems to be sending

out an enormous sheaf of rays embracing the earth. She is the focal point; she is most important; she alone against so many batteries!

She descends majestically, slowly, whistling and hissing with the stream of air rushing through the controls and aerials. She descends, taking with her across the sky the bending cone of searchlights. She is very imposing gliding calmly with her engines throttled. Her propellers shining like mirrors in the glare, she turns unhurriedly, and on the thread of her bomb sight the earth moves before Zygmunt's eyes.

We drop flares. One is shot down by a shell splinter, but the second lights up and remains behind us. I can see the town, the port, the quays, the ships.

We go on down with our engines throttled. And we are still alive!

By what miracle?

Puffs of smoke and flashes burst behind the tail, five or ten shells exploding at a time. The splinters are banging on the wings, ringing against the metal ribs, striking on the turrets.

How long has this gone on? A quarter of an hour? An hour? Half a minute? I don't know; I could not guess.

At last the full, clear, ringing, almost triumphant voice of Zygmunt: "Attention! Bombs away!"

I can see them clearly, shining in the streaks of light and falling down, wagging their tails. Immediately afterward a sudden whirl pushes us down after them.

"Hold tight!" cries Goral.

Half a turn wedges me into the back of my low seat and at once throws me back against the back blocks of

my guns. My heart stops for a second, then begins to beat furiously. Fear contracts my throat.

"What has happened?"

There is no answer. We are falling down from six or seven thousand feet as if our wings or our controls were broken. We are falling, followed relentlessly by the searchlights, in a flood of blinding light, straight into the sea. The machine roars, howls, struggles. I can hear the voices of the crew, but I cannot understand the words. I cannot move my turret, it is jammed, or the mechanism has been damaged by the shells. I am trapped and shall not be able to get out even if I am not killed instantly by the impact of the fall.

A sort of paralysis has got hold of my thoughts and nerves. I know that somewhere in my brain, or in my instinct, the fuse of fear has been lit, but the flame has not reached the charge and there is no explosion. I do not realize clearly that we have been shot down; that we are perishing.

Neither can I understand the darkness which surrounds me after a while, nor the burden which is pressing me down. An enormous bell is ringing in my ears, one—two—one—two . . .

How weak I feel. . . . Is this how you die? . . .

Now even this bell ceases to ring. . . .

"Herbert! Herbert! Herbert!"

Suddenly I come around.

"Herbert!"

"What . . ." I want to say, "What do you want?" but my voice fails me.

"He is alive, nothing is wrong with him," says Goral.

He means me. My strength returns suddenly.

"What do you want?" I ask aloud.

Somebody is laughing.

"That was a narrow escape, I must say!"

"They were dead sure they had us, and we came up just above sea level and—'goodbye, gentlemen,' we said!" Goral rejoices.

"They've even ceased firing at us," confirms Buyak.

I look around. We are flying low over the sea. Far away wandering searchlights, artillery fire and glares of fires can be seen. This is Wilhelmshaven burning.

And we are alive! Goral had risked a steep dive from six thousand feet to avoid the fire of almost all the anti-aircraft batteries and he succeeded! Good old Genevieve could take it. Now she is carrying us straight to base! Pierced with shells, with her sides smashed, with the wireless set shot through, but alive, humming with the bass voice of her engines, light and quick.

Oh, my Genevieve!

19. A Stain on the Sea

The moving of our squadron from Bomber Command to Coastal Command was not a demotion; it meant a chance for us to rest. After every two days of operational flights we rested the two following days, which meant that we had training flights, tests with fresh crews and such routine work. And of course, we did not fly at night. Compared with bombing operations over the Continent, service with Coastal Command may be considered a job for convalescents. We needed the change. The last luckless month cost us a number of crews either killed, missing or wounded in action; we were rather depressed by these losses and exhausted by strain.

Conditions for rest are ideal. Within ten miles there are literally no amusements of any sort, no pub, or dance hall or cinema; we are fourteen miles away from the nearest railway station and from the village which has all the above mentioned civilised institutions; fourteen miles along a winding, narrow road, going steeply either uphill or down, bordered by high hedges on both sides. The British drive along these canyons at the rate of sixty miles per hour, smashing at irregular intervals either the cars, themselves or their passengers. Communication by rail is much slower;

the local trains in the direction of London stop at every little station and crawl slowly. Not a single one of them is direct, and you have to change at out-of-the-way stations at unearthly hours. You cannot get food at the stations and there is no restaurant car on the train. In one word, it is an idyll; a railway idyll from the end of the last century.

Zygmunt, who is usually rather inclined to pessimism, is pleased with our seclusion, for, as he says "no brass hats nor similar fifth column representatives can get here and we have peace at least."

We live in huts of corrugated iron, eight men to one hut. We have spring beds, one for each man; rather strange looking chests instead of cupboards for our belongings, one for two men; and something which looks like an enamel spittoon and is supposed to be a wash basin, one for four men. There is only one iron stove for the eight of us. The stove looks rather suspicious, its dimensions are suited to a doll's house and I don't think it is possible to light it. But meanwhile it is still summer, and Zygmunt assures us that it is warmer here in winter than in summer.

There are hellish draughts in these huts. When it rains—and it does so three or four times a day—the water drips on the pillows and our things never get dry, for the ground is as damp as it is in a brick kiln.

But the airfield is as vast as a prairie. It has been built for the Americans and their Flying Fortresses or even bigger machines; the runways are, to quote Pryszczyk, "respectfully yours," for a mile and a half. Even if you don't like it, take off you must, for there is so much run. In addition, the airfield and the whole station are on a tip of land, on a point which goes out far into the sea, high, steep, with

banks suddenly ending in cliffs a hundred yards high, at the bottom of which there whirls and roars the swell of the ocean. Each runway abuts on to this precipice.

What is more important is the fact that over the hut of the station commander there flies only a single, lonely Air Force flag. The *Polish* flag.

We are alone here. We are at home. In a *Polish* station. A *Pole* is the station commander. The orders are issued in Polish; the instructions on the boards are in Polish (but with an English translation for the few men of the ground crew). The cook, however, is British and poisons us at mess with the strange dishes invented by the English to spoil the best food products in the world.

Another important thing is that in this new station we are at once successful in our new daylight work. Before us, a British squadron was stationed here for fourteen months hunting German submarines without notable results. And we, at the end of a few weeks, have two certain ones and several probables to our credit. We are in luck.

I think we are in luck, but Zygmunt thinks that it is the British who were out of luck. Our padre thinks of course that a saint (whose name I don't remember) meddles in these affairs. In our Air Force headquarters they probably think: "A good squadron, the boys are trying hard, so they have sunk a few Germans." The Intelligence Officer suspects us of having an arrangement with the Germans by which we are the only ones who are allowed to sink them. I cannot say what Pryszczyk thinks for it is unprintable.

But after all it is not important who thinks what, for we are members of the armed forces, thinking is not our job and we have had plenty of time to get out of the habit.

The important thing is that we have given the Germans plenty to drink; that they have drunk themselves to death, and not with beer!

The first of the U-boats was sighted by Leyba, and his crew sank it. (Leyba is the second pilot of the Wellington "F"—for Felicity.)

Leyba, strangely enough, is very fond of beer. Apart from this he likes flying and loves eating. These are about all his interests in life.

"The war," he says, "must be won by Great Britain, one way or another, for such is the tradition. So why should I worry about the Allies being beaten in the meantime? When the end of the war comes, I will learn about it anyway."

Therefore he does not care a hoot about Libya and Egypt, nor the Japanese blitz, nor the campaign in Russia. The Battle of the Atlantic interests him only because he is now taking part in it.

Leyba has ruddy cheeks, is fattish, with a small evenly cut moustache and a sleepy expression. But his eyes are keen and he knows how to use them when necessary. Anyway, he was the first one to sight the submarine.

The story was told to us by Felicity's navigator, cocky, vivacious "Sweet Frank," so nicknamed by the fair sex who—God knows why—are in love with this boy. Maybe Frank is sweet, how should I know? He is attractive to look at, has a velvety tenor voice, dances well, is not at all stupid. Anyway, the girls fall for him by the dozen.

But that night he did not tell us about his conquests among the women, but about Leyba's victory.

There were several of us, from different crews, gathered

round the fireplace in the mess. It rained of course, for it was August; the wind howled and rushed along the runways like a flock of Hurricanes gone mad, but in the mess it was warm and cosy, for one of the British orderlies had made a fire for us, and a shipment of sherry had arrived at the bar. Apart from this, Casimir, our mess officer, who had gone grey with worrying about our well-being, provided us with a tray of sandwiches with garlic sausage, so we would have listened to anything, even to Sweet Frank, who, this time, was talking sense.

"Well, as you know, we took off soon after lunch," he began. "The weather was so-so, the ceiling not too high, perhaps four or five thousand feet, the wind moderate and quite warm. We flew in the centre of a fan-like formation, to Herbert's right. Well, nothing happened. Over the sea we passed a large convoy, then a lonely Norwegian ship that signalled to us politely, then—nothing. Baca at the controls began to sing out of tune, so all of us yelled at him to shut up. Leyba ate all his sandwiches, finished with dry apricots and it was clear that he was beginning to look for a bunk, so I realised we were some three hundred miles from the coast."

"Two hundred eighty," corrected Leyba from his armchair in the shadow, close to the tray with sandwiches.

"All right, two hundred eighty," Frank agreed. "I did not take any bearings. But the bunk was already occupied by the wireless operator who had a bellyache, so Leyba had to remain at his post next to the first pilot. This was lucky, or no one would have sighted the submarine. . . ."

"This was lucky for Leyba, who took advantages of 'Spark's' tummy ache and ate his sandwiches as well," said Baca.

Leyba took umbrage. "Didn't I give you two sandwiches?" he asked indignantly.

Baca honestly admitted that he had got the sandwiches, although the cheese was missing in one. Someone took a bottle and filled the glasses. Mercury put more coal on the fire and inadvertently opened a full cigarette case. Six or seven hands at once stretched towards him although we had plenty of cigarettes ourselves.

"It's sheer robbery," he mumbled and did not smoke himself.

Sweet Frank went on:

"So for the next fifty miles Leyba was busy eating six more sandwiches and starting on the second bag of dried apricots, and Baca had time to get through all his repertoire. Perhaps five minutes later I looked up and saw our second pilot with his face pasted to the glass, looking intently at something. I looked too, but did not see anything. He began to shout: 'A U-boat in front of us! The periscope visible to the right!' The more sleepy he felt, the more he shouted.

"The noise almost deafened our front gunner. 'Oh all right,' he said, 'a U-boat, perhaps, but don't you shout so, sir, for it prevents me from seeing.' Our front gunner is a very logical man. Baca throttled up, dived, we flew in the direction of the supposed periscope and indeed something which had been showing on the surface, dived under the waves, leaving only a trace on the surface."

"A trace; on the water?" wondered a newcomer to our station.

Everybody looked at him indignantly, and Baca said pointedly: "Keelwater, my dear sir."

The newcomer did not get it, but said "aa-ha!" and was

silent, apparently ashamed. Frank took a gulp of his sherry and went on.

"This looked, you know, like the skeleton of a herring."

"Like what?" Mercury asked in turn.

"Like the skeleton of a herring. A herring is a fish; it has a skeleton, you know; bones and suchlike—see?" explained Zygmunt.

"All right, but what looked like a herring?" the ex-representative of Polish trade wanted to know.

Zygmunt sighed and explained: "The trace on the surface of the sea, dearie. The trace left by the diving periscope. Do you know, little Mercury, what a periscope is?"

"I do," said Mercury. "Well?"

"What, well?"

"What has it to do with a herring?"

"I wish you were swallowed by a shark," mumbled our padre under his breath. He was interested in the story and impatient to hear the end of it.

There was no shark at hand, and as Mercury insisted upon being enlightened in the matter of herrings and periscopes, I explained that a trace on the sea, *a trace that disappears quickly*, is made by the periscope of the submarine cutting the surface of the water. This trace is a series of small waves, parting like the ribs of a herring, on both sides of the disappearing periscope.

"But this is not a good comparison," retorted Mercury, "for a herring has bones placed vertically, and not horizontally."

Zygmunt gnashed his teeth.

"But this particular trace looked like the bones of a herring swimming on its side, and not on its belly!" he declared.

"That is different," Mercury agreed, and Sweet Frank was at last able to continue.

"Well, then, when we saw that this was really a submarine, we flew over it at once. Baca aimed at the trace and we dropped four depth charges. Four columns of water rose behind us. Our rear gunner reported that they were 'on the target,' but to be quite certain we turned back again and dropped whatever we had left. Meanwhile our wireless operator began to recover from his emotion, so we gave our position to base and sent a report saying that we intended to wait. We waited, climbing a little, for we had dived quite low. None of us was sure whether the depth charges had done any damage to the U-boat, so we looked to see whether it was visible anywhere under the surface. Every now and then someone shouted that he had sighted it, but he had spotted only a shadow of the breaking waves, not a submarine. I was beginning to think that we all had had a hallucination, when suddenly Leyba shouted again: 'A stain on the sea!' I thought this was another false alarm, so I answered: 'If you hadn't overeaten so much, you wouldn't be seeing things.' But this time Leyba was right again. We saw a muddy rainbow-coloured stain of petrol spreading on the surface. A moment later it began to boil and bubble—enormous bubbles of air coming up from under the sea, covered with foam, whole geysers shooting up! We thought the submarine would emerge at any moment, and the gunners went nearly crazy with impatience. But half an hour passed and nothing happened. Only the foam, oil or petrol and these air bubbles, showing all the time on the same spot. . . ."

"I would never have thought there would be so much of it in a submarine," said Baca. "We waited some four

hours in the air, before we were released, and the sea went on boiling and bubbling the whole time."

"And was this boat credited to you?" asked Casimir.

"The Coastal Command would certainly have credited us with it, but the Navy has the final say. And as the Navy waits for the German communiqué, perhaps in a few months . . ."

"Maybe in May, or in December, but not today," sang Baca, out of tune as usual.

Frank sighed resignedly.

"Give me some of those sausage sandwiches," he said. "Where are they?"

All eyes turned towards the forgotten tray. It had stood in the shade, and Leyba sat next to it. . . .

"Damn!" exclaimed Casimir.

All the sandwiches were gone. Leyba has dematerialised too, as if he had been sucked in by the darkness.

20. "*G*" as in Genevieve; "L" as in . . .

Don't be childish," said Goral. "It could have happened to any of us."

I know it. I have repeated this to myself over and over again. But it doesn't help.

The broken arm hurts terribly. I probably have fever. The doctor has forbidden us to speak and threatened that he will separate us if we go on talking, especially as Zygmunt's condition is none too good; serious burns. But Zygmunt has fallen asleep now and the doctor is not in sight. The nurse also has ceased to honour us with her presence. So we are talking in halftones and Goral tries to console me as well as he can. But he doesn't know everything. He doesn't know all the truth. And I am the involuntary cause of what happened. This is all because of me; because of my carelessness; because of this arm which now hurts, throbs with all its pulses in the plaster-of-Paris dressing.

I broke it yesterday at 2 P.M. I stumbled on the steps, when getting into the machine, just before the take off. I fell from the height of a few feet and landed with all my weight on my arm. Something cracked, and I was so faint that I was unable to get up alone.

I could not, of course, fly with them, and as there was no one to take my place, they flew without a rear gunner —the five of them. Mercury was to take my place on the way over the target, and Goral on the way back.

"It is such an unimportant operation," said one of them, to calm me a little. "We shall manage, don't you worry."

Our doctor saw my arm and wanted me to go to hospital at once. I did not agree: I wanted to wait for Genevieve's return. They told me to lie down in the sick bay, but I could not stick it there. Worry for the crew would not let me sleep in spite of an injection. I probably had no "bad premonition," but my head was seething with the thoughts of what was happening somewhere between the Bay of Biscay and the open Atlantic.

Three hours after Genevieve took off, with the help of Pryszczyk who had come to inquire about my health, I slipped out of the sick bay, eluded the doctor and drove to the airfield in the ambulance car.

The car jolted terribly, and the arm hurt again. We stopped in front of the hangar, at Genevieve's usual position. I lay on the stretcher, chain-smoking cigarettes and waited, waited, waited. . . .

"What are you thinking about?"

This question brought me back from my feverish memories. Oh, yes. I am in the hospital. Next to me, on the right, Zygmunt is sleeping. On the left lies Goral. He is asking what I am thinking about. I have to answer. . . .

"How . . . ," I begin, and don't know what to say next, for I want to ask what has happened to Mercury, and recall that Goral does not know the whole truth yet. No, I can't speak about this now. He has lost too much blood; he is too pale and I myself would not be able to bear it.

But Goral takes it up with animation:

"How it happened to us? Don't you know?"

"I don't know," I answer truthfully. "No one has told me. But . . ." I look a Zygmunt who lies with his arms on the blanket, bandaged up to the shoulders.

"He is asleep," says Goral in an undertone. "The whole sweep was unlucky. First of all, the weather. No, first of all, your arm," he corrected himself quickly. "Secondly, the weather. We flew straight into the sun for an hour and there was not a single cloud in the sky. Buyak almost broke the glass in his turret, keeping watch. He did not see anything startling, for what can you see when you are flying into the sun? Zygmunt, Koza and I looked at the sea. Mercury was complaining that his legs were getting stiff in your turret. He even said he must have longer legs than you have, for he sat folded like a penknife and couldn't move. But he at least was able to see something.

"At four o'clock Zygmunt did his magic with the sextant and soon afterwards we saw a British convoy just as we were told we would at the briefing. We flew nearer. There were two big destroyers and one merchantman of probably some fifteen thousand tons. And Buyak said: 'Goodness gracious—lightning!'

" 'Are you crazy,' I say, 'or are you dreaming?'

"The weather was like that of the Mediterranean, not the smallest cloud in the sky, and he insists on lightning!

" 'I tell you; lightning.'

"To which we all replied: 'Where do you see it, you fool?'

"He was right, after all. 'The destroyer to the right,' he said. We looked. Lightning indeed! The Polish destroyer! Koza could not bear it and sent an open message to her:

'A Polish Wellington greets the Polish ship in convoy!'

"And down below they began to signal with their flag! God knows what there is to it; a bit of cloth, like the next one, with only an eagle on a red field, but we were as moved as if Poland herself had saluted us!

"They answered something, but I don't know what it was, for Koza listened alone, and he was so moved that instead of repeating it to us, he blew his nose loudly.

"Then another machine from the escort came near, so we couldn't speak to the Lightning. We left the convoy, returned to our course and again we flew on into this terrible sun. We had it now on our right, but lower than before. In the west there was a belt of cloud over the horizon. Zygmunt was reminding us that in another hour the glare would be less. Small consolation; just then we should be on our way back. . . .

"But, as you already know, it did not come off on schedule."

Goral changed his position on the bed, lifted himself on his elbows and hissed from pain: "This time they did get me all right, the swine."

"Are you in pain?" I asked.

"Yes, a little. But the worst thing is that I am as weak as a fly. I must have lost a good couple of pints of blood. . . ."

I knew he lost so much blood that he nearly died. He was very pale, almost as pale as the off-white walls of the hospital.

"If Lucy should see me now . . . ," he began, and suddenly stopped.

He looked at me very embarrassed, as if this name, or the entire remark had slipped out unconsciously; as if he

had inadvertently disclosed something which should not have been told to anyone.

"Miss Lord?" I thought, "Miss Lord, Lucy. So it was he . . ."

I pretended to be looking towards Zygmunt's bed, but on the table there stood a mirror. In it I saw Goral's face, smiling and blushing. So that was it, Miss Lord had been "Lucy" to none of us.

I moved a little and reached for cigarettes. Goral spoke quickly now as if he wanted to end this moment of silence.

"About half an hour after we left the convoy, I saw two little points south of us. I was not quite certain so I said to Buyak that the glare made me see black spots before my eyes. 'And where are you looking?' he asked. You know him, he understands at once what you mean and his voice does not even falter, though he knew perfectly well that I was suspecting something. 'Towards the Bay of Biscay,' I said. Buyak was silent for ten or fifteen seconds. And there was silence in the machine—only the roar of the engines. At last Buyak said, calmly again, as if it were without any importance: 'Three twos from the south. I believe they are Ju-88.'

"We weren't afraid to meet the Jerries but not six fighters. You know what it means; count their fire capacity alone."

I closed my eyes. Six Junkers! Some twelve cannon and twenty-four machine guns against one Wellington. If you deduct from the crew the pilot who cannot fire, there are three cannon and six machine guns against each of the remaining members of the crew. The Junkers are manoeuvreable and quick; they can attack from any side; they can enter the combat whenever they wish, at any moment

they choose; and they can always get away. But not a Wellington. The Wellington is a heavy unwieldy thing, big, slow, armed with only six machine guns. A fight against one fighter is very difficult for her. Against so many, it is quite hopeless. The very thought of the six Junkers paralyzed me.

Goral said something about distant cloud, about the distance from the coast, about the sun. I knew those details already. I did not want to remember them. I waited for something which would give a spark of hope, knowing beforehand that there would be nothing of the kind in his story. I felt some unjustified regret that he did not say anything of the sort. He merely mentioned what was true; that they were doomed. They did not "decide to sell their lives dearly," as one says for the sake of morale. Quite to the contrary; they must have experienced a desperate, bestial fear; the fear which sometimes paralyses the muscles; which makes you hunch your head between your shoulders and await the blow; the kind of fear you never mention, because you are ashamed.

Goral did not dwell upon these feelings; he spoke only of facts. Maybe he would not have been able to express in words the thoughts which cross the frightened mind at such times.

"The first two came towards us against the sun and dived. Before I could release the bombs and turn by 180 degrees, Mercury and Koza opened fire at them. The German bursts hit our wings. It was as though it had hailed for a second and then stopped. I did not hear nor see the bursts but I felt them with my nerves. Immediately afterward, Mercury shouted: 'A German at the tail,' and began to fire, so that the panes rang round me.

"Well, you know I don't like to have the enemy at my rear. It is silly, but I would prefer to get it in the breast rather than in the back. I made an avoiding turn left and down, and suddenly Buyak began to fire from his guns, then Zygmunt, then again Buyak and—I don't know which of them hit it—both began to shout that the Junker was falling. I saw it at the last moment to the right of us, hitting the water. A jet of water came up—Versailles was nothing compared with this—and that was the end of it.

"For a while, not more perhaps than five seconds, none of the others approached and I was beginning to think that they would leave us alone when Mercury shouted: 'Jerry at the tail and right.' I turned sharply right and dived; we were flying low then; at perhaps five hundred feet. I flattened out to two hundred and saw some fifty yards away to the left, small dancing geysers come up from the sea. Then continuously from the left, then from the right, then in front of us, they attacked us in twos, in threes and hit us . . . burst after burst. The water was bubbling here and there. How to make any avoiding action in these conditions was beyond me.

"Suddenly Buyak cried: 'Left and down, left.' Instinctively I put the machine on the wing, kicked the rudder bar . . . she went into a slip. . . . This was too sharp for the height of two hundred feet. I saw the bubbles disappearing on the surface, something struck me on the legs—I did not even know it was a shell—and I felt the machine falling . . .

"What a feeling. I gave a boost, pulled the stick hard—nothing doing—so I began to think; this is the end. . . . I took a look; the wave was growing under my wing . . . then a shock. The water spurted on the glass plate, it shook

us a little, we were brushing the water with our belly; a splash, a crack, again a shock; bullets falling on the cockpit, and suddenly something began to burn in the radio partition.

"I don't know by what miracle Genevieve flattened out again, but she did it on her own account. Anyhow, under incessant fire, we zigzaged to some fifty or seventy feet and Zygmunt snatched the extinguisher to put out the fire.

"Meanwhile Koza damaged a second Junkers which turned back south, limping and the remaining four of them must have had very little ammunition left for they now began to fire sparingly. Maybe they also lost their enthusiasm for it, for they did not attack at short range. In spite of this, Mercury got wounded in the arm by splinters. I don't know how he could have escaped, for Zygmunt who went to see him said that there was a hole three feet wide in the turret, exactly at the height of the gunner's head.

"We could not think of getting Mercury out of there, for a fire started again, and I was afraid for the boxes of ammunition. I made a terrible row about it. Zygmunt returned and began to put out the fire, while Koza and Buyak fired at the Germans. One of the extinguishers was empty, the others pierced by shells, so Zygmunt put out the fire with his bare hands and his body; he lay down and yelled as it scorched him, but he put it out.

"The Junkers flew away and we began to survey the damage. Only then for the first time did I feel faint and in pain. I also saw that blood was flowing from my legs like water from the eaves. Buyak dressed my wounds and said with such conviction 'these are only scratches' that I believed him. It did not even hurt much, only my legs were getting numb and became as soft as macaroni. I had trouble

with the rudder bar and Mercury was no use, though Koza at last succeeded in dragging him out of the rear turret and bandaging him. So Buyak, having somehow dressed Zygmunt's wounds, sat next to me and between the two of us we flew Genevieve."

"If I had been with you," I began, but Goral interrupted me.

"If you had been with us, you would have been hit perhaps by that shell from the cannon," he said pointedly, "Mercury was lucky. . . ."

These words shook me; Mercury was lucky. Oh, my God! One ought not to say such things; one ought not to say things having such a bitter meaning, even in ignorance. . . .

"I will tell him," I thought.

But he was speaking again.

"Our wireless set was smashed into powder, the nose and the fuselage covering were in bits, the mechanism of the undercarriage did not work, the turrets were immobilised and, what is worst, the meter on one of the tanks pointed to zero. Buyak told Zygmunt about this, and Zygmunt, groaning, began to calculate how far we were from the British coast. After a few minutes he declared that we would not be able to make it; some thirty, or forty miles before the coast we would have to make a forced descent. Our dinghy was holed like a sieve by the German shells.

"Zygmunt and Mercury groaned. Every one was listening to the roar of the engines—was the tone even? I was feeling sick every now and then—I felt the blood streaming from all my wounds through the bandages. Koza had discovered his thermos-flask with black coffee, also shot

through, luckily near the top. We succeeded in having half a cupful. I drank it and it helped a little.

"Well, so we flew on and on. Three quarters of an hour passed, and the meter of the second tank showed that it was still half full. Buyak saw it at once. 'Everything is all right,' he said. 'The other tank is also undamaged, only the meter doesn't work. We have enough fuel to fly at least to Sweden.' We felt better at once, and half an hour later we saw the coast.

"The coast. It is a big word. A glorious word, as Columbus probably observed. But in Columbus's time there were no barrage balloons. We had to face them for we had neither the strength nor the wish to avoid the whole zone, so we flew somehow between them. This was a trifle compared with the flight over the sea.

"Buyak wanted us to land at any field that came along, but I was stubborn, we would reach our own airfield. We were flying over M., you know, forty miles south from here."

I nodded, and he interrupted his story and looked straight ahead, as if he was searching for our airfield, on a cliff cutting into the sea. After a while he smiled, as if he had found it.

"Isn't it queer, I don't remember how I landed. Of course, they have told me about it, but . . . Have you seen it?" I told him that I had witnessed their return; that I remembered every detail and should never forget it.

It was true. You cannot forget such things. They remain in your memory as a complete picture. Fresh impressions tend to be chaotic, fragmentary and sometimes out of proportion, but time brings order to the details and gives them

back their real perspective. This is how I saw Genevieve's return at that moment. It all happened the night before last. I lay on the stretcher in the ambulance and chain-smoked cigarettes. Pryszczyk stood near the car and talked to the driver. I heard their indistinct voices through the thin partition covered with white oilcloth. A few minutes later the other mechanics arrived. Talaga mentioned my name, probably asked whether I had gone to the hospital. Pryszczyk answered something in a low voice.

"Sergeant," I called.

Almost at the same moment one of the engine mechanics (the long and thin one—I can never remember which name belongs to whom; I think Ferenc is the tall one, and Malinowski the fat one, but it may be just the other way around); the slim one said: "I hear a machine."

Someone denied it, but very soon the bigamous corporal (the one who married a red-haired English farm girl, the blackguard) supported Ferenc. "I hear it too. She is flying low."

"Sergeant," I cried, louder.

Talaga's ruddy face appeared in the window, and a strong hand pushed open the door.

"Are they coming?" I asked.

The mechanic shrugged.

"Perhaps it is them," he said haltingly. "But it's rather too early."

"Take me out of here."

Talaga looked worried.

"Do you mean to get up with this arm of yours, sir?"

"Nothing will happen to it," I said firmly.

Pryszczyk also jumped into the car. They carefully pushed the stretcher outside, and put it on the ground.

They helped me to get up. I set my teeth; the pain raged in my arm as if it were being twisted by pincers.

"Where is this machine?" I asked.

"Over there," somebody said, pointing south.

The Wellington passed over the neighbouring cliff and showed over the bay.

"Genevieve!" cried Pryszczyk.

I don't know how he recognised her, but it really was Genevieve. She flew in a flat glide, into a moderate wind, listing to her port side. She was returning unannounced by the radio, without signal lights, blind.

The roar of engines ceased suddenly on the edge of the airfield, but the closed flaps and the un-opened undercarriage of the machine did not check the momentum. She flew parallel to the surface of the runway, skidding more and more, flattened out in a horizontal flight, then headed up and pancaked slowly, inch by inch. Suddenly she fell down in a short slip. She brushed the concrete with her belly, sparkled, cracked with all her steel and with the torn plating, rebounded and crashed heavily on the ground, smashing both her engines.

I saw her like this for a second, with her tail standing up aslant. From behind Talaga and Pryszczyk I saw her crumbling on her broken wings. Then the ambulance with its back door ajar turned sharply to that side. Before it disappeared from my eyes there was a flash of fire.

Somebody shouted behind me: "Extinguishers!"

I could not run. I walked quickly and each step had its repercussion in a jerking pain in my shoulder.

Genevieve in flames gave me a hundred times greater pain, a pain which grows in you and seems to blow up your brain. Genevieve was burning and I looked on; I

had to look on. It was like looking at a wife or a son being murdered before my eyes.

Genevieve. I felt physically connected with her, a part of her organism. I was burning with her. Everything which determined my existence was burning.

I stumbled on something and nearly fell. The heat rose against my face. Someone was shouting: "This way, sir."

I saw Zygmunt with his face covered with soot, his overall smoking, swaying between two mechanics. Koza and Buyak were hitting the burning side of the plane with crow bars, smashing a hole in it. The flames were reaching the controls and the rear turret.

Suddenly Pryszczyk appeared between the tongues of fire, black and terrible. He coughed, choked and disappeared in clouds of smoke. Talaga jumped on the wing which broke under him, shedding sparks. He stooped and pulled something sharply, then both he and Pryszczyk receded from this hell, dragging a limp body, wrapped in a blanket.

Just then the ammunition began to explode. Something whistled near me and fell on the grass. I backed instinctively, knelt and then lay down behind the ambulance. Pryszczyk who had thrown himself on the ground near the machine, was covering the wounded man in the blanket with his own body.

Luckily there was not much ammunition. As the last shell exploded, the hot ribs of the fuselage burst, and the tail, already in flames, crashed on the runway. Men ran from all sides, but it was impossible to get near the machine; the heat was terrible and the flames roared over the dead body of the aircraft.

Someone helped me to get up. I was put into the am-

bulance. Zygmunt on a stretcher, groaned. They brought in Goral, unconscious. Koza and Buyak sat near me in silence.

Only then did I think of Mercury. He was not here.

"Where is Mercury?" I asked.

They looked at me dazed. Only after a while did Buyak point with his head towards the burned-out machine.

"Over there," he said. "We came too late. . . ."

Goral listened quietly. He bit his lips when I finished. We were silent for a long while.

"I did not know," he said in a hollow voice. "And Pryszczyk?"

"He is all right."

He sighed with relief.

"It was he who dragged me out. Now I remember."

I looked at the wall in front of me. It was naked and empty. I felt tired, discouraged, indifferent. Everything that had finished with Genevieve was distant and had ceased to be painful now that I had entombed it in words. What was to follow was too distant to think about it now. Nothing remained but a misty present, off-white like the wall, a long row of grey and lazy days.

I shut my eyes on the yellow wall and the dusk. I did not want to hear soft slippers walking in the corridors or to smell iodoform and carbolic. I did not want to remember, to expect . . .

A knock at the door seemed to me an undignified intrusion.

"Come in," said Goral.

They crowded in all at once. Loud, talkative, vivacious, impossible Buyak at their head.

Zygmunt groaned, woke up and blinked with his lashless eyelids. Goral smiled as if this were our airfield. Somebody shook me by the good hand.

"We have a new machine," Buyak said gaily.

I lifted my head, to curse him. Only yesterday we had lost Genevieve. No one paid the slightest attention to me. Koza added: "She is marked with the letter L. L as in . . ."

"L as in Lord," said Zygmunt.

"L as in Lucy," said Goral.

For a moment they were silent, then laughed, a friendly laugh, warm, disarming. I looked at Goral and smiled too. He was as red as a lobster.

"Let it be Lucy," said Zygmunt.

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