



EIGHT BALED OUT

by

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**TO THE MEMORY OF
GENERAL DRAJA MIHAILOVICH
AND TO THOSE OF HIS FOLLOWERS,
DEAD OR ALIVE,
WHO AIDED US**

I

JULY 28, 1944.

0245 HOURS—I groped through the blackness, my fingers scraping the cool damp earth and the withered grass. A ribbon of moonlight unwound along the ground as the orderly pushed aside the tent-flap; then he slipped out and the moonlight slithered back as the flap fell into place again. In the brief second I spotted where the flashlight had rolled against the bunk post. I snapped the button and laid it on the ground, where its glow was half lost under the bunk. Then I sat up and began to dress.

*** A match flared in the top bunk across from me. I could see Skinner's eyes like a cat's when he lit his cigarette.

'Throw me one,' I whispered. The pack landed on the bunk beside me.

Skinner asked hoarsely, 'Who you going out with today?'

'Perkins and his boys. Same ones I went with last time.'

'You like risking your neck with green replacements?'

'It's one more mission.'

'The Headquarters boys been sweating out this briefing since noon yesterday.'

'You're telling me!'

The Italian night was warm and sticky. The khaki shirt itched and then clung to my skin.

Skinner said, 'I got a couple of gals lined up for tonight. Come home, you hear?'

'That's just why I told Operations to schedule this one for a round trip.'

Someone snored heavily in the bottom corner bunk and then rolled over. A murmur of voices filtered through from the next tent.

'We been together a long time,' Skinner said. 'Sure hate to lose you.'

'I'm four missions up on you now. I'll be home eating breakfast in bed while you're waiting on line for the SOS.'

'Maybe you're right. Good luck.'

'So long,' I said.

0330 HOURS—We filed into the briefing tent, expecting the worst. When the Operations officer uncovered the big wall map, the overlay showed the route to Ploesti. That was it.

Hitler had oil at Ploesti, and his tanks and planes couldn't move without it. To protect it, he had anti-aircraft guns and fighter fields spotted en route, and more close at hand. Ploesti was the roughest target in Europe ; it had been especially costly for my outfit, the 776th Bombardment Squadron.

Operations overruled the anxious buzzing, his voice weary and harsh: 'Now get this. Engine time, 0530 hours. Taxi time, 0545. Take-off, 0600.'

I thought: I've made Ploesti a round trip five times; I'll make it a sixth.

In the same tired monotone, Operations read off the formation positions. As navigator, I took notes. We were last, all the way. D-box, the last box in the serial. Position 23, the last in the box. Jerry ack-ack could

warm up on the leaders and be all zeroed in by the time we sailed over. We had a name for that spot: Tail-End Charlie in Purple Heart Box.

'Any questions?' said Operations and, before anyone had a chance, yielded the floor to Navigation. Routes: zig-zag to target, to throw the enemy off scent, and then bee-line home. Altitude : 24,000 feet. Rendezvous points and times. We were to have escorts and plenty of company. Emergency landing-field locations. Emergency routes to nearest friendly territory. Location of rescue boats in the Adriatic.

I thought : Some plane has to drop out of formation, and then we'll move up with the leaders.

Bombardment took the floor: loads, intervals, targets.

Intelligence rose for his turn: location of enemy flak, number and calibre of guns, rail flak expectancy, number and type of enemy fighters en route and approximate locations. Ground escape routes, if shot down . . .

'Now Yugoslavia,' he said mechanically. 'Remember, it's a five-cornered war there, and it's not always clear who's on whose side. You know enough to keep away from the Germans, I hope.' No one laughed. 'But there are all kinds of guerrilla groups. It's a free-for-all, and some are with us, and some against us, and some always changing sides. Your best bet . . .'

We had heard it all before. But from mission to mission it seemed to change, and we had long ago given up trying to make any sense of it. And so we had stopped listening. The way things turned out, it didn't matter.

Intelligence surrendered to Weather: clear skies, visibility unlimited.

Escape-kit distribution: silk escape maps, language books, forty-eight dollars in U.S. greenbacks, vitamin

tablets, water purification pills, no-doze tablets and medicines.

One of the wheels, making an effort at heartiness after what had evidently been a rough night with the *grappa* and the *signorinas*, took over for the pep talk. 'Men, Ploesti is one of Hitler's key . . .'*

I thought: Forty-two missions. Seven more like this—then Texas, here I come !

Chaplain Eastwood always spared us the big, empty words. He took the floor and we bowed our heads with him. At this moment there were never any atheists. He had written the poem which he read now, my favourite prayer :

Lord, guard and guide the men who fly
Through the great spaces of the sky.
Be with them as they take to air
In morning light ana sunshine fair.
Eternal Father, strong to save,
Give them courage and make them brave . . .
Amen.

0500 HOURS—Each man had inspected his section of the plane, and we were lined up on the parking stand, dwarfed by the huge B-24. It was a replacement plane, without even a name as yet. Our group had been pretty well shot up since March, and the crew were replacements, too. In the morning chill, I decided maybe I'd been hasty in volunteering to fill in for their sick navigator.

The radio operator, Sgt John Schuffert, didn't belong either. Like me, he had volunteered to substitute for a sick man. He was even more in a hurry than I was.

'How many does this make, Sergeant?'

'This is the big one, Lieutenant. You show us the way home, and I'll be on my way to Pittsburgh tomorrow.'

He was tall, about six feet, with reddish-blond hair

and a husky build. I am only five feet nine. I looked up at him. If he were sweating it out, he didn't show it.

I said, 'I'll show you all the way to Pittsburgh if you stick around for seven more free rides.'

'Lieutenant, after today you don't get me any higher off the ground than the second floor, and I won't even ride in a car that goes over thirty-five miles an hour.'

Lieut. Francis R. Morley, the bombardier, came from Pittsburgh, too. He was as big as Schuffert and huskier. He said, 'It's just a milk run.' But you could tell at a glance he was sweating it out.

The pilot, Lieut. Lewis M. Perkins, of Athens, Ky., came over. 'Well, Morley,' he said cheerfully, 'will the sight and the intervalometer kick the eggs out of this crate when the time comes?'

'They'd better. We've got a belly full of 500-pounders. I'd hate to have to press the mickey button and drop on other ships.'

The waist-gunner, Cpl Ben Pizion, of Jackson, Mich., asked wistfully, 'Can't you find anything wrong so we can go back to bed?'

'That's me,' said Arky, the tail-gunner. 'I ain't scared. Just tired.'

Perkins grimaced. 'The ship's got a couple of wings and four fans. We can't back out now.' He turned to Sgt Neal M. Spain, of John Day, Ore., the flight engineer. 'Sergeant, how about gas and oxygen?'

'We're loaded, sir.'

'You men in back,' Perkins said. 'Your turrets and guns OK? Plenty ammo?'

Sgt Willard E. Griffin, of Fredericksburg, Va., the ball-gunner, answered. 'Yes, sir. I guess everything's OK. I heard Arky lecturing his stingers.'

'Just told that fancy machinery all it has to do is shoot

twice as fast and half as straight as the little old squirrel gun my grandpaw gave me when I was three/ Arky said. Tall and slender, Arky, at twenty-seven, was the oldest man in the crew. Both Perkins and I were twenty-three, the others younger. Arky was also the least handsome of us, and possibly of the base, his features bony and hap-hazard. His real name was Floyd E. Umfleet, and he came from Harrisburg, Arkansas. That, and his drawl—the lintiest Ozark ever heard—explained the nickname. He would lecture his tail guns with all the fervour of a preacher at a Holy Roller meeting, which he had been, too.

‘OK, men,* Perkins said. ‘Fifteen minutes to station time. Let’s check personal equipment and get on board/

We filed by him and he looked over parachutes, flak-suits, tin helmets, oxygen masks, cameras, and chaff, the tinfoil strips we carried to throw out at strategic points in the hope of confusing enemy radar. When he got to Schuffert, Perkins said, ‘How does it feel, Sergeant, to be on Number 50?’

Schuffert burst out, ‘Like hell. I wish it was over.*

Talk like that can make you nervous. ‘Me, too,’ I said. ‘They’re opening up the officers’ club tonight, and I got twenty-five bucks invested, plus thirty-two ounces of Mission whisky. And Lieut. Skinner has some dolls lined up for a scientific experiment on what happens when One gets zipped up with you in your sack.’

‘It’s uncomfortable,’ Perkins said.

‘No room for manoeuvre,’ Arky said.

I said, ‘After tonight, I’ll be an expert, too.’

‘Let’s get on board,’ Perkins said.

That was the way it was in those days.

You woke up with it inside you, a cold stone in the pit

of your stomach. In those first few minutes you were alone with it, and that was awful. It was easier to bear when you were with others. You wisecracked and kidded and went in for horse-play, and you laughed at everything—but nothing, was really funny. You were tough and you were cocky, outside. But inside, everything was soft except that cold, heavy stone in your stomach that weighted you down, and you could walk with it and laugh with it only because you could see that everyone else walked with it and laughed with it, too.

When you woke up in the black hours of the night, you thought : It's a half-hour to briefing, and a couple of hours to take-off, and then three or four hours to target and then two or three hours back.

That was what you woke up with in those days, and you opened your eyes and saw nothing and thought: What's the use? If I make it today, it's all to be done again tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. How can I go on?

And then you got up and you did go on, because that was the only thing you could do.

You pretended it wasn't there, because that was the only way you could make it from minute to minute. But all the while, the stone—not fear but apprehension, the gnawing worry that comes before fear—was there inside you. And it became colder and heavier with every minute that brought you closer to the doubtful rendezvous. You never stopped to think about it, to meet it face to face, because you knew that if you did it would become too big to carry any further.

In those days it grew colder and heavier with every second, up to the moment the eggs dropped and the bombardier sang out 'Bombs away !' in that special exultant cry that told you that he, too, had had the swollen,

chilling stone in his stomach all along. Then you knew first that the bombs couldn't go off in the plane any more, and then that you were going back.

And from then on it would be easier to carry, because you knew that every minute was no longer speeding you toward Death, but away from him. That was the way it was then. The belly full of bombs the plane carried was a private weight in your own belly, too, and when the twelve 500-pounders left the plane, you yourself suddenly became three tons lighter. You didn't need to wisecrack and kid before laughing then. Everything was funny, and glorious, too.

0530 HOURS—The engines began warming up, a mighty roar.

0545—Lead ship taxied down to the take-off end of the runway and turned at a 45-degree angle for his run-up and mag check, the Other planes falling in line.

0555—Lead ship took the runway, the planes behind feeding on as there was room.

All the engines were racing now. The noise was like thunder; the air vibrated with cyclone fury and the planes trembled like leaves. There were two runways, running parallel north and south, with circular parking stands at widely spaced intervals abutting to the east and west. A quarter of a mile to the north and south, ack-ack guns, manned by British troops, poked their menacing snouts to the sky. East of the runways, two rounded hills, the Mae West twins, swelled above the flat surface of the wheat fields. Between them, the tip of the rising sun was a red arc.

0600—The flagman gestured sharply.

Lead ship raced, fluttered, swooped away, other ^

planes crowding behind, chasing down the runways, hurtling into the air at fifteen-second intervals.

0618—Group, completely airborne, circled the field, climbing the skies and shaping into formation, and then moved off to form up with Wing.

0620—The co-pilot, Lieut. Lloyd G. Aclan, of Little Rock, Ark., sang out the good news over the intercom: 'Ship in B-box falling out with engine trouble. Good-bye, Tail-End Charlie and Purple Heart Box!' We all sang silently with him as we moved into B-23 spot.

0700—The sun changed from a red ball to a blazing white one. It was cool upstairs, but you could tell that down below was the heat of an Italian midsummer day.

Passing through 12,000 feet, I told the crew: 'Oxygen masks. We're half-way to heaven.'

0800—The way to make it was to keep busy. Every ten minutes I called the roll. In between, I kept our location pin-pointed, warned of formation turns and climbs, had the gunners test-fire over the Adriatic, notified each man of the scheduled time of fighter escort arrival, and hunted up other jobs.

0900—Almost the whole 15th Air Force was spread out before us over Yugoslavia and Rumania. 'Ninety minutes to target,' I told the intercom. Toy towns, green and brown and grey fields dovetailing like an intricate jigsaw puzzle, slid by beneath us, our shadows floating over them like clouds.

No opposition.

1005—On the flight deck, in the white radiance of the summer sun, I was on top of the world. The Invincible Inks. The Indestructible Inks. The Imperial, Indomitable, Inextirpable Inks, the whole, wide beautiful world at his feet and the whole beautiful 15 th Air Force clearing his way.

In the blue sky ahead, black flowers suddenly blossomed.

'Ack-ack at 12 o'clock low,' I shouted to the intercom. 'About 125 miles ahead.'

The nose-gunner, Robert M. McCormick, of Spokane, Wash., said, 'They'll have the whole formation zeroed in by the time we get there.' He spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, without alarm or even resignation.

Perkins said, 'Pity those behind us.'

'The Lawd have mercy on po', po' Tail-End Charlie back there in Purple Heart Box,' said Arky.

The Lord have mercy on us all.

1025—A field of bursting black puffs all around us. But it was a short field, rail flak, and we were through and past it in two minutes.

1030—Ploesti was less than 60 miles off. There was a storm there, and we were just beginning to feel the thunder. Great smoke-clouds rolled up to the sky, and planes bobbed and tossed between ack-ack bursts like canoes in a tempest.

1045—The Inglorious, Insignificant Inks folded the RO table, helped Morley set the intervalometer, watched the bomb-bay doors open, and moved up to the small bench near the top turret to sweat out the flak on the bomb run. And sweated.

1057—**Bombs away!*⁹

1058—The Inglorious Inks was Indomitable again. We were on our way home.

1059—* *This is it!*

An enormous explosion lifted the plane, filling every crack, every crevice, with licking tongues of fire, threatening to tear the aircraft apart. Shivering, the plane seemed to stop in mid-air; it dropped, then wobbled, finally lurched ahead. There was a smell of burning.

I thought: I'm alive. I've got to get the hell out of this coffin.

Ripping off my earphones, oxygen mask, flak-suit, I picked up the parachute and headed for the bomb bays. I was beyond fear. My mind, clear as a bell, delivered instructions—what to do, what not to do—with the precision of a manual. When I reached the catwalk, I saw Perkins and Aclan, crouched over the instrument panel; it struck me with shock that I was not alone. As I paused, Aclan half-rose, as though to leave, and abruptly sat down again.

Through the bomb-bay doors, I could see the earth almost 5 miles down in cataclysmic upheaval, spewing flame and smoke into the sky. Anti-aircraft shellbursts speckled space; beneath me, parts of a plane—a wing tip, an engine—and the headless, legless torso of a man went sailing by.

Dizzy, I tottered, held firm. Aclan settled back in his seat. My reeling mind caught a cue from him and regained 'balance. I remember thinking: I'm not going mad—it's just the lack of oxygen; I shouldn't have taken off the mask.

The fire was out. It had lasted only a matter of seconds. I crawled back to the flight deck, found my oxygen mask and a walk-around oxygen bottle, breathed deeply, and felt the giddiness go. I made my way to the pilots' compartment. Perkins and Aclan were both fighting the controls, struggling to keep us upright. White and tense, neither showed signs of panic.

Perk shouted to me, 'Check the nose. I can't get any answer.'

I went forward. Flak still puffed and hailed all about us. It came to me suddenly that it hadn't been flak that hit us. Puzzled, I crawled through the alley to the nose.

The nose-wheel doors were swinging in the fierce draught. Morley had bailed out.

I was certain the nose-gunner had gone, too, but when I got up there McCormick was still in his turret, pale, taut, silent. 'What happened?' I asked. It took a few minutes to loosen his tongue.

'One of the ships ahead of us began changing position. It slid right under a ship that had just dropped its load. It caught one bomb right on the top turret.' He shivered at the recollection. 'The plane just suddenly became a ball of fire. You should have seen it. One minute a plane—the next, just flames, nothing else but fire. We flew right through the middle of it.'

From the nose-turret, the flak-bursts made patterns, pocking the sky like rain falling on a river. Momentarily, I thought of my flak-suit, then discarded the notion of putting it on again. I had my parachute strapped. I was certain any minute I'd be using it.

I plugged in my mike and told Perkins about Morley's departure.

'We're minus a waist-gunnér, too,' he said. 'Pizion dived out right after the explosion.' His voice sounded more confident.

'How're we doing?'

'We're still flying.'

I crawled back to see if I could help.

1117—Number One engine, damaged in the explosion, was throwing oil and gas. The rest of the formation was pretty far ahead.

Perkins said, 'I'm afraid to take a chance on Number One. I'm feathering the prop. We'll have to try to stagger home solo on three.'

No more flak, anyway.

1122—All damage checked and reported. We were without the tip and aileron of our left wing. Part of our left tail section was burned away. Engine Number One was out. The formation seemed more than a hundred miles ahead.

But, thanks to the C-i automatic pilot and the skill and courage of our two human ones, we were flying home.

1126—Spain reported on gas reserves.

‘That’s not enough to get us home at our present speed/ Perkins said. ‘Get this, everyone! Salvo everything you can. We’ve got to lighten the ship to bring her home.’*

1127—Plane and crew equipment streamed out the bomb-bay doors and the escape hatches, landing in a broad streak across Rumania. We hoped some of it landed where it could do some good.

I took the camera out of its brackets. ‘Goddam it, men,’ I said. ‘Do you realize we’re living one of the epic moments of this war? I’m gonna get pictures so we can go down in history.’

‘We’ll make *Life*,’ Aclan said. ‘Just get a couple of shots of Perk and me wrasslin’ these burned controls.’

‘We’ll be heroes,’ Spain said. ‘We oughta get a big spread with the pictures.’

‘We are heroes,’ I said. ‘It’ll be a goddam miracle if we get back—and just look at how cool and collected we all are.’

‘I’m cool, collected, and scared silly/ Arky said.

Griff said, ‘Them *Life* guys hang out around the rest centre at Capri. You get us all back, and I’ll guarantee to give them the pictures personally.’

I took pictures. I photographed the burned tail surfaces, the silent, smoking Number One engine, the gunners throwing ammunition out of the plane, the pilot

and the co-pilot battling the controls. They didn't have to pose to make it look difficult.

Perk was tense. He shouted, 'We've got to get rid of more weight. And even then I don't know if we can make it.'

I threw out the camera.

A B-24 carried ten 50-calibre machine-guns. Each weighed about 70 lb. There were between 30 and 40 lb. of ammunition for each. We threw out ammunition first, and then the guns.

Flak suits and helmets weighed 30 lb. Out they went—out the nose-wheel doors, the bomb bays, the waist windows, the rear escape hatch.

I crawled up to McCormick in the nose-turret. We threw out everything we could tear loose.

'Inks,' Perk called. 'That ball-turret is giving Spain trouble. Lend him a hand.'

It says in the manual that in an emergency the ball-turret can be jettisoned. I crawled back to the waist. We got all the fastenings loose except the main nut. We sweated and cursed, wrenched, and hammered it—and couldn't turn it. I took out my .45 and fired at it, once, twice, three times and hit it every time. No effect. We gave up.

We threw out gun mounts, sights—stripped the plane to a skeleton. Now we were alone in the bright blue sky.

1252—'Plane at nine o'clock low.'

1254—After an agonizing interval, we identified it as a Fortress and came back to life. From the way it kept pace with us, it was obviously as crippled as we were.

1312—McCormick spotted them.

'Three fighters at ten o'clock high.'

Perkins identified them. 'ME-io9's.'

With curses and prayers, Arky mourned his jettisoned stingers.

‘They’re taking on the B-17/

‘Poor bastards.’

‘At least they’ll be off our tail.’

‘Until they knock her down.’

‘She’s putting up a fight.’

‘Inks, give me the shortest route to friendly territory. We’re not going to make it home.’

I opened the RO desk, took out the maps, and went to work on our position. I kept busy, trying not to think how long it would take the Messerschmitts to finish off the Fortress and turn on us. I plotted a route to the Adriatic. I gave Perk the course.

‘I got these rescue boats spotted,’ I told him. ‘Try at least to make it to one of them.’

‘Just as a personal favour to you, I’ll try.’

1330—‘My fiftieth mission,’ Schuffert wailed, for the fiftieth time.

‘What happened to the ME’s and the B-17?’

‘They were still fighting when we lost sight.’

‘I had my mind made up if they made even one pass at us I was going to jump.’

We had all made up our minds.

Gloomily, McCormick said, ‘They might have seen us tossing out all the equipment and figured we’ll never make it home anyway.’

‘Let’s hope they were wrong,’ I said.

‘Pray, brethren,’ said Arky. ‘And may the good Lord have mercy.’

Amen.

1342—McCormick, from his nose-turret, was first to spot the water.

‘All right, you men/ Perk said. ‘Off with the heavy clothes. You don’t want to sink when you hit. And get on your Mae Wests.’

Off went the sheepskins. It was bitter cold. We wore only khakis, the summer uniforms, beneath the sheep-lined leather. We put on our Mae Wests, then parachutes again.

1351—We were down to 12,000 feet and it was warmer. The Adriatic, shimmering and sparkling in the sun, was 15 or 20 miles away.

1353—Number Two engine began coughing.

1357—‘We’ve had it, men.’

I tightened my chute, opened the bomb-bay doors, and stepped down to the catwalk. Below, two parachutes were already open and a third was puffing out. I waited numbly, watching Aclan get up from the co-pilot’s seat, adjust his harness, and move toward me. Then, as though slipping out of bed, I left the plane.

When the chute came alive I felt the forceful jerk and then the pull. After a while I was floating, floating like a cloud. My head cleared and I thought, in wonder: I’m not hurt at all ! I looked up at the parachute billowing overhead. Abruptly, my heart began to pound. There were two gaping holes in it, each about two or three feet in diameter. An ack-ack fragment I never felt, I thought, and calmed down instantly with the realization that the chute was holding despite the holes.

Now suddenly a greater menace threatened. The plane, pilotless, had made a wide circle and was coming directly toward me. Never religious, I found myself praying aloud, ‘Oh, God! Please keep that plane off me!*

The B-24, growing monstrously in its approach, loomed enormous overhead, blotting out the sky; but it

missed the chute by a very small margin. As I watched it, it continued on in a wide curve, narrowly missing another chute, circling, and returning toward me again/ I screamed curses at Perk for pushing the C-i automatic pilot all the way to the right before jumping, realized angrily he couldn't possibly hear me, and prayed again.

This time the plane passed below me and went on, crashing nearby with a tremendous explosion and flame. Now I looked around : seven more chutes were visible in the air within a mile or two ; we were all safe, so far.

Directly beneath me now, the wreckage was burning fiercely, and I tugged at the shroud lines to guide myself away from it. I may have pulled too hard—or maybe it was the holes in the parachute that did it—but suddenly the chute collapsed and for some 500 feet I fell as a stone falls, and believed myself dead. Then, as suddenly, it mushroomed open once more, and I was alive again. I found the rip-cord still in my hand and threw it away.

The ground.beneath was rocky and splattered with scrub brush, and it seemed to be shooting up toward me with express-train speed. I heard the sound of rifle-shots and then the stuttering of a machine-gun. I thought: The Germans are shooting at us. I grasped the shroud lines again and, just before my feet touched dirt, pulled upward with all my strength.

Still, I landed with a great jolt and a sharp explosion of pain; my back, my kidneys, both my legs seemed smashed. I lay stunned, for how long I do not know; it was the sound of firing close by that roused me. I got to my feet, dizzy, but aware that I was basically uninjured. I pulled the chute in, bundled it up, pitched it into the brush, and started running.

I had landed, I saw now, on a ridge that rose some 300 feet. A few trees, mostly scrub oak and pine, patches

of sparse grass, and great boulders—some as big as trucks—covered the area.

I had no idea where I was running. I had been told so often to get away, fast, from the place you land that I was only obeying orders that had become part of me. There were shouts and shots all around, and over on the next ridge I could see running figures. After several hundred yards I was out of breath and exhausted. I looked about for a place to hide; a few yards away there was a crevice between two boulders, with scrub-brush cover, and I crawled into it.

Lying down, gulping air in huge chest-shaking gasps, I became panicky. Somehow I thought it would be better if I were unarmed, so I pitched my .45 into the brush. And just as it landed, a voice behind me said, 'Hands oop !'

A bearded man, short and stocky and wearing what appeared to be a home-made attempt at a uniform, pointed a rifle at me; its .30-calitffe barrel seemed huge enough to hold a howitzer shell. He wore tight-fitting trousers, a short jacket, and an overseas cap, all seemingly cut from an old, dirty-grey horse-blanket. There was a small, circular silver emblem on the cap. I clambered to my feet with great effort. My body was stiff and painful; it felt like one enormous bruise. I looked uncertainly at my captor, and he grinned.

The ridge was swarming with men similarly uniformed. Within an hour they had rounded up Perkins, Aclan, Schuffert, Griffin, and McCormick. We met in a small clearing before an unpainted wooden shack about 200 yards down the ridge. We compared injuries : Griffin, dragged by his chute across rocks, was banged up pretty badly; McCormick, hung up in a tree, had

severely wrenched his right shoulder; my kidneys felt as though they had been battered by Joe Louis. We were all stiff and bruised, but no bones were broken.

'Couldn't hurt me,' Schuffert said. 'My fiftieth mission/
We hoped Spain and Arky had avoided capture.

'They might have been shot in the air, coming down/
McCormick said, gloomily. It was a thought that had
been in my mind, too.

'I don't think they Were shooting at us/ Perkins said.
'Looked to me like we jumped right into the middle of a
pretty hot skirmish.'

I remarked that our captors—there were about fifty,
in varying degrees of uniform—seemed friendly enough.

'Like the warden escorting the condemned man to the
electric chair/ Aclan said.

Most of our parachutes had been retrieved, and they
were stacked in a pile nearby. They shared with us the
attention of the crowd, which by this time included many
women and girls. EVttyone took a turn at feeling the
nylon and exclaiming over it, and then in circling
around us, with equal curiosity.

Two old men among them, who mangled a barely
comprehensible English, told us they were 'Chetniks'.

Griff said, 'I remember. They're the guerrillas.' We
looked at him expectantly. After a moment, he finished
lamely, 'They're either on our side or the Germans'—I
can't remember which.'

No one recalled exactly what had been said at the
briefings. Questioning elicited from the old men the in-
formation that they were not fighting the Germans—but
neither were they fighting the Allies. Their enemy was a
man named Tito, of whom none of us had heard. They
could not tell us whether we were to be turned over to
the Germans, kept prisoner, or returned to Allied lines.

But presently our questions were partly answered by the arrival of an officer. He was clearly that : his uniform was complete and clean, and he was treated with deference by the men. With the help of one of the old men a\$ interpreter, he informed us that our two comrades had been picked up and were safe and that he was going to lead us away from the Germans.

'Ask about our guns,' I told Perkins. 'Tell him we want them back.'

A dialogue between the old man and the officer ensued. The officer shrugged. The old man said, 'You get guns back tomorrow.' The way he said it didn't make us feel very safe.

The officer took the lead. We hiked, single file, uphill mostly, along a narrow path that wound over, around, and between huge boulders, sharp, jagged rocks, and scrub forest. Two soldiers followed behind.

We trudged along slowly, still stiff and full of the aches of the jump. Now and then we exchanged places in line so that we could exchange ideas. The officer and the soldiers seemed friendly, helping us over rocks, slowing down when the going was tough, giving us time to rest whenever we complained. But we were uneasy.

Perkins dropped midway back in the file to talk to me.

'What do you think, Inks?'

'So far, so good.'⁵

'You don't think it looks like a double-cross?'

'I don't like the idea that these people are buddy-buddy with the Krauts.'

'Neither do I.'

'Still they seem friendly.'

'Maybe we ought to make a break.'

'We could jump the officer and the two men.'

'Then what?'

'We have our escape maps.*'

'Do you know where we are?'

'Just about.'*

'Well, what do you say?'

I thought a while. 'If they were going to turn us over to the Krauts, they could just as well have left us where we were and brought the Krauts over.'

He thought. 'Maybe you're right. And maybe they're making themselves look better by marching us right down to Kraut headquarters.'

'Let's wait and see.'

He moved up again and talked it over with Aclan. I discussed it with Schuffert. Aclan talked with Griffin. Perkins conferred with McCormick. We couldn't come to any conclusion. And all the while our captors seemed amiable enough, grinning at us and offering us, during rests, the cigarettes they had taken from us.

After little more than an hour, we arrived at the foot of the ridge and followed a path between two rugged, almost vertical, cliffs. The officer stopped and pointed to a spot about a quarter of a mile off. Up some 300 feet on the side of one cliff was the scar where our plane had hit. It had smashed into a solid wall of rock, about 40 feet from the top of the ledge, and it had almost completely disintegrated.

One tyre had bounced down the cliff and lay a few yards from the trail, where several men were cutting up the rubber. Other bits of wreckage, blown into tiny fragments of scrap that one would never associate with a plane, lay strewn about a smoke-blackened circle where the little^ gasoline remaining had burned itself out and the grass with it. The trail turned, passing within 50

yards of the circle. We began searching the ground, for what no one knew.

I found a burned piece of a leather flight-jacket that I thought had been mine, but I couldn't be sure.

'My fiftieth mission,' said Schuffert.

The officer began shouting to us to get going. We were reluctant to leave. The ship had meant less to Schuffert and me than to the others who had brought her all the way from home, but its wreckage was to all of us a last link with the past, with our buddies in Italy and our families on the other side of the world. The officer managed to make us understand that Germans were on their way up to look over the wreckage, and we left in haste.

'Looks as though they're not going to turn us in.'

'Let's hope.'

But we were wary nevertheless. The shadows of the ridges were lengthening now, and the officer urged us on. Not sure whether he was leading us to safety or to doom, we went in spurts—now driving ahead, now lagging behind. Soon we were so weary that we almost didn't care. We stopped frequently to rest, and then stumbled, scrambled, tripped, fell, lunged, moved on somehow over the roughest country we had ever seen.

At twilight, a man with a gun popped out from behind a tree, startling us for a moment, but then passing us on with a reassuring wave when he recognized the officer. In a small clearing nearby there was another unpainted shack. Inside was Arky, completely at home. He lay on a cot, safe, cheerful, and well cared for. '*Cooey taymahj* he greeted us. 'I'm learning Jug talk.'

'Cooey taymah, *sir*, you linthead,' I said. 'How're you doing?'

'Bunged up my leg. Otherwise, frisky as a bob-tailed pup.'*

'Now when we find Spain/ Perkins said, 'we'll all be together.'

McCormick said, 'Except Morley and Pizion.'

The thought of the two who had jumped over Ploesti sobered us. Griffin said, 'They should have stuck it out.'

'Funny thing about Pizion,' Schuffert said. 'He thought we were all bailing out. He took off his headset, opened the emergency hatch, and got himself set. I still had my headset on and I heard Lieutenant Perkins say to stick with the ship. So I motioned Pizion to sit down. He must have thought I was motioning him to go. He stood up, smiled, waved, and went.'

There was silence. We were all thinking of the odds against his safe landing amid the bombs, the fires, the heavy flak. And if he had made it, he was a prisoner, while it seemed clear now that we were in the hands of friends.

Arky changed the subject with a comic version of his jump. He had pulled the rip-cord immediately on leaving the plane; then, worried that the shroud lines might tangle with the ship, he pushed the pilot-chute spring back against his chest with both hands. For several thousand feet he had fallen as dead weight, and, forgetting that he was holding the spring back, he began worrying that the chute didn't open.

'I thought, maybe I'll try flying like a bird, he concluded, 'and I began flapping my arms, Good thing I did, because it popped out just on time. Then I heard shots below. I yelled, real loud, so the Lord could hear me, "Lemme down easy now, Lord. Lord, lemme down easy." But I guess in all that ruckus He couldn't hear too well, 'cause I sure hit hard.'

We ate at the shack—honey, cheese, eggs, salt pork and goat's milk. Nervous about the possibility that a

German patrol might come by, the officer hurried us out. Walking was difficult for Arky, whose leg was badly sprained, and not easy for any of us ; but with confidence that we were not to be turned over to the enemy, our spirits rose. At midnight, we stopped off at another house to rest. Here the officer located a jackass for Arky to ride, and after an hour we set out again.

The way led upward, into the mountains. Tension filled the night air. Now and then along the trail, we were challenged by armed sentries. The officer explained that we were in a no man's land raided nightly by enemy patrols. *Cooley taymahP* (Who goes there?) The threatening command brought us to a shivering halt. With the answer '*Chetnicee*' (Chetniks) began an interval of sweating until the response came '*Ide brisso!*' (Go quickly.)

About five in the morning, when the blackness of the forest night was infiltrated by a pre-dawn glimmering of silver, we reached the peak of the mountain. A little way down the other side was a small unpainted house around which about a hundred soldiers were sitting, standing, or lying asleep. There we were introduced to a tall, bearded man who carried himself with an air of pride and distinction. He was identified to us as the Supreme Commander of All Montenegro.

After some confusion, the Supreme Commander managed to make us understand that he would arrange for our return to Allied lines in Italy.

'This guy makes me feel better,' Griff said.

'Yeah', said Perk. 'He really acts like an officer.'

'We ought to be back in a couple of days,' Aclan said.

'Two or three at most,' I said.

The Supreme Commander gestured us to his bed, a large, square mattress under a tree. Three of us leaped upon it. The rest slept on the ground nearby.

II

YUGOSLAVIA, July 29.

WE AWOKE just before noon. It took us a little while to get our bearings.

'This time yesterday we were just sailing into the ack-ack over Ploesti,' I said.

'This is a better deal/ Griff said.

'I counted four ships went down,' said Aclan.

McCormick said, 'I made it five.'

'Wonder what happened to that B-17?' Arky said.

No one gave it much of a chance.

Two young soldiers, one short and stocky, the other tall and thin, gave us our breakfast. From the way they hovei-ed about us, they were either guards or guides; we were undecided which. They indicated the Supreme Commander had left.

'Maybe he **went to fix it up for our getaway,**' said Perk.

'He's probably got other things on his mind,' Mac said.

I said, 'He went off to a staff meeting of supreme commanders.'

'They must have at least a platoon of them,' Arky agreed.

Schuffert was disconsolate. 'My fiftieth mission/ he said. 'Boy, did I pick the long way heme!'

From the hilltop, we had a commanding view of the surrQunding countryside. Westward was a chaos of

mountains, the Katunsk Range, forbiddingly rugged, as though huge chunks of stone and granite had been casually dropped by God and then smashed by His angry fist. Deep, fierce gorges, rugged chasms, great scaly cliffs, precipitous ravines, strewn with beech and pine and alpine scrub growth, were between us and the Adriatic. Eastward, below us, was the valley of the Zeta River, broad and fertile, every arable foot under cultivation. Vineyards, cornfields, tobacco patches spread out before us, as regular and sharply defined as checkerboard squares. On the hillsides was clear evidence of the poverty of the country : among the boulders, plots of red earth only a few yards square had been carefully tilled.

'Arky ought to feel at home in these hills,' Perk said.

'Tain't the Ozarks, but gimme a houn'-dawg, a squirrel gun, a jug o'corn, a little blonde gal and a prayer meetin' once a week, and I ain't gonna run back to the war.'

'Jug of corn wouldn't be a bad idea,' I said.

Griff said, 'Rather have the blonde.'

But what we got instead was a tall, bony youth, with wild black hair. 'I speak English,' he said, with a bit of a British accent defining his mispronunciations. 'Very well educated. Speak many languages. Be your interpreter.'

What was uppermost in our mind he stated clearly: 'You not prisoners. We friends with Americans. We get you to Italy in boat.'

We tackled him for a clear picture of how the Chetniks figured in the war. It took us most of the day to get it straightened out to the point of reasonable clearness, and the intricacies of it left us full of worry and doubt.

To start with, we learned, the Chetniks were Royalists, faithful to their King who was an exile in England.

They had fought the Germans, and, until recently, had

had our full co-operation, including supplies, men, and money. Now, however, we were no longer supporting them, but a Communist movement, called the Partisans and led by a man named Tito. As a result, the Chetniks were allied with the Germans.

The Chetniks claimed their alliance with the Nazis was only a means of self-protection against the Communists. They claimed they were not fighting the British or the Americans, but admitted they were battling the Russians, who were allied to the British and the Americans. Somehow, they clung to the hope of British and American help against both Germans and Russians.

To complicate matters further, there was a third guerilla group who fought both the Chetniks and Partisans. These were the Ustashi, Yugoslavs who were out-and-out Nazis and who worked closely with the Germans. How the Germans could remain allied with two groups who fought each other, or how the Chetniks could be allied with the Germans, fight against the Germans' other allies, and simultaneously claim to be on our side, was quite beyond us all.

'One thing sure,' Schuffert said, summing up for us all, 'these people sure got their politics fouled up.*

This much seemed obvious: they were well-disposed toward us. And we found, too, in the all-day political debate, that we were in agreement with them on many points.

'Roosevelt'—they smiled, nodded vigorously. Obvious approval.

'Churchill'—they debated. Some were tolerant, some pro, some con.

'Hitler'—frowns and grimaces., Vehement disapproval.

'Stalin'—same as Hitler.

Who could argue with that?

But it became clear that the two young soldiers who followed us everywhere were not so much concerned with protecting us as with keeping us from making a run for it. That left us wary.

AUG. 2—This diary is now up to date. I began keeping it two days ago just to fill in time. It occurred to me that this is quite an experience to be going through, and maybe it will be interesting to look back on it a couple of years from now, when I'll be sitting on my front porch in Texas, looking over all the oil-wells I will have brought in by that time and having nothing much else to do while the millions pile up.

It hasn't been too unpleasant a life—eating, sleeping, loafing, shooting the bull, no responsibility. If it weren't for the shortage of food, tobacco, and women, we could sit this one out for quite a while. Also the Germans—they are hunting for us.

Finding the wreckage of our plane, but no bodies, the Germans have posted a reward for us—\$50,000—and several of the Chetniks, with a smirk we don't like, have told us that the reward goes whether we are taken dead or alive. German patrols have been scouring the woods for us, and we have watched them from the hilltop. But the Chetniks have kept us hidden and their mouths shut.

We have given our Yugoslav buddies nicknames. The chunky guard we call 'Stupid', the thin one 'Goofy', and our interpreter 'Jughead'. The names fit.

Jughead is a pain. Only twenty, he has a smattering of education. That is apparently so rare in these parts as to be a matter of considerable pride. He is arrogant to the point of being certain that he knows more about the U.S., let alone the rest of the world, than we.

'Americans do not speak good English—very bad dialect.'

'Dig this goofball,' Griff said.

'What he say?'

'He said you're a goofball,' Schuffert explained. 'That's an American dialect word for a very educated person.'

'Oh, yes,' he said, quite seriously. 'I am goofball.'

'You're also a pretty crummy jughead,' Perk said.

'Explain, please.'

I said, 'Jughead is person with big head, lots of brains.'

'Thank you. But it is only that I have study very much.'

To give credit where credit is due—and, believe me, in this case it really hurts—he knows many things about the U.S. that we should and don't: about our Constitution, for example, and the Bill of Rights.

AUG. 4—No word from the Supreme Commander. The food is bad and we are all hungry. We have been getting black bread and noodle soup twice a day, plus whatever food we can scrounge. Water is also a problem. The well close by is full of wiggletails and other more obscure and obscene forms of life. We are low on purification pills.

We have got a tobacco ration—two pounds of fierce black leaf. McCormick doesn't smoke and Perk very little, so it should do the rest of us for some time.

Stupid is in the middle of a romance. He disappears for a few hours each night and returns the worse for wear. After explaining in sign language what he's been up to—that's one thing you can't mistake in sign language—he corks off for most of the day.

AUG. 5—It began raining early this morning. Jughead, Stupid, and Goofy, as concerned with getting wet as we were, got permission to take us to this house. We trudged half an hour through a steady drizzle to make it. The house is of unpainted wood, one room about 12 by 20 feet, with a dirt floor—a peasant home, but snug and dry.

Sava, the old man, speaks a little French, Italian, and Spanish. We have been arguing politics with him and Jughead in these three languages, plus the little Serbian we have picked up.

For anti-Communists, these people sure have queer ideas about the U.S. They believe our cities are collections of sweatshops and slums and unemployed who leave bread-lines only to threaten revolution against capitalists who live in mansions with Hollywood mistresses. No amount of argument can persuade them that an American citizen can stand on any corner and shout, 'President Roosevelt is a dirty So-and-so,' without getting clapped into jail.

AUG. 6—What a night ! Arky slept with the old man in the corner bed, the old woman in the bed near the wall, and Mac and Aclan in the third bed. The rest of us slept on the floor. The place was alive with lice and fleas, about a brigade of each, which were reinforced by a division of bed-bugs as soon as we lay down.

I couldn't sleep for hours. Then, in the middle of the night, Sava's wife climbed out of bed, walked 2 feet, squatted, and urinated right on the floor, about a yard from me.

I have counted thirty-six insect bites. Mac has forty-one, and Griff is champ with fifty-three.

Late today, a Chetnik guard brought Spain in, so now

we are all together. He had been hiding out with a peasant family and had heard about the reward the Krauts are offering for us, so he'd been getting nervous.

AUG. 8—They woke us up at midnight. Jughead said, 'The Germans are coming.' It didn't take us two minutes to get out of the house and into the woods.

The march was a nightmare. We almost ran at first, cutting ourselves on the rocks and the branches. When we stopped to rest, we heard all kinds of noises, and from then on we moved silently. We got to this straw hut, about five miles away, in the dead of night.

'I don't like this,' Perk said. 'Someone's bound to tip off the Krauts.'

'It's a poor country, and that reward's a lot of money,' Mac said.

'Fifty thousand bucks ain't hay even in Texas,' I said.

Arky said, 'I'd turn you guys in myself if I thought they'd give me the reward.'

AUG. 9—Anyway, the food is better here. We are getting mutton, eggs, corn bread, and cornmeal mush that they call *kochanic*. We have to hide out in the woods on the hillside during the day, but we can go down to Sava's hut at night.

We are also learning to speak Serbian. Arky and I have made a pact to talk only Serbian to each other. So far, we can use the language only for the political arguments we keep having with the natives who come up to inspect us as if we were strange creatures in a zoo. But we've stocked some non-political words we're hoarding for use in the unlikely event we ever get within shouting distance of a babe.

AUG. 10—Too many people know where we are. What with this confusing political situation, the natives all divided up and fighting against each other, and the size of the reward for us, we're in a dangerous spot. Some of the people who've been up to see us may well be spies for the other factions, or for the Germans, and certainly they're poor and awfully hard up for dough. They're all suspicious of each other, so how are we to know whom to trust?

We are going to try to get back to the hilltop staff house, where we will be safer. Also we want to see the big wheel and find out when we're going home.

AUG. 12—Back at the staff house. The wheel is due in tomorrow. Meanwhile, we've been killing time with bull sessions. To hear our guys tell it, we've got all the Don Juan talent in the U.S. cornered on this hilltop. Wonder what the girls at home can do without us.

On the other hand, better not think about that.

AUG. 13—The wheel sent for us at 1400. We went down to the staff house and found him talking to a tall, slender fellow wearing a U.S. officer's forest greens, with no insignia. The fellow took one look at us and let out a whoop. 'Americans!' he shouted and grabbed us and got hysterical. 'Where you from? How long you been here? What's your outfit?'

We were a little excited ourselves, but got him calmed down after a bit and found out he is a Lieut. Delbert Peterson, of San Antonio, Tex., co-pilot and apparently the lone survivor of a B-24 that went down three months ago. He has been hiding out with some people who arranged at last to have him sent up here.

With a good command of Serbian as a result of having

no occasion to speak English in three months, Peterson functioned as interpreter. He told us the Supreme Commander had plans to get us down to Italy by boat.

'We heard that one before/ I said.

'This is where we came in/ Mac said.

But Pete's optimism could not be restrained, and gradually it infected the rest of us. With his help, we questioned the Supreme Commander closely. Yes, he said, he had made arrangements. We would go in a day or two. Then he added the clincher: he would take our names and radio them to Italy, so that our families could be informed that we are safe.

We hadn't felt so good since the jump. He brought out some *rakija*—the local firewater—and we had a few snorts. That made us feel better yet. To top it all off, he gave us some supplies : five shirts, seven pairs of shorts and socks, two towels, two razors, some blades, and three bars of lye soap. We had quite a time dividing up this treasure so each man felt he had a square shake.

Pete is an ebullient guy, and it looks as though he should be an asset. He knows almost nothing about the confused political situation, having been cloistered with one family. But his cheerfulness, his certainty that everything's going to turn out fine, plus the mere fact of his survival here for so long, have given us all a lift.

And, he's a fresh face, a new personality. God knows we've grown tired of looking at each other, and we're beginning to rub each other the wrong way.

AUG. 14—They woke us up in the deepest hour of night. We stumbled, sprawled, and scrambled through the woods and over the rocks, back to Sava and the old lady, the fear of a Jerry patrol making the prospect of reunion with the fleas, the lice, and the bedbugs seem

like a homecoming. I was so tired, I slept till late in the morning, right through Mrs Sava's pre-dawn ritual. But when I awoke I couldn't help noticing the damp stain in the dirt. And the smell.

AUG. 15—We moved to another *cela*, or village. A village in this country is any three houses within a half-mile radius. Between the Jerries combing the countryside for us and the Partisans pushing our people off the mountain, it's been getting too hot up at the Chetnik staff house.

By continuous pumping, we have learned from the natives that the Partisans have this area pretty well surrounded. We also heard a rumour that there is a British mission with them, not far away. When Jughead left us for a while yesterday afternoon, we had a pretty hot debate.

I said, 'All we have to do is walk off some dark night in any direction and run right into the Partisans.'

'Unless we run into the Krauts,' Aclan said.

I insisted: 'We just keep away from the valley.'

'And run into a Nazi patrol in the hills,' said Perk.

Schuffert said, 'We'll march under a white flag.'

'Big help at night,' said Aclan.

'Even if we reach the Partisans,' Perk said, 'how do we know they'll help us?'

'There's this British mission with them,' I said.

'You don't know they'll turn us over to the mission,' said Pete.

'They're fighting on our side,' I said.

'Against these people who've been pretty good to us,' Pete said.

'All I know,' I said, 'is they're fighting on our side against the Germans. The Chetniks say they're on our

side, but they're allied to the Germans. They've made promises about getting us back to Italy—and here we are.'

'You can't trust Communists,' Aclan said.

'We have only the Chetniks* word the Partisans are Communists,' I said, 'and they've lied about getting us out. Besides, in this war the Communists happen to be on our side.'

We are split squarely down the middle. Arky, Schuffert, Mac and I feel we are just being held as hostages by the Chetniks. The others worry that leaving this safety might plunge us into trouble. Perkins spoke for them:

'I say you guys are too radical. I say we're doing fine here. Give the wheel a chance to make good on his promises. It ain't easy, and it will take time. And meanwhile, he's taking good care of us.'

Military discipline has never been a question. A while ago Perk tried to act like our C.O., but that's impossible in this kind of situation. For over a week none of us officers has heard a 'Yes, sir', or 'No, sir'. Rank has been thrown out of the window. Every man is equal, even through Perk still sometimes acts as though all the responsibility and authority rest on his shoulders.

AUG. 21—Skirmishes around us almost every night, the fire-fights getting closer all the time. We've given up our G.I. shoes—too heavy and bulky for this hot weather—trading them for Chetnik sandals with soles made of old auto tyres, which are much more comfortable.

Arky has made himself a suit of clothes. He whittled a wooden needle, unravelled the edge of a horse-blanket for thread, and cut up the rest of the blanket with his jack-knife for the material.

AUG. 22—The Germans almost had us. Some stool pigeon, hungry for the reward, no doubt. But we got the tip in time and scooted back to the Chetnik staff house.

We built two shelters this morning, rectangular frames out of vine poles and trimmed branches, covered over with leaves. Not much against rain, but a good shadow to protect us from the blazing sun. It looks as though this hill is going to be home for a while.

AUG. 24—Alone together all the time, we're getting to know each other like brothers. This isn't entirely to the good. In many ways it's like a shotgun wedding. We are continually finding things in each other which grate on our tired nerves. We are drifting apart, into little cliques.

Before, thrown constantly among the Yugoslavs, we united in the face of our differences from them. What mattered then was what we had in common. Now, alone, it's our differences from each other that emerge. The life we lead—wait, wait, wait, for something we are beginning to doubt will ever happen—magnifies the smallest problems, makes them seem far more important than our over-all plight. Chow, smokes, rain, water,, liquor, women, are the big things in our minds.

The easy ones to live with are Spain, Griffin, Arky, and Aclan. Spain is quiet and unassuming. Sometimes you'd never know he's around. Aclan thinks and talks only about the wife back home. Griffin, with his curly blond hair and his youthful egotism, cheers us all. The biggest asset of all is Arky, who has been everywhere, done everything, and can perform the most amazing feats with a jack-knife.

Am I wrong in putting myself on this list? Let's face it, Inks—you're a pretty good guy.

AUG. 25—Mac's the one to watch most. He broods a lot. None of us has got to know him well; he's still the stranger among us. He is twenty-one, a good-looking boy, medium height, with brown hair, and very piercing blue eyes. Of the bunch, he's the only one who hasn't boasted of real or imaginary boudoir conquests.

He is the first one awake every morning. When I get up, he is already sitting on a rock 100 yards or so up the hill. Silhouetted against the rising sun, silent and motionless, he is a strange, eerie figure. I watched him closely this morning, worried when I saw his lips move wordlessly, then felt a shock when I realized he was praying. That's all right—it's all to the good. Except, he does little else all day.

He is a relief after the big talk we get from Schuffert and Peterson, but it isn't healthy to funnel that emotion up inside you, and I worry that he may crack up under it.

AUG. 26—Up to now, Perkins has been the most serious of us all. As pilot of the ship, he has felt responsible for everyone. At times his attitude has been irksome, although he has never attempted to be chicken and does his fair share.

But since we've deprived him of final authority, he has begun to let things slide. Some of the boys feel he's been showing a little selfishness: I mean in such matters as bumming *rakija* from the Chetniks. Before, he used to make certain that every man got his share. Now, he sometime takes advantage of his position with the Chetniks, who look on him and Pete as bosses of our party, to get extras for himself.

He is still a very good egg. It's just the effect of this do-nothing life.

AUG. 27—Schuffert, always outspoken, was lecturing us. ‘The fact is,’ he said, ‘that you don’t die until your particular time comes. If it comes, no doctor can save you. And if not, you can walk unharmed across a battlefield, because none of the bullets has your name on it.’

‘I’m not worried about the bullets with my name on them,’ said Arky. ‘The ones that bother me are those addressed “To Whom It May Concern”.’

Despite his religion, Schuffert won’t take any more chances than the rest of us. He has, of course, a greater gripe: it’s his fiftieth mission. He tends to look on our plight as a personal affront. He did newspaper cartooning before the war and he’s pretty good when he fools around drawing now. But he has the cartoonist’s habit of seeing everything in black and white, with no shadings between.

Peterson is a Mormon. He married an Army nurse before coming overseas, and his best moments are when he’s wondering what she’s doing back in San Antone. Some of the suggestions he gets are not especially conducive to his peace of mind—but they’re a kind of revenge for his aggressive air of superiority.

AUG. 29—Yesterday we volunteered to help the peasants harvest grapes. They sent us down to Sava’s hut, and we helped him and the old lady all day, eating about as much as we picked. It was a good change from doing nothing.

Most of the men were asleep, but Arky, Griff, and I were gabbing when we heard a plane in the darkness.

‘B-24,’ I said. Griff said, ‘It’s a 17.’

Just then there was a great flash of light, followed a few seconds later by a muffled explosion. We stood up.

‘He wasn’t in any trouble.’

'He must have been flying too low and hit the mountain/

We hoped we were both wrong about its identity and that it was a Jerry.

AUG. 30—The food is improving. There are bits of sheep mixed in the noodles we get once a day. Also, in addition to the ants, beetles, flies, roaches, and more repulsive insect life, there are weevils.

'The thing to do is fish them out and throw them away/ said Pete.

'Hell/ said Arky, 'them weevils taste better than the mutton.'

We are supplementing our diet with grapes and com, which we hope will give us the essential vitamins. Some of the boys argue that the grapes are what keeps us regular. They do give us gas.

Jughead found out about the plane that crashed yesterday. It was a B-24 with an English crew. The Chetniks gave a military funeral to the six bodies they recovered, firing a volley over the mass grave.

SEPT. 2—They have brought us some mattress covers filled with straw to sleep on. This is a real improvement on the horse-blankets and leaves.

We have settled into a routine. Mac is always first up, followed by Arky and me. Mac climbs the hillside, sits, and prays. Arky and I lie around talking while the others wake up, one by one. Schuffert and Aclan are the last to open their eyes.

Our jokes are beginning to wear thin.

'How'd you like breakfast in bed?*

'I sent the bell-boy down for eggs, sunny side up, with four strips of bacon, toast, and marmalade.'

‘What do you suppose happened to the girls?’*

‘Beats me. I know mine won’t be in shape for any other customers for a week.’

‘That was some blonde I had. Grable’s legs, Hayworth’s face, and Lana’s-----’

‘That’s my girl you’re talking about.’

‘I gotta hangover from all those martinis.’

‘Feelin’ fine myself—I stuck to champagne.’

Another half-hour of this, and then Griff does his setting-up exercises to keep in shape that muscled torso he’s so proud of. He never wears a shirt daytimes any more, and claims the insect bites don’t bother him.

Next, down to the well. It’s pretty low, and we don’t drink the water any more, it’s so foul, but it’s good enough to wash in. I’m the only one with a toothbrush left. Once a week, we shave.

About 1000, one of the Chetniks comes up from the staff house with our breakfast—grapes. A few days ago we had pears. It was like switching from Spam to steak.

From then on, nothing to do but beat our gums. Whenever a native comes up we pump him for the last word on the war. The news seemed to be bad for a while, but it seems definite now the Germans aren’t going to push us out of France into the Channel. What we get, of course, is mosdy via the German radio, and the natives don’t listen too closely, but every little bit helps.

We also pump the natives for new Serbian words. Most of us can argue politics in Serbian pretty well by now.

Arky is always busy. He has carved himself a pipe of wild briar, a bowl for eating, and he makes straw hats and baskets by skinning the bark off trees, scraping off the rough part, and weaving the fibre that remains. There are usually two or three of us sitting around giving him a hand with whatever project he’s got at the

moment. His suit turned out pretty well, although he gets a kidding about Easter parade on the Bowery.

Sometimes in the afternoon we play games. Tossing stones at a line or a hole in the ground, or fixing up a crude baseball to play catch or run bases, or whatever anyone thinks up.

About 1230 or 1300 a Chetnik comes up with the noodles, mutton, and weevils. About 1500 or 1530, we get grapes. And about 1700 a stew of weevils flavoured by rice or onions or something less nourishing.

At night, we have been breaking loose on unauthorized foraging expeditions, stealing corn or grapes from one of the nearby farms and hoping to run into a woman under fifty.

When it rains, it pours misery. All we can do is go down to the old people's house and sit.

SEPT. 3—We watched the whole 15th Air Force pass overhead today, maybe on the way to Ploesti again. Some of the boys thought they could pick out our group, and even the squadron, back in Purple Heart Box.

SEPT. 6—Griff is covered by a mass of infected chigger bites. The sores are scabby and pus-filled, and he is in agony. We have pleaded for medical attention for him, and are giving the Chetniks hell.

The water situation is bad. They have forbidden us to come down to the staff house or to use the jvell near there, for fear one of the wandering German patrols might stumble on us.

SEPT. 10—A fire fight in the valley last night. Tracer bullets streaked and curved and arched, hot red and gold, like a fireworks display. Later, German artillery

joined in from Danilov Grad, pounding a small hilltop about 3 kilometres from us. It was like the Fourth of July.

Today, Jughead told us the shooting was started by Partisans who raided a German encampment, taking it by surprise. That set off again the old argument about our joining the Partisans.

This time we reached a decision and informed Jughead that unless Griff gets immediate medical care we are going to make a break for it. We also told him something must be done about the water situation. The well is dry; our throats are always parched, and we haven't washed for a week.

SEPT. 11—A doctor came up to look at Griff. His sores have festered horribly and are running pus. It's ironic that Griff, who used to be so proud of the smooth-skinned, muscled torso that made him look like a young Hercules, should become so afflicted as to resemble a decayed syphilitic.

The doctor, young, smooth-shaven, impressed us initially because he was the first really clean human being we have seen since the big wheel took off. But he was cold and aloof and just gave Griff a couple of pills, which we can't conceive will do him any good.

However, at the same time the doctor took all our names—the first time anyone has done so since we have been in Yugoslavia.

SEPT. 12—Stupid awoke us with loud cries. While we were trying to calm him down, Jughead, Goofy, and some other Chetniks ran up. 'They're coming!' Jughead shouted frantically. 'About fifty of them. Someone informed.*'

We tore down the shelters, heaped the wood and

leaves in the clearing, emptied the straw from our mattress covers on top, and set fire to the pile. By the weird firelight we destroyed all evidence of our sojourn on the hillside that we could pick out.

Then we hauled butt. The whole thing took us about twenty minutes of breathless confusion. We scattered through the woods most of the night, making for the hamlet where we had hidden out twice before. Almost there, we were stopped by a sentry who told us the Partisans had moved in for the night. So then we backtracked, and side-tracked, and zigzagged up and down the mountain, coming before dawn to this grape arbour, where we have slept most of the day.

At least here the grapes are ripe. We're clobbering the vineyard.

SEPT. 13—At twilight yesterday we came down off the mountain and hiked most of the night. We are in a house close to Podgorica [Titograd]. The people here are wonderful. The old lady is fixing our clothes : repairing tears, sewing on buttons, and even mending socks.

We Have had eggs, milk, cheese, pork, bread, wine, and *rakija*. We have all bathed, and though we sleep on the floor we have clean blankets.

SEPT. 16—For a couple of days we had it made. Then, around 1500, it started raining, heavy sheets of water. An hour later a Chetnik courier came running. He told us the Germans would be along as soon as the storm let up. 'Someone has informed. They are looking for nine Americans. They know you are in this area.*

We rolled up our blankets, helped the people of the house obliterate all traces of our presence, said good-bye, and left. It was a cold rain.

‘Jerry must have upped the ante,’ I said.
‘Or someone couldn’t hold out against temptation any longer,’ said Perk.
‘What’ll we do if they spot us?’ Aclan asked. ‘Run, or give up?’
‘Give up hell,’ Griff said.
‘Helluva note to get caught now,’ Schuffert said. ‘After all we been through.’
Pete, still cheery, said, ‘Just shows we’re not destined to get caught.’
McCormick, who rarely spoke, said, ‘We won’t get out alive.’
The blankets were soon soaked completely through and weighed a ton. We wore khakis, already in bad shape; now, completely waterlogged, they provided no warmth at all. Arky, in his improvised horse-blanket suit, was in the best shape of all.
Now we realized what a mistake it had been to give up our G.I. shoes. Rocks underfoot twisted the Chetnik sandals, cut our ankles. Where there were no rocks, there was mud, and we slithered and went down.
‘I can’t keep this up much longer,’ Aclan said.
Jughead chose this moment to let us know we were on our way back to the hilltop near the staff house.
‘Home again, boys,’ Griff said savagely.
There were curses, loud, violent, desperate. Someone sobbed.
‘How much worse off could a Jerry prisoner be?’ Aclan asked.
‘We’d be warm and dry and well-fed anyway,’ said Perk.
‘Like hell,’ Griff said. ‘We’d rot behind barbed wire.’
‘Someone’s tipping off the Krauts regular,’ Aclan said. ‘It’s only a matter of time before they catch up with us.’

'Before I give up,' I said, 'I'll take my chances with the Partisans.'

Jughead said, 'They'll kill you.'

'Better than living this way,' Arky said.

'Wj^o's stooling to the Krauts?' Schuffert wondered.

'Must be that doctor,' Perk said. 'I didn't trust him at all.'

'That's right,' said Pete. 'Why else would he want our names?'

McCormick said, calmly, 'We'll never get out alive.'

We turned on him. 'Cut it out, Mac.'

'You're still free and kicking, aintcha?'

'You could have been killed in the crash, don't forget.'

But our spirits have never sunk so low.

III

SEPT. 18—Griffis getting better. The cold nights are killing off the chiggers. We have picked up where we left off, rebuilding the shelters and re-establishing the same old routine. Without straw the ground is wet and cold at night, so we sit up around the fire, making up for the lost sleep in the daytime.

We have got to the point where we don't care if the Krauts come up to look at the fire.

SEPT. 19—Our first fight yesterday. A hellacious one. But if it helped get some of the poison out of our systems, it will have been for the best.

It started around noon, in the fierce heat. We had had no water since the day before. Despite the Chetnik injunction against visits to the staff house, Pete and Perk took the bucket down. They should have been back in twenty minutes. They didn't return till after dark. In between, we sweated out the direst possibilities—had visions of them being beaten, or court-martialled and shot, or who could tell what fearful fate?

What we never suspected was obvious as soon as they got within sniffing distance. They were both drunk.

Of all the angry men, Griff raged most. He called them every name in the book. Perk knew he'd done wrong, and he sat there and took it. He was sorry. Pete, though, got belligerent. So Griff promptly knocked him on his butt. Pete got up swinging; Griff hauled off again and Pete went down again.

Aclan and I felt Pete had it coming. We just stood there, enjoying the justice of his getting it. Pete got up a third time, and went down a third time. But he got up for more.

Only Arky kept his head. He jumped up and grabbed Griff. 'Holy Jehoshaphat !' he said. 'Ain't we got troubles enough without fighting each other?'

Griff wrenched himself free and slugged Arky. Pete didn't want any more, but Arky got up fighting and went after Griff. At that point, I decided to intervene. I realized that when two close friends like Griff and Arky could blow off at each other so quickly, we were all on the edge.

Then everybody came to, and there were apologies and resolutions and handshakes all around.

SEPT. 22—Day before yesterday the Germans pulled out of the outpost they had on the hill 3 kilometres away. Yesterday they pulled out of Nikšić. There is a kind of apprehension in the air. Rumours are that the % Allies are giving them a hard time in Greece and they are pulling back through Albania and through here, maybe even all the way up to Germany. It seems definite that the Allies have taken Paris and may be already on the borders of the Reich.

Amid all this, we are forgotten. The Supreme Commander hasn't been around for over a month, and the officers at the headquarters here don't even bother to lie to us any more about a boat being readied to take us to Italy.

Jughead brought some definite news. He said the Chetniks were going to stay after the German retreat and were going to hold this country against the Partisans. As long as the German headquarters that knew about

our presence had pulled out, though, it had been decided to let us roam around more freely, with escorts.

‘To hell with the escorts,’ we told him. ‘We’ll take care of ourselves.’

It was like being out of prison. We decided to split up. Perk, Schuffert, and Spain went one way; Arky, Griff, Mac, and I another, and Pete went off with Aclan. We agreed to return to the staff house by dark.

We didn’t run across any girls. We stopped off first at the most prosperous-looking of the houses down the hill. It was painted white and had a kitchen and four other rooms, partitioned off. An old woman was in the yard. We spoke to her in our broken Serbian. It took her a little while to figure out who we were, and then she expressed surprise. She’d heard talk of American fliers on the hill, but hadn’t known where we were or even for certain that we were really close by. She became friendly and invited us to pick figs from the trees in her back yard.

The figs, plump and purple-coated, were delicious. Some had over-ripened and dried, and they were the best. We stuffed ourselves.

‘These people really know how to keep secrets,’ Arky said.

‘They probably didn’t trust this old lady.’

‘Funny,’ said Griff. ‘Her closest neighbour is Sava, and we’ve been up there plenty.’

We decided to visit Sava. Climbing back uphill, our stomachs full, we felt pretty good. But we could tell something was wrong as soon as we approached the shack. Inside, the old lady was alone. She called to us to come in, and we entered, to find her lying on her bed.

The whole right side of her face, from the bridge of her nose to her ear, was a massive, swollen bruise, brown

and yellow and purple and red. Fear was in her eyes and in the trembling of her hands. She didn't want to talk to us. 'You go,' she pleaded. 'Only trouble here.*'

'Who did that to you?' I asked.

Griff said, 'We'll kill him.'

Finally she told us. Her son had been with the Partisans all along, and a few days ago Sava had left to join him. The Chetniks had found out. That morning, a couple of the ugliest, roughest young Chetnik punks had come to the house, taken all her food, and beat her up.

We asked her to describe them. They were our friends, but hitting old ladies put them on the other side.

She wouldn't tell us which ones did it. 'Only trouble,' she said. 'You no tell them you know.'

She was a hard old woman, and she was used to being knocked around, I guess. We talked it over and decided she was right—there was no point in our getting our protectors down on us.

At night, we all met at the staff house. When we were alone, we told the others about Sava's wife. It started the old argument again about joining the Partisans. And ended in the same old stalemate.

SEPT. 24—Perkins and Schuffert and Spain are dead. They were killed by the Partisans. We are boiling mad, but helpless.

Yesterday morning we split up again. Perk and Schuff and Spain wanted to go up where the Germans had had the outpost and see if they could find any souvenirs. The rest of us decided to visit locally.

We had met some girls and were walking along, feeling kind of gay, when Jughead found us. He asked where the others were. When we told him, he went pale. 'The Partisans hold that outpost,' he said.

'Let's go up and get them,' I said.

'You are foolish. You are unarmed.'

'Well, let's get some guns and get up there.'

But Jughead persuaded us to return to the staff house first to see if the others had returned. We waited there all afternoon. At twilight the Chetniks decided to send up a patrol. They wouldn't let us go along, suspicious of what we'd been whispering—that if Perk and the boys had run into the Partisans, they were probably safe and maybe already on the way back to Italy.

At night there was a lot of skirmishing. We could see the red flashes and the tracers and hear the shots, and we slept very little.

The patrol returned at dawn. They had found an old woman who had witnessed the shooting. The boys had been going from house to house, scrounging food and *vino* on their way up to the outpost. Without knowing it, they wandered into no man's land. Suddenly, a Partisan stepped from behind a tree with a burp gun and rattled it off. Two were killed instantly and the third man fell with a bullet in his leg. Then the Partisan killed the wounded man.

'He probably didn't know they were Americans,' I said.

'He could have seen they didn't carry any weapons,' Pete said.

'Yeah, but any man up here you don't know is your enemy,' Arky said.

'Shooting unarmed men!' Pete said.

I wondered if the story were true. 'These guys may have made the whole thing up just to keep us from going over the hill,' I said.

For a while, we hoped that was the case. But everyone we have talked to has heard about the shooting. They

have told us some pretty grim atrocity stories about the Partisans. One lady told us about a Partisan who came home on a visit, found his Chetnik brother in bed, and shot him as he slept. Others have told us about Partisans murdering whole families, including women and children because one member of the family was a Chetnik. These stories make what the Chetniks did to Sava's wife appear like a caress.

SEPT. 25—We have been closely guarded for two days. Last night, while we were washing down at the well, Pete was summoned to the staff house. The rest of us were sent down the valley to a house alongside the road from Danilov Grad to Podgorica. We were given cheese, meat, and bread.

The house has two rooms, a large one for living and sleeping, and a small one for cooking and eating. The couple who own the house are not very friendly. I can't say I blame them. Germans drive along the road only 150 yards away, and our hosts are well aware of what would happen to them if we were found here.

One window faces the road. We spent most of the day peeking through it. Jerry trucks, cars, tanks, jeeps, motor-cycles, horses, and bicycles are coming through in an almost uninterrupted stream. The Germans are pulling out of the Nikšić area completely. A couple of times, formations of troops came marching along. They sang and cut up like any bunch of G.I.'s. Most of their soldiers seemed to be quite young.

In the afternoon, the guards left Jughead alone with us. I guess they figured that we're not going to roam around with the Germans right on top of us. Jughead dug up a deck of cards somewhere, and we have been playing blackjack.

SEPT. 26—I have the \$142 of our pooled escape-kit money, plus over \$200 in IOU's. We haven't stopped the blackjack game since 1400 yesterday. The Jerries are still moving on the road. Jughead is our look-out. He is sore because we won't take turns. We told him that either he does it alone, or we are willing to be captured. He daren't let us be captured while he is with us, because the Jerries will knock him off. And if he escapes, the Chetniks will kill him for betraying his trust.

SEPT. 29—The morning of the 27th, Griff had all the money and all the IOU's, and the blackjack game was still going full blast. We had been playing almost non-stop for over thirty hours and there was blood in it now. Jughead was still at the window, dozing off now and then, but wakening to instant alertness whenever the rumble of tanks, or the groaning of trucks, or the clump-clump of marching feet signalled that the Krauts were coming down the road. Asleep-or awake, he would spew out Serb curses at us.

The man of the house had gone oif. He worked for the Germans, and before we let him go there was quite a discussion about which course involved more risk—keeping him in, and maybe have the Germans come to look for him, or letting him go, and maybe have him turn us in for the reward. With his wife as our hostage, it was decided best to let him go. She sat in a rocking-chair, watching us with sneaky brown eyes, every so often sighing or sobbing her fear, of us and of the Germans on the road.

We stopped playing only to eat the bread and cheese and meat we had brought with us. Every four or five hours she would fix up sandwiches. As we ate, we would discuss the desirability of walking out and surrendering,

driving Jughead to quaking terror and revenging ourselves for his intolerable arrogance during the preceding weeks. He was close to the breaking point.

Suddenly, he jumped up and shrieked, 'They're coming!'

I dashed to the window. A young, clean-cut German, carrying a carbine, had turned off the road and was walking up the path to the house.

'It's just one,' I said. 'We better hide.'

Jughead was red-faced and speechless with fear. The old woman began to rock back and forth, making little moans. Griff and Arky dived under the bed. Aclan gathered up the cards and blankets and shoved them into the fireplace, then crouched in one corner. Mac hid behind the stove. I stood stiffly behind the door, watching through the narrow slit between the heavy curtain and the window.

Jerry came up the path. On the road, a column of infantry was going by, singing 'Lili Marlene'. Jughead collapsed on the floor. Almost at the door, Jerry turned aside and went around to the back of the house.

We stayed frozen until the German kid came back, buttoning his fly and whistling, and went down to the road again.

'Let's get the game going,' I said.

Arky and Griff came out from under the bed. 'Christ, that was a close one.'

Aclan retrieved the blankets and the cards. 'I've never been so scared.'

I was pretty proud of myself. I hadn't been scared at all. 'Listen, men,' I said. 'Now that Perk's gone, I'm senior officer. I'm taking charge. We've got to get organized. We're doing-----'

'Go to hell,' Griff said. 'You take charge of yourself.'

'You're not giving orders to me,' Aclan said.

'I'm doing fine,' Arky said.

Mac said, 'Me, too.'

They looked at me oddly. I said, 'We've got to divide up into watches. None of us are getting any sleep. We can't go on like this.*'

'I don't want any sleep,' Aclan said.

Griff said, 'Rank don't go in a situation like this.' He sat down on the floor and began shuffling the cards. Aclan sat down opposite him. 'It's every man for himself,' Aclan said.

'Rank don't go any more,' said Arky.

'Rank don't go any more,' Mac agreed.

I gave up. 'All right. We're getting pretty jumpy, though. I figured a little discipline was just common sense. It's not that I want to be a big cheese.'

'You playing?' Aclan asked.

I sat down.

When Jughead revived, he was more nervous than ever. He sat on the floor near the window, sputtering curses. The old woman moved around in a daze, and at intervals she would cry. Arky began winning all the money. Late that night, Aclan took it away from him. In the morning I was ahead.

During the night, we ran out of food. The man of the house hadn't returned from work. The old woman and Jughead traded curses with each other. She wanted him to take us away before we got caught, but his orders were to keep us there.

In the late afternoon we scrounged around and found some cheese. Fear of the Germans hadn't bothered the old lady so much as the prospect of our eating her food, though we offered to pay for it. She screamed and wept, and we decided we'd had enough.

'Let's go back up the hill/ I said.

'The Germans will get us, or the Partisans,' Mac said.

Arky suggested, 'We'll send Jughead up front to scout the way.*

We left at nightfall. On the road, German infantry was marching by. They never seemed to march route step, but always in perfect unison, chop-chopping away at the road. For quite a way up the mountain we could hear their tramping, and the singing:

*. . . und wollen wir uns Wiedersehen,
Vor dem Kaserne, wollen wir stehen . . .*

Not fierce and jubilant and excited, the way you might expect from Nazis, but sad and schmaltzy, so that you wondered why the hell they couldn't be human beings, too. Or maybe it was just because they were retreating.

The only sentries we passed were Chetniks. Jughead got us through, and we arrived at the staff house before midnight. The officers were very angry at our return.

'You'll have to go back,' the captain on duty told us. 'The Gestapo were here yesterday. They might come back any time.'

We'd been pushed around enough. We demanded to see the Adjutant. When they refused to awaken him, we used the lever we'd learned with Jughead.

'We'll sit right here until he comes. And if the Germans find us—OK, we'll be prisoners.'

They sweated awhile, and then got the Adjutant, who was as nice as pie. He told us we didn't have to go back and we could go down to see Pete any time we wanted to. Pete was down in the valley, he said, staying at the house where they had their radio.

All night there was firing on the ridges. The Partisans

crowded the Chetniks and harassed the retreating Germans down in the valley.

Later today, we are going down to join Pete.

Griff has all our money and about \$420 in IOU's.

SEPT. 30—The shooting started up again around noon, some of it pretty close. We moved down to the valley, slowly and cautiously and under armed escort. Pete was happy to see us.

'They're setting it up for us to get out by boat.'

We gave him a unanimous razzberry.

'No kidding. They mean it this time. I've heard the talk.'

'It don't make sense,' I said. 'They're in the middle of a fight, and they're being pushed back. They got other things on their mind.'

Pete insisted. It is odd that he, who has been in the country three months longer than we and has heard so much of this talk come to nothing, should be the most optimistic. None of us believed the promises for a moment.

While we argued, some runners came to the house, and before we could find out what was happening, they were packing the radio equipment and moving it out.

'I guess that means we'll be moving, too,' Pete said.

'Like hell,' I said. 'I'm staying right here till the Partisans come.'

'I'm with you, Inks,' said Arky.

'You guys want to get what Perkins and Schuffert and Spain got?' Pete asked.

'I'm not so sure they're dead,' I said. 'I think the Chetniks made that up so we wouldn't go off, too.'

'If the Partisans did kill them,' Griff said, 'it was because they didn't know they were Americans.'

'I'm not taking any chances,' said Pete. 'I'll stick with these people.*'

More soldiers came down from the hillside, and with them now came civilians, old men and women and children, refugees, their belongings piled on carts and jackasses and their own backs. We watched the retreat for a while and then went back to the argument.

'If Perk and the others weren't dead, they'd have sent back some word,' Griff said. 'This outfit must be shot through with Partisan spies like the Savas.'

'Both we and the British are supporting the Partisans,' I said. 'They're our allies.'

At the end of the afternoon we had reached a decision. Pete, Griff, and Aclan were staying with the Chetniks. Arky, Mac, and I were going to remain behind until the Partisans came through. We were certain that in the confusion of the retreat we could slip away unnoticed.

We slept back of the house in a grape arbour. In the dead of night we were awakened by loud Chetnik voices.

'Come quickly,' they said. 'We are moving on.'

I said, 'We're staying.'

Pete, Griff, and Aclan got up. 'We're going with you. They're staying behind.'

'You all come. Partisans find you, kill you.'

'We'll take our chances.*'

'You all come.'

There were five or six of them, and at a word from the man in charge they unslung their rifles and clicked the bolts. The sound of the bolts sliding forward on the greased receivers, closing down over the bullets in the chambers, was louder than the machine-guns and artillery down the road.

'OK. We all come.'

They told us they were taking us to the home of a major a few miles away. They didn't know why. They just had orders.

We joined the retreat for a time, moving with Chetniks and civilians in a sandwich between German units, until we turned off to the major's house. Off the road, we had to move cautiously. The Partisans came down from the hills every night, and they were skilful at ambush. Several times we stopped when our scouts fired, but they were just jittery, shooting at shadows. We got to the major's house without trouble.

It was a white, two-storey house, surrounded by soldiers, and there was an air of tension. Danilov Grad, too, was being abandoned to the Partisans, and everyone feared that, emboldened, they might make a sudden attack in force. We slept in a room upstairs, on a wooden floor covered with the first rugs we had seen in this country.

When we awoke, the major himself came in and briefed us. The Germans had decided to fall back on Podgorica and hold a circle around the town. The Chetniks had planned to hold Danilov Grad at first, but with the Partisans in great strength and without German help that was impossible. So they were going to fall back with the Germans.

We didn't like that, and we told him so, insisting on our right to surrender to the Partisans. He said the house where we had spent the night before was now in Partisan hands and that we were alive only because the Chetniks had compelled us to go with them. Then he said, 'You know how the Partisans shot your three comrades. You want to die like that, too?'

He spoke with such sincerity, it was hard to doubt him. He was haggard and weary and obviously harassed. His

uniform looked as though it had been slept in for two or three days. We said we'd do as he suggested.

But after he left, we went into the same old debate, this time converting Pete to our side. Aclan and Griff will stay while the rest of us break away into the hills and join the Partisans, carrying a white flag.

We have been sitting here since, watching the retreat. We can see up the road to the houses on the edge of Danilov Grad. The road is covered by a solid mass of human beings and vehicles—Chetnik, German, civilian. The German troops pass by at intervals, some in trucks, some on foot. They look snappy and there is nothing to indicate that the retreat has snapped their morale.

The Chetniks who march by every so often are ragged and disorderly, looking as confused as the civilian refugees. Most of the civilians are old men and old women and young children. All carry bundles, pull carts, or lead packhorses or donkeys. Occasionally a civilian car, loaded high with furniture on top, creeps along in the crush; The Germans sing. The Yugoslavs cry and wail. They are a heartbreaking sight.

'Once we get drawn into the Jerry perimeter around Podgorica we'll be cooked,' I said.

'That's right,' said Pete. 'We'll never be able to get out. They'll have trenches and road-blocks surrounding the town. It'll be like a siege.'

But Griff and Aclan insist on going on with the Chetniks.

'We don't want to get killed like Perk and the others,' Aclan said.

IV

OCT. 1—In the end we had no choice. An officer came up around noon, decided our rags closely approximated to Chetnik uniforms, issued us rifles, packs, and caps, and marched us off with a group of two dozen men, mostly staff officers, in ragged formation.

For miles we trudged along the road, mixed in with the civilian refugees, staying out of the way of the German troops and truck convoys that came briskly past at intervals. By agreement, we Americans kept apart from each other, mingling with the Chetniks.

In the late afternoon we came to a road-block. Barbed wire stretched up into the hills on one side and, on the other, across the cornfields and through the woods as far as we could see. There was an 8-foot opening in the wire across the road. In that gap stood four German soldiers, checking each refugee. More Germans stood at the side of the road and behind the barricade.

We halted about 20 feet away. I looked over at Aclan, ahead to Arky, and back at Griff. My throat was dry and tight, and I hoped that I didn't look as frightened as they did. The major walked over to the Germans and spoke to them for a moment, then turned and motioned us on.

I was walking on the left side of the road between two Chetniks. The four Germans stood two feet apart, and we had to march between them, single file. I walked in step with the Chetnik in front of me, and as we came up to the nearest German, I looked straight in his eye. He

returned my stare, and my heart began a maddening thumping. But he said nothing, and I walked on past without breaking stride.

More Germans were seated on the ground on the other side of the barbed wire along both sides of the road. They were all young, about seventeen to twenty-three, and they looked at us with a mixture of curiosity and contempt. I returned their stares and kept moving. About 50 yards down the road we passed the last of them, and then I began to sweat, and I felt weak.

But soon the Germans were all around us. Small units, infantry and anti-aircraft, were camped in pup tents by the side of the road. German traffic in staff cars, jeeps, and motor-cycles drove among us frequently, going both ways.

We talked it over during a break in the march.

'With the Jerries all around us, it's only a matter of time before we get picked up.'

'If they stop you, talk Serb. They don't know it any better than we do, and we look sloppy enough to be Chetniks.'

Those who had wanted to go over to the Partisans cursed themselves for getting drawn into this trap. Griff and Aclan, who had intended to stick with the Chetniks anyway, were complacent.

'They're taking good care of us. They haven't let the Jerries get us so far. They'll manage a way to get us out.'

At twilight, we hit another road-block. This time, secure in the knowledge that we had passed scrutiny once, we found it easy going through. We arrived in the outskirts of Podgorica late in the evening and fell exhausted into a haystack.

The next morning we went through the town. The Krauts were everywhere—marching, drilling, working,

loafing. The town had been flattened by Allied bombing. One of the Chetniks remarked sourly that American planes had smashed it. I shivered, but said nothing. I had been on the heavy raid over Podgorica.

Jughead left us in the middle of the town. He wanted to see his family, he said, but he would return that evening. We have not seen him since, and we do not regret his absence. The three young Chetniks who took over as guides are the nicest we have met in Yugoslavia. They are our age, my height, and with their crew-cut hair they look more American than we do. They gave us their food, although they hadn't eaten since the march began either.

On the other side of Podgorica, we came upon a house that was a sort of Chetnik message centre. Our friends scrounged some German rations for us—canned cheese, blood sausage, and Vienna sausages, all delicious. Then we moved on to this stone house where we are now. Arky is winning in the blackjack game.

Oct. 2—We are skating on thin ice, and we are bound to fall through. I am beginning to agree with Mac that we are destined not to get out of this alive.

Last night we went exploring with our friends and stumbled on a German encampment. About 200 Jerries were scattered around, many asleep, others sitting around camp-fires, talking or singing.

We started to walk right on through. One stood up and stopped me. I almost collapsed on the spot. But one of our friends stepped in, explained that I couldn't speak German, and engaged him in conversation. Some other Germans came over, and they stood around and talked for over half an hour. Then the first German, who had hit it off with our friends, suggested we have a snack with them and spend the night there.

So we roasted some of the Vienna sausages over a fire, and that was fine. But then they got some blankets for us, and we all rolled up and lay down to sleep. I was determined to stay up all night, knowing that if I did fall asleep I'd be bound to have a nightmare and shout in English, as I usually do. But after a while, I corked off.

Our three friends woke us before dawn, gesturing us to silence in case we had forgotten where we were. How could we forget? We rolled up the blankets and eased out of the camp.

And as if that kind of experience weren't enough, we had an uncomfortable time with our friends this afternoon. Our old pal, the Supreme Commander, came up to see us. He brought a bottle of *rakija*. While we were drinking, we heard planes. We ran out of the house, which is about a mile from the edge of Podgorica, on the side of a hill.

About twenty Liberators were over the town and, as we watched, they unloaded. The thunder was continuous and overwhelming, and great clouds of smoke and dust and debris went up. We were afraid to look the Supreme Commander in the eye.

But when we went back into the house, he passed around the *rakija* and remarked, in matter-of-fact tones, that there were no Germans in the town any more, that they had left it to the civilians to be bombed while they camped outside it.

'The Germans are our enemy,' I said. 'We are at war. They bomb to hurt us, and we bomb to hurt them.'

He agreed that we hadn't bombed just to kill civilians, but added, 'The Partisans are using you to kill us. They know there are no Germans in the town, only Chetniks.'

But they have told your headquarters it is full of Germans and asked for the bombing.*

We agreed that if that were the case, it was pretty horrible.

'When I get back,' I said, 'I will report this to our headquarters. I will report how friendly you have been and ask that you be given support.'

So he said again that he would get us to Italy by boat. None of us believed him, but it sounded good to hear it anyway, the way the plainest girl likes to be told she's beautiful.

OCT. 4—The Supreme Commander's adjutant took Pete yesterday. We were supposed to go that night, but no one came for us. This morning, the adjutant told us Pete had left for Italy with a mission of four Chetniks. They are following the river down to the Adriatic, where they will pick up a boat.

A messenger has just informed us that we will be moved to a village near the coast tonight. He said Pete and the mission have left and are to send back a boat for us.

OCT. 6—Hiking in the rain was fun, even though we put in five miles last night over the rocks and through the cutting branches of the trees. Like the last big one in basic training. We're on our way. We had a feast when we got here : roast lamb, milk, cheese, good bread, wine, and *rakija*. Afterward, we sat around and sang: 'Pistol-packin' Mama,' 'You Are My Sunshine', and 'Clementine'. Then sleep on real beds with real mattresses.

Griff's winning the blackjack today. Tonight we push on.

OCT. 7—One more jump to the boat for home. Our three young friends have left us. I gave one my watch, and he gave me a cigarette case and other souvenirs. We have their addresses, and we intend to write them when this war is over.

OCT. 10—We are living on top of the world, almost. The trouble is the Krauts who come around every day and have twice almost bumped into us. Aside from that, this is the best deal we have had since we joined the Army.

We are living now in what was once a schoolhouse and is now an Army barracks and Chetnik headquarters, in a village about fifteen miles south-west of Podgorica. We have a room with real beds and mattresses, and since we got here three nights ago, we have been living practically on the fat of the land.

The Chetnik C.O., Capt. Vlado, and his adjutant, share the room with us. The common soldiers sleep on the floor in the other rooms. We are getting good German rations. We have met some girls. We have even met a young Ghetnik who is a collector of American jazz records, and it's been like a jukebox Saturday night back home.

We are free to roam around while we wait for Pete to send back a boat for us. The only trouble is the Germans. And, actually, that should be no great worry because we all speak Serbian well enough to get by—more than any of the Germans we have met. But there is always the chance, and the sight of those ugly helmets still gives me the jumps.

Capt. Vlado usually gets tipped off when the Jerry officers are coming by for a conference, and we scoot out the back way. Arky swears he's going to walk up to the

highest-ranking German he sees tomorrow and invite him for a drink. We haven't dared go into the local saloon yet, because it's always full of drunken Krauts.

Last night we had a real blow-out at Donna's house. She is one of the nicest girls I have ever known, as well as one of the prettiest. The only trouble is her mother is so strict we can never be alone in the evening. And where can we be alone in the daytime?

OCT. 12—It is clear now we are winning the war. We got only six Reichsmarks for a dollar at the market the first day. Today we got eight. And we can still buy all the fruit and cookies and eggs we can eat with just one Reichsmark.

OCT. 13—Inks the Tactician located the proper terrain for the campaign. Inks the Navigator steered Donna right there. The cemetery, where else? So after we'd been sitting around for ten minutes, me still hurling the preliminary softening-up barrage while scouting the best assault plan, suddenly there was a great shrieking and wailing. I thought for a moment her mother and sister had trailed us. It turned out to be two women in black carrying on over a grave. Donna said it is the local custom to grieve over graves at least once a year.

Why did those two have to pick today?

OCT. 14—They brought the band from Podgorica to play especially for us. They played in front of the schoolhouse, and we had folk-dancing, which is very much like our square-dancing with the polka added. The Jerries tried to horn in on our party, but pretty soon they got the idea they were unwanted and most of them went away, although a few hung around watching us envi-

ously. They must have thought we were Chetnik Éteroes.

Arky got loaded and was barely stopped from testing one of his pet theories. He's been claiming that if we walked up to a Kraut with a big smile and said, real fast, 'Sonavabitch/ the Kraut would think we were saying 'Hi, pal/ in Serb.

I almost tried it myself.

Ocr. 16—Since we have been down off the mountains, we have been treated like kings. These people have been wonderful to us, and that is more than a wonder. It is miraculous they do not kill us on sight, in view of what we have done to them.

We have handed them a raw deal in every way, and still they love America and what it stands for.

And they do hate the Germans. It is only they hate the Partisans, who are Communists, more. As long as the Allies are helping the Partisans they have to throw in with the Germans for protection. But they do not like them, and they do not hold anything against us individual Americans.

They have very little, and yet they are willing to share everything with us.

OCT. 17—We have been joined by another American, Herbert Martin, of Pasadena, Cai. He was the tail-gunner on Pete's ship. He had thought all the rest died in the crash and was surprised to hear that Pete had survived and is probably in Italy. He has been living with a family near Danilov Grad for the past six months and can speak much more of the language than we can, so he is a pretty valuable asset.

Even though the living here is easy, we are beginning to worry why we haven't had any word from Pete and

what has happened to the plan to take the rest of us to Italy.

They tell us the Grand Duke is coming to town tomorrow, and we are to see him. Maybe he will be able to do something about getting us back.

OCT. 19—The Grand Duke turned out to be our old friend, the Supreme Commander of All Montenegro. Thousands of people came from the surrounding countryside to see him, by truck, bus, car, horse, mule, and on foot.

It was fantastic. We sat up on the platform with him through all the speeches and songs. If our presence here had been a secret, it certainly isn't any more. Several times he turned to us and pointed to us, and there were cheers—so he apparently told the whole country we were Americans.

It was a good thing the Germans stayed away. But we are a little worried that some traitors in the crowd may tip them off, although it has been a long time since we heard any talk about the reward for us.

Afterwards, there was music and dancing and drinking. All of the people had to come over and talk to us and shake hands, or just touch us. Many of them wanted to know whether we had taken part in the Podgorica bombing, which had taken a heavy toll. Each time the question was asked I felt horrible, because I still remember the feeling of exultation I had when I saw Podgorica in flame and smoke beneath me.

But each time I lied, and managed to smile, and we were all friends.

Some of the boys wound up the celebration with real promotions. I'm afraid I'll have to marry Donna to get anywhere. Matter of fact, I could do a lot worse.

OCT. 24—We are still in the same place and feeling like hell. Capt. Vlado has received word that the attempt to return Pete met with disaster. He and six Chetniks boarded a boat and were sneaking out of the harbour when a Kraut saw them and cut loose with a machine-gun. Four Chetniks were killed, two wounded, and only Pete escaped unhurt. He swam ashore and is now being hidden with a family on the coast.

So that kills our hopes for a quick getaway. The only good news is the war news, and that is making it tough for us, personally. The Allies appear to be driving the Germans out of Greece. The Germans are retreating up here through Albania. Meanwhile, the Russians are coming in from Belgrade, the Albanians are pushing from the rear, and the Partisans have us practically encircled.

The Partisans have been raiding every night, and each night the sound of the fighting gets closer. The village is packed with German troops. And all the natives do is discuss politics, about which they are more abysmally ignorant than could be imagined.

Nov. 3—Allied planes have been coming over every day now and bombing the hell out of this area. It is a cinch that if we don't get killed by our own bombs, we will be finished up by relatives of the innocent civilians who are being slaughtered.

Of course, this area is a prime target because of the concentration of German troops and supplies, but the civilians don't think about that.

NOV. 5—Yesterday and today, to get away from the bombing and the people whom we can hardly look in the eye, we went down the valley to this drinking place a mile away which is a hangout for German soldiers.

It is a queer feeling to be sitting around right next to the Jerries, and now and then to exchange a word or two with them. It's a good thing they think they're Supermen and too good for us Ghetniks. They ignore us except to push us around a little, and we haven't heard one of them speak Serb. When they want *rakija*, they ask for *schnapps*.

Some of them look to be only sixteen years old, which I guess is another sign that Hitler is down to his last reserves. .

Nov. 8—It is clear the people no longer believe us when we tell them it's only the British planes that are doing the bombing. Thanks to the Germans, they can now distinguish between the Mosquitoes and the Marauders, and between the Lancasters and the Liberators, and they know which are ours.

Marauders plastered the town around noon while Donna and I cowered in the graveyard. When I put my arm around her, she drew away.

'Don't Americans ever tell the truth?' she asked.

'Always,' I said.

'What kind of planes are those?'

I could tell by her tone she knew. I said, 'Allied planes. Planes on our side, bombing Hitlerism.'

'Is this town Hitlerism?'

'There are Nazis here.'

'And the innocent people—don't they count?'

'It's war. You should see what the Germans have done to London and to other towns in England.'

'And are you no better?'

Then she asked me the question I'd been dreading. 'Tell me truly. Were you never on one of the raids on Podgorica?'

'Never,' I said. But my tone or my expression must have lacked conviction. She moved away from me and was silent. When the planes left—they were over for less than a half-hour—she got up silently and didn't say a word all the way home.

At her door, I said, 'Donna, I have been lying. I was over Podgorica once . . .' Her eyes were on fire but I went on anyhow, miserably, 'It was a big raid. I thought only of killing Germans. That was what we all thought. We didn't know—we had no idea . . .'

She burst into tears, and turned around and fled inside.

Arky and Griff have been having the same experience, more or less. Talking it over this evening, we decided that if this keeps up, the people might turn against us at any time. We'll have to be mighty careful from here on.

Nov. 9—I am twenty-four years old. What a birthday!

The dollar now fetches twenty-four Reichsmarks on the black market, and we got some *rakija* and food to celebrate. But we have given up all hope of getting away at any time soon, and we are beginning to feel that "the Germans, who are all around us and with us, are bound to catch us sooner or later.

I tested Arky's theory, by accident, and it worked. Mosquitoes came zooming in over the housetops while we were walking down the street. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one lay an egg, and I dived into a crater about ten feet away. Someone jumped in right on top of me. 'Sonovabitch !' I yelled, thinking it was Arky. But it was a Kraut, sure enough. He was plenty scared and he just grinned at me, weakly. I grinned right back at him, and repeated the word, twice. 'Yah,' he said. 'Ach, yah.'

Jocko, the Chetnik jazz fiend, has brought his portable

phonograph, the old crank-handle kind, and some old, old Paul Whiteman records that don't sound half bad. We will have quite a blow-out.

Nov. 10—Major Crntza (that's how it sounds, anyway) came over and gave us the old swindle, with a few new touches. He told us that in a few days we will have false identity papers and will be sent on to the British mission which is in Albania.

We wrote a letter to the mission, which he promised to relay for us. None of us pays any attention to the steaming any more.

The party last night was a honey. Arky dug up a mouth-harp somewhere, and one of the natives had an accordion, and we tried to polka. That was easier for us than for the girls to foxtrot to Jocko's decrepit jazz records.

For dinner we had a goat. These people eat everything that is edible, including the intestines. As guest of honour, I got the head : the horns, ears, eyes, tongue, and teeth were intact, but the skull had been split to make the brains accessible. I ate the tongue and some of the brains. They kept telling me what a great delicacy the eyeballs were, but I couldn't bring myself to eat them. They looked alive, and the sight of the beard made the goat taste like his own grandfather.

We got well oiled on *rakija*, and they began singing, ending up with their national anthem. That led to something I'll always remember with shame : they asked us to sing ours, and none of us knew the words to the 'Star-Spangled Banner' all the way through.

To divert their attention, we sang 'You Are My Sunshine' and 'South of the Border'. They roared at the latter and made us sing it over and over again. At the

end we learned that it was the refrain, 'Aye-yah-yah-yaye' that set them off—"yah' means egg in Serbian, and also an obscenity suggested by it.

Coming home in the pre-dawn blackness we watched the nightly fireworks. The Partisans are now little more than a mile away.

Donna didn't come, or even send word.

NOV. 11—Jocko brought news that President Roosevelt has been re-elected.

'Man,' said Arky, 'first time he did that without my vote getting counted twice.'

'I never got a chance to vote,' I said.

Nor had any of the others. It left us kind of gloomy.

We went down the road to the saloon. As usual it was full of Krauts, many of them goofing off from duty. About half a mile up the road was the river and on the other bank were the Partisans. Every so often, a Kraut would come in from the line, get a bottle or two for his squad, and go back down the road to the shooting again. We could hear desultory rifle and machine-gun fire as we sat and drank, and stray bullets crackled occasionally. We agreed it was a good thing the Partisans had no mortars handy.

We discussed joining the Partisans (talking Serb so fluently by this time that the Germans never suspected us) but none of us is really anxious to risk the shooting.

NOV. 12—Damndest thing. I was sitting out in the schoolyard, smoking, when a Lancaster came over at tree-top height. I was too late to move. I looked up and there was the nose-gunner looking right at me through the plexiglass—only 30 yards away. I waved, and he waved back. It was a funny feeling.

NOV. 14—All the Germans who are able to get out of Greece are retreating up through here. They are taking one hell of a beating. The Reichsmark is now sixty to the dollar. Allied planes are over all day long, having a picnic, and at night the Partisans raid. They have at least two mortars now.

We have had a showdown with Gapt. Vlado. We were coming down the road from the saloon when a P-51 came over and began strafing a Kraut convoy. The Krauts naturally shot back, but what got us mad is that a lot of the Chetniks joined in, banging away at the American plane. We had never seen a Chetnik shoot at an American plane before.

‘Whose side are you on?’ I asked the captain later.

‘But he was shooting at us.’

‘He was shooting at the Germans.’

‘And us, too.’

We had quite an argument, and then I stopped arguing about principles and told him, ‘The pilot will report all the ground fire. Tomorrow there will be twice as many planes. And if you should shoot one down, his buddies will report the location, and then they’ll come back in swarms and blast the whole area.’

That sobered him, and he agreed to order his men not to fire at American planes.

NOV. 17—Almost caught yesterday. Griff and I were visiting Coco, who owns the local variety store. We were talking English, because he likes to practise, when a Jerry came in. I was sure he had heard us. But I went right into Serbian and tried to act nonchalant. He kept looking at us suspiciously when Coco went up to serve him, and Griff got nervous. We shouldered our way past him, and once outside the door we ran all the way back.

Went around to Donna's house last night, but she refused to see me.

NOV. 19—There must be a million Germans within a few square miles. There is a battalion camped with us at the schoolhouse now, and we don't dare talk in our sleep. Allied planes are over almost hourly, blasting away at the retreat.

Most of the local families are packing up and getting ready to go. It's a cinch the Partisans are going to walk in as the Germans leave, and they're not going to be too nice to those who were nice to the Chetniks, let alone those who were friendly to the Germans. The sound of firing is continuous now, day and night. We can sleep through the small arms, but not when the Krauts let loose with some of the big guns close by.

nov. 20—I came around the corner of the building a few minutes ago, and there was a squad of Germans at the door. They saw me, so I couldn't go back. The leader, an *Oberst* no less, said, '*Sieg Heil!*'*

'*Do vagenia:*' ('How do you do?'), I said, not too nervously.

'*Wo ist der Kommandant?*'

'*El capitano?*' I said, less jittery now that I knew he spoke no Serb. '*Tema*' I pointed to the house.

He ahk-k-ked and yah-hak-k-ked at me, but I shook my head to signify I couldn't understand. '*Cheka maly,*' I said. '*Ya doge capitano ogi.*' ('Wait a moment—I'll bring the captain here.')

Calmly, I walked into the schoolhouse. The captain was in the back room, chewing the fat with some of our boys. 'Krauts outside,' I said. 'They want you, Captain.' Everyone hushed, and the captain, looking worried,

got to his feet. 'Maybe they know you are here,' he said.

'Out the back way,'⁵ said Arky.

'There are probably more there,' I said.

'Conceal yourselves,' the captain said, nervously.

'I'll go with the captain,' I said. 'They've seen me. You guys get under the beds or something.'

We went out, and I stood beside him as he talked with the *Oberst*. They talked for a few minutes before I caught on that the *Oberst* was merely instructing the captain about the new defence arrangements against the Partisans. Then I relaxed, borrowed a cigarette from a German lieutenant—who looked as though he'd like to refuse but didn't dare with his C.O. fraternizing with mine—and walked back inside.

The boys were nowhere to be seen. '*Raus!*'¹⁹ I shouted, trying to sound German. '*Raus, Amerikanische schweine—and you Ozark linthead first !*' Arky's shoe came flying from behind and caught me in the back of the neck.

I'll never be scared of a Kraut again—and that's for sure.

Nov. 23—Arky, Griff, and I were sitting in the saloon, from which all the Krauts had just been routed by a very angry colonel who supervised their march right down to the line, when a fat man came over to us. He was about six feet three and almost as wide.

'I envy you your youth,' he said, in flawless, Oxford-accented English. 'We are both running. And I know how to run, but you don't. But I am tired and ready to quit, and you are not.'

'Hell, mister. We quit four months ago. We're sitting here because we like it.'

'I cannot joke now,' he said. 'I'm tired.' He looked it,

too, almost mournful, unusual for a fat man. Then he told us his story. He had been a big shot in the government, and owned a lot of land, including some estates in Austria. Kings and queens had visited him and were his friends. And now he had nothing. He was a particular target of the Communists, and he had to keep on going.

'What if they catch you, mister?'

'They'll shoot me.'

'What do you think the Germans will do if they catch us, in these clothes?'

'They'll shoot you.'

'Same difference, mister. See what I mean? Drink up.'

Arky said, 'Shore feel sorry for you, mister. You're just in one hell of a spot. Wouldn't trade with you for less than a counterfeit Reichsmark.'

He laughed, and then we had a good time, chewing the fat and listening to some very scandalous—and, who knows, maybe true—stories about kings and prime ministers and such, and what they do off duty. Until a Kraut machine-gun squad came in for some *schnapps*.

NOV. 24—Saw Donna on the street and darted after her just as some Forts came over. Followed her into the same cellar, but quite a crowd had taken shelter there, and I was afraid to try to make her talk to me. She kept looking the other way all the time.

Nov. 25—The last two days have been a nightmare. The countryside has become a swarming mass of Germans, and the British and our own air force have been having a field day. The Germans moved in the schoolhouse with us day before yesterday, and we have had to be continuously on guard both from our own side and the enemy at once.

We are living, eating, sleeping, and getting bombed and shot at with the German Army. For all practical purposes except being of use to them, we are in the German Army.

There is a gigantic regrouping going on, and all we can gather is rumour. It is said the Jerries are planning to fight their way through the Partisans and the Russians to the north, all the way back to Germany. At the rate our planes are mowing them down, not many will reach home.

Night brings little relief. You can see the planes in the daytime, and duck. But no sooner is the sky empty at night than the Partisans attack, and the small arms and grenades and mortars—they have plenty of mortars now—never let up; bullets and shell fragments fly around at random. When we get inured enough to their annoyance to sleep, the German big guns nearby unfailingly open up.

Moreover, food has become extremely scarce. The dollar buys hundreds of Reichsmarks now, but the Reichsmark buys nothing.

Between lack of food and lack of sleep we are all haggard, red-eyed and brain-weary. And that makes it even more difficult and dangerous. For in this state we can't stay as alert as we have to be to keep the Germans from catching on to our identity.

Donna and her sister came to say good-bye yesterday. To Griff. Their family, like most of those in town, was moving up north with the Germans. Donna looked at me a few times out of the corner of her eye, but wouldn't acknowledge my attempts to talk, or even my presence. 'After the war . . .' her sister said to Griff. It was a sad parting. We all stood in the street, with the Germans all around us, and occasionally some of them looking and

whistling or making wise remarks like any bunch of G.I.'s.

'After the war . . . Griff said, and I said, and watched them go down the road. They turned back once and waved.

We'll probably never see them again. Our one hope is to stay here and let the Partisans take us, or maybe go south to try to link up with the Allies who are pushing the Germans back.

V

NOV. 27—Thanksgiving, I think.

We are alive and well, for which much thanks.

We moved out from the school two days ago, on a flatbed truck that rode in second gear all the way, partly because of the hills but mostly because we moved with, alongside, and through, marching columns of German troops and convoys of German vehicles.

Two or three times an hour our truck would stop suddenly and we'd dive off the road into a ditch or behind a tank or, where there was no other shelter, under the truck itself and pretend to fire at the planes that swooped and dived, strafing and bombing.

Once three P-38's caught us smack up against a hillside. I lay wedged between two Krauts in a dip at the side of the road. They were firing at the planes as fast as their machine pistols could chatter; I was going through the motions. The planes pulled up after the first pass, then swung around and came on back at us, their .50-calibres chopping up the dirt in a straight line toward us so that the Kraut on my left screamed with fear.

That sudden shrilled agony drove me wild. I began jamming a clip into my rifle, cursing (in English, I guess), trying to get the bullets in fast so I could shoot at the planes. In my frenzied haste, I fumbled, and then their bullets spat in the dirt in front of me, kicking up little clouds of red dust, and the planes pulled up and were gone.

Relief brought me the shivers and shakes. I lay there

trembling, thinking: My God, I was about to fire at my own buddies !

And now I know what it is like to be on the other end of our air force. I thought I was frightened up there, but now I know that fear was as nothing to the fear below.

Coming through Podgorica again, winding through the ruins while the German M.P.'s signalled us on through detours where once buildings stood, I saw all my own handiwork in a new light, and I felt all the agony the innocent civilians must have felt when I was at work above them. I know one thing—if I come out of this alive, I'm going in for fighters.

The whole trip was less than 15 miles, but it took us almost twelve hours. We arrived at Chetnik' headquarters just west of Podgorica at nightfall. At the moment, we are waiting for the Supreme Commander, or whatever title he's passing under here. We hope he knows what's going on—even more, that he will tell us the truth for a change.

NOV. 28—This all started four months ago today. The Supreme Commander, now referred to as the Grand Duke since there is apparently another Supreme Commander in the neighbourhood, gave us a blow-out last night: roast pork with all the trimmings, plus wine and *rakija*. He also let us tune in his radio. We listened to the Allied Forces station in Italy. They played all the good old records—Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Gene Krupa, James, and all—and we got real nostalgic.

We also heard a couple of news broadcasts and they make it sound as if the war is about over. We had no idea our Army was already so far inside Germany.

The Grand Duke was warm and full of promises, but we have heard them all before, and he was less convincing

than ever. At one point, when we pressed him about this joint retreat with the Germans and his refusal to let us stay and wait for the Partisans, he said the Chetniks may turn around and battle through the German lines to join the Allies in the south. We volunteered to lead the vanguard of that movement.

NOV. 30—It's lucky we had that good meal three days ago, because we've had only a couple of cans apiece of German rations since. We are in a ramshackle frame house, not far from Chetnik H.Q.. The house is falling down, but there are over eighty persons in it, more than half of them Kraut soldiers. It is cold and we have only one blanket each. We sleep on the floor, huddling together for warmth.

DEC. 1—Another move. Two and a half miles, and it took us all day. The whole German Army and just about all the civilians in Yugoslavia are jamming the road to the north. The Krauts are fresh, young, in clean uniforms, with excellent discipline and high morale, not what you'd expect of a retreating army.

But are they getting the hell pounded out of them! The U.S.A.F. and the R.A.F. take turns, and they can't miss, even from high level. It's no picnic, though; the Krauts have ack-ack mounted on trucks, and their troops are well disciplined and throw up a deadly curtain of fire with small arms, too. If I weren't so scared of our flyers, I'd really be proud of them—coming in again and again through all that.

Around 1430, four Hurricanes came in, strafing. One flew smoking into the mountainside a quarter-mile off and exploded in flames. The pilot had no chance.

The Chetniks have taken over a house half a mile off

the road where we are staying tonight. We were standing in the front courtyard a while ago when a German squad came up, and an officer tried to draft us into pushing a stalled truck. I was holding my diary in my hand, the loose pages fluttering in the wind. I wasn't at all bothered, though. Shot back at the Krauts in Serbian, and with an assist from Arky and Griff, finally made them understand we were Chetnik officers, but that our C.O. inside would get some enlisted men for their menial labour. They apologized and went on in.

DEC. 2—We are going to make the break this afternoon.

After the Germans left last night, we had it out.

'We can't keep this up,' I said. 'We'll have these narrow escapes again and again, until we get caught. But we're living right with the German Army, and as thick-headed as they are, they can't help catching up to us.'

'What can we do?' Aclan asked, troubled.

'Desert to the Partisans,' I said. 'They're all around us every night.'

'I don't like the idea of wandering around in no man's land,' Aclan said. 'That way we get shot up by both sides.'

'I'm taking off in the morning,' I said. 'Who's coming along?'

Arky and Martin chimed in their agreement simultaneously. Aclan and Griff grew vehement trying to dissuade them. At last Mac spoke up.

'We can't go on like this,' he said. 'If the Germans don't get us, it's a cinch our own planes will. If we get to the Partisans we'll have a fighting chance.'

Both Aclan and Griff were on the verge of giving in when firing broke out behind the house. Occasional

flashes of fire spotted the attackers on the crest of the hill and the defenders down the slope.

‘There they are,* I said. ‘They’re not half a mile away.*

A machine-gun opened up from the next room, and brought a quick response from one of the machine-guns on the hill. We fell flat on the floor as the tracers groped their way through the blackness toward us. In a moment, our window was shattered and bullets buzzed over us like angry insects.

‘If you go, you’re crazy,’ Aclan said. ‘You’re asking to be killed.’

Griff said, ‘I’m with you, Inks.’

‘You’re nuts, all of you,’ Aclan said. ‘Going out there in a battle like that.’

‘The Partisans don’t do any shooting in the daytime,’ I said. ‘They’re way outnumbered and they don’t want to give their positions away. We go up with a white flag and we let them take us without a shot.’

At that moment, artillery opened up from the road. We peered over the window-ledge and watched the shells fall on the hill, tearing up the earth in giant flashes. Then all was silence. We waited for a while, but there was no more shooting from the hill.

‘See,’ I said, ‘it’s just a nuisance raid. They’ve pulled back now.’

‘All right, all right,’ Aclan said. ‘If that’s the way you want it, I’ll go along.’

And so, early this morning, we scouted the valley back of the house and the hill, spotting the best getaway route. I wrote out a note:

Dear Capt. Vlado—As soldiers, it is our duty to return to our command as speedily as possible. Since it

seems unlikely we shall be able to do so in the near future from here, we are breaking out on our own. Thank you for all you have done. We shall do our best to persuade our government that your forces deserve all the help we can give you. Meanwhile, this note will attest that the government of the United States owes you \$717 for our quarters and rations during the past four months.

Sincerely,

JAMES M. INKS,
Second Lieutenant,
U.S. Army Air Corps.

I have placed the note on my bed, where it will be found.

DEC. 3—I'll tell it as it happened.

We took a pillow-case for a white flag, and Arky put it inside his shirt. When we got a few hundred yards from the house, we cut a sapling to tie it to.

'We won't hoist it until we're near the top of the hill,' I said. No one objected to my taking command.

It had been very cold during the night and the early morning, and now, in the sun-bright noon, it was still chilly. We walked along slowly, chatting. But I noticed every one of us was flushed and sweating.

'What do we do if the Chetniks spot us?' Aclan asked.

'We're just out for a walk,' I said.

'You think they'll swallow that?'

'Why not? We've taken walks before.'

We were about a mile from the house. The hill was stony and covered with tangled brush and scrub trees and dead weeds that crackled under foot.

'It's the Partisans that worry me,' said Griff. 'What if they begin shooting?'

'They won't shoot when they can capture us so easily,' I said.

'What makes you think they believe in taking prisoners?' Aclan asked.

'They'll take us alive so they can pump us for information. That will give us a chance to tell them who we are.'

Aclan started to ask another question, but I got mad. 'Holy Christ!' I said. 'We've been running through this same dialogue since our first week here. It's like an old phonograph record by now. Do we have to keep it up?'

Aclan was stubborn. 'But-----' he started to say, when Mac interrupted with his pessimistic matter-of-factness. 'What's the difference—the Germans might shoot us any time, anyway.'

And I wished I had a buffalo nickel for every time he'd said that, too.

Another forty-five minutes took us half-way up the hill. We were all jumpy, aware that at the crest the Partisans might be lying in ambush, guns trained on us.

'Time for the white flag,' Aclan said.

'Not yet,' I said. 'We're still on Chetnik ground.'

'This is no man's land,' Griff said. 'And the Partisans are closer than the Chetniks.'

'It's less than half-way,' Arky said. 'The Partisans won't hold the crest during the day. They won't want a pitched battle when they're so outnumbered. So hold off for a while.'

The hill was more rugged close to the top. Great boulders and thick clumps of trees and shrubs cut off the view. The house could no longer be seen.

'Now's the time,' Aclan said. 'We're pretty close now.'

'We're right on top of them,' Griff said. 'Let's put up that flag now.'

I waited for another ten minutes, until I could no

longer bear the suspense myself. 'All right,' I said. 'I guess we're out of Chetnik range now.'

We stopped in a clump of pine. Down in the valley we could see groups of Germans and Chetniks, distant, small figures, and on the road, the vehicles of the retreat like toys. Arky unbuttoned his coat and shirt, to get at the pillow-case.

'Cooley taymah!'

The challenge came from behind a thicket.

I stepped boldly toward it, heart pounding. '*Americanos!*' There was a thick silence. I shouted, louder. '*Officier Americano, soldados Americanos!*'

A big, rough-looking bruiser came out, carrying a German machine pistol at ready. He wore a Chetnik uniform. In Serbian, my heart sinking, I said quickly, 'We are Americans with the Chetnik forces.'

He stalked toward us, scowling. Four men emerged from the thicket behind him, their rifles levelled at us. He said, 'No Americans with the Chetniks. Who are you?'

'American flyers who have been with Capt. Vlado and the Grand Duke.'

One of the men lowered his rifle and said rapidly, 'I have heard of them. They are under the protection of the Grand Duke.'

'What are you doing here?' the leader asked suspiciously.

'We came for a walk.'

'You do not know the Partisans are all around?'

I tried to look surprised. 'We heard a battle last night. But we thought they were driven off.'

Surly, he said, 'It's not a likely story. Tell me another one, the true one.'

'Fact is,' said Arky, 'we were looking for the Partisans.'

We wanted some target practice.* He said it with an easy grin and a chuckle.

The patrol leader sneered. 'With your rifles slung over your backs? Or did you want to be targets for Partisan shooting?'

'We are flyers,' I said. 'We are not foot soldiers, and we do not have the experience and the knowledge of foot soldiers.'

'Hah! No Americans are soldiers. Except in the movies.* He laughed at his own joke and was put into better humour by it. 'You are good for making war with machines,' he said. 'Not like men.'

'You will see,' I said, 'if we run into the Partisans.'

'Enough. You will go back with me.'

And, at the bottom of the hill, we ran into a very worried Capt. Vlado. He had found my note and had 200 soldiers out looking for us. 'If you had crossed the Partisan lines, you'd have been killed,' he said.

'We were willing to take our chances,' I said.

'And the Grand Duke would have killed me,' he said. 'You are my responsibility. Please believe me. You can see we are taking care of you, protecting you from the Germans. Why do you not believe we are trying to return you to Italy safely?'

His sincerity and worry made me feel bad. Aclanivas first to promise we wouldn't run away again, and then the other men assented, and finally I agreed, too.

'Now maybe you guys are convinced,' Aclansaid. 'We shoulda all stood in bed.'

DEC. 5—Capt. Vlado and his troops moved out yesterday, leaving us behind with Jocko, the radio operator, and his assistant. Jocko has an Adam's apple that moves when he talks, like some actor whose name I forget. It

isn't clear what's going to happen to us. We're to wait until called for. We have been filling in the time, loafing and shooting at cans in back of the house. My Italian carbine, which has a folding bayonet on the barrel, is better than the Austrian rifles the others have.

We were out in the yard before, pitching horseshoes, when a Wellington came over. They have been using P-38's and 51's, British Spitfires, Hurricanes, and Mosquitoes, for the strafing and bombing, and the Wellingtons only for tossing out *letka*, the local word for toilet paper, and propaganda leaflets.

'There's some *letka* for the fire tonight,' Arky said.

We watched as though hypnotized while one, two, three . . . seven black spots fell out—and then became bombs. We made the slit trench, 25 yards away, just as they landed, straddling the street and the yard, the closest 30 yards away.

After that we stayed close to the trench all day. Twice bombs fell within 200 yards. When darkness came, we felt worn out, exhausted, although we'd done nothing much besides sit and shiver. None of us can imagine that the Germans can continue long up the road in the face of such punishment.

Last night, all night long, German transports came in and took off from a strip a few miles south. Jocko said they were ferrying all the big shots out. We discussed the possibility of stealing a plane, and Aclan said he'd be willing to fly it. But it was just talk.

This morning, we took all our food—dried potatoes, beans, and rice—and headed for the rocks, away from the bombing. We have been sitting here all day, in grandstand seats, with the planes diving on the road and pulling out right over our heads. One fighter has been shot down so far.

The Germans are catching it. Unfortunately, all the nationalist civilians on the road are catching it, too. If the Communists outnumber them after the war, it will be in good part because they mixed in with this retreat. I don't know what will ever become of these people, or this country. Almost all the houses are vacant, and many are destroyed. No one has any food.

DEC. 7—We came in from the rocks just before dark yesterday, when it looked as though the day's bombing was over. Just as we reached the house, we heard a plane dive and then pull out. We looked up. Either the plane had been damaged by flak or its bomb rack was out of whack, because the bombs didn't drop in the dive. Instead, as we watched, two big ones came from the ship as it climbed.

We barely made it to a trench.

Today, it has been raining, and there hasn't been a plane over. We finish the last of the beans tonight. Jocko has been trying desperately to make some contact via the radio to find when we are leaving here.

DEC. 9—We left the house at 1600 yesterday, and hiked and hiked and hiked until 0200. We passed a continuous file of German trucks. They say there are over 8,000 trucks in this column and that the line of the retreat stretches down this one road for 75 miles, and I can believe it. It has been raining without stop and the planes have not been able to come in, for which we are selfishly grateful.

We are in a bad way, in good part because of the shoe situation. We have only the Chetnik sandals, and they are pretty well worn. We are wet and cold and hungry, and if something doesn't happen before long, we won't

be able to keep up. It's miraculous none of us has got sick so far. And mighty, mighty lucky, because doctors are few and far between, and those we have met have no equipment and little medicine.

DEC. 10—The weather let up a litde and the planes came back. This time the Germans threw the kitchen sink at them, too, scoring twice. I was glad to see them come in and work over the retreat, mostly because it gave us a rest, even if some of the drops came pretty close. We hid in the rocks by the side of the road most of the day. Last night the Partisans attacked from both sides, and there was quite a celebration. I suppose they'll be back tonight and every night as long as this lasts.

DEC. 11—Rain again. We go on for four hours at a crack, then stop. With the mules carrying the radio, and us on foot, we still go faster than the German trucks. They stick to the road and stay in line. We just go by alongside the road. Some of the Germans look worn out, too.

The Partisans are sure taking one hell of a toll. They were back last night, again and again, in hit-and-run raids. All they have to do is shoot down at the road and they're bound to hit something. In the daylight, they vanish.

We have heard that the Germans are trying to drive the Partisans out of Kolašin and make that their winter headquarters. That appears to be our destination as of now. •

dec. 13—Partisans cut the column in two last night, just a few miles ahead of us. It was one hell of an uproar. The Germans didn't dare use artillery, or even mortars,

and it was all small arms and hand-to-hand. Soon our outfit got word to move in and join the hassle. We wanted to go along, figuring we might make a break, but they sent us back down the road, under guard.

Before morning, the Partisans were gone and the column was joined again.

The rain has let up today, and the planes are back. Did I ever wish for them to come over? We are cold and miserable and hungry. We got a little potatoes yesterday and that was all.

VI

DEC. 29—I have not written in this diary for sixteen days. There have been times when I was certain I would never write again. How can I describe what we have been living through—what we are living through still? It is as though we were acting out the devil's own worst nightmare, suffering his ultimate torments.

Back some days, Christmas passed, and the birthday of the Prince of Peace was the worst and bloodiest day of my life. Ahead some days is the New Year, and if I live to see it I will be more than lucky, because it cannot possibly hold anything worse than what has passed.

I will try to set down everything, but there are things I remember doing I cannot believe I did, things my memory tells me I saw and heard and felt that I cannot believe anyone ever saw and heard and felt and lived to remember.

There was first the retreat, and the stupendous, incredible fact of it I can believe, because it is still going on and I am still in the middle of it and its terrors and absurdities and agonies are all around me as I write.

Never in all history was there anything like it. It stretches along the narrow, rubble-strewn road for more than 100 miles. From the mountain peaks we can see it in all its relentless desperation, a thin, black line threading the snow, twisting and turning crazily through the mountains, the anguished swarming of the most fantastic collection of vehicles, animals, and human beings that can ever have travelled together.

Vehicles—trucks and cars of almost every make and nationality, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Czech, British, and American. Powered by gasoline, oil, benzine, kerosene, charcoal, wood-burners. Tanks, and tanks, and tanks, lumbering on heavy treads. Covered wagons and mobile artillery pulled by thousands of Percherons. Carts, pulled by old men and women and children. And jeeps, command cars, recon cars, and limousines, some not long off the assembly lines of Detroit, almost new, captured in Greece.

Animals—horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, jackasses, cattle, sheep, goats, cats, and dogs.

Human beings—the heavy-jowled, paunchy German high brass, riding in staff cars and limousines, often with painted, powdered, perfumed women in furs beside them. Well-fed field grade German officers, riding in jeeps and command cars, frequently with their floozies. German Wacs, and companies of prostitutes, riding in trucks. German troops, marching in formation, sometimes singing. Chetniks, officers sometimes riding horses but usually on foot with their men, and as gaunt, bleary-eyed, slovenly. Civilians—old men, crippled men, sick men, bearded and haggard; gnarled old women, eyes never lifted from the road; middle-aged and young women, eyes usually filled with terror but sometimes with an obscene and anxious invitation that is worse. And the children, thin-faced, burning-eyed, swollen-stomached, trembling, and fearful.

And six American airmen, aliens sharing the solidarity of misery.

Which among all the retreats of history could match this for brutality and despair, for horror and suffering and death? One evening, when we sat huddled in the snow, waiting for a gallon can of melted snow to boil two

quarts of small potatoes—all the food we'd been able to scrounge all day for twenty-two men—I remembered a description I'd read of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

I thought: Napoleon had it made. All he had to contend with was snow and cold and hunger and desolation. We have all that, plus the mountains, and that's only the beginning. From Moscow to France he had the enemy at his back, but clear roads ahead. But this retreat, with the tail-end of the column continuously engaged in bitter rearguard action, is simultaneously an attack, the forward elements battling for every foot we advance. And from the sides every night, the Partisans. And from the skies every day, either snow or planes, both spitting devastation.

It is a living hell for the Germans and the Chetniks and the civilians. But they look forward hopefully to its success, to the time when they will have got where they are going, and can rest. But we six Americans know that if the retreat succeeds, and if we live to see it through, it will carry us not to comfort and safety and freedom, but deeper into danger and captivity.

In the beginning, we buried our dead where they fell.

When the Germans took Kolašin, we took up the march again, falling in behind a company of German infantry. We were seventeen Chetniks and six Americans, with three mules and a jackass to carry our radio, our blankets, spare ammunition, cooking utensils, and odds and ends.

'We've got to get shoes,' I told the Chetnik lieutenant. 'We can't keep on this way. We'll get trench foot, pneumonia.'

He shrugged agreement and said he would try.

It was start and stop, start and stop, all day. The

jerkiness of our movements told clearly the story of the fighting at the head of the column. When the wind came from the north, we could hear the artillery.

Early in the afternoon, the first planes came, spouting .50-calibre shells like fountains of death, dropping fragmentation and high-explosive bombs that mushroomed destruction. Every 75 yards or so in the column, the Germans had spotted ack-ack and machine-guns on trucks. The gunners stood by their posts, spraying a deadly rain. Everyone else scattered, dashing off the road to fall flat anywhere.

I fell on a rock that first day, punching my kidneys, which had never been well since the parachute jump. When I got up, I first felt the sharp, shooting pain that has been getting worse since, day by day. But I went back to the road and I helped bury, first, one of our Chetniks, and then two civilians, an old man and a little boy of four or five, all torn apart by the same bomb. Then we went on.

The planes came back three or four times that day. Sometimes they worked overhead for only ten minutes. Once there was wave after wave for an hour. And we lay flat on the snow and the rocks until it was over, and then we went back to the road, pushed aside the wreckage and the rubble, buried the dead, and moved on. The Germans placed their dead on trucks and carried them, sometimes for a day or two—in the bitter cold, the corpses made no smell at all—until they could bury a whole group at once in some open field which was transformed speedily into a graveyard, with crosses in neat rows and dog-tags and helmets hanging on them.

Late that first afternoon, we began to hunt for a house for the night. There was none. There were only wrecks and ruins, sometimes bombed, sometimes shelled, some-

times burned. At night we bivouacked in a field near a German infantry company. The Chetniks scrounged rations from the Germans, about two dozen cans of cheese, sausage, beef, and weenies; we opened all the cans and dumped all their contents into one pot, and cooked it over a fire, and ate our first meal all day, and were ravenously hungry afterward.

We worried about our feet.

'I'm going to steal the shoes off a dead German tomorrow,' Arky said.

'If you find one my size,' Martin said, 'just yell/

'The Germans are touchy about their dead,' Aclan said. 'If they see you robbing one, they'll shoot.'

Griff stuck out his jaw. 'If we don't get shoes by tomorrow, I'll take the chance. Sooner die by a bullet than from gangrene.'

I talked to the lieutenant about getting the shoes off the German dead. He spat on the fire and thought. 'The Germans won't give them to us,' he said. 'At the moment, they're stupid and superstitious about their dead. In a few weeks, they'll be using the shoes themselves.' I insisted he try. 'All right,' he promised. 'I'll try.'

All the clothes we had were the sandals, woollen trousers, thin woollen shirts, Chetnik caps, and long blue wool Italian Army overcoats we had been given. Each of us had one coarse blanket and two or three pairs of socks in addition.

'Jackets, too,' I said. 'Try for jackets, too. We're freezing now, and it'll be colder higher up.'

'All right,' he said. 'Jackets, too.'

Some of the Chetniks had found girls, and they slept in little black mounds on the snow. We slept sitting up, huddling together around the fire. The fire would die

down at intervals during the night, and someone would stir awake and toss more wood on it. And still we were cold.

In the morning, the temperature had slumped to below freezing.

We took the load off the jackass, piled it on the mules and the lieutenant mounted the jackass and rode off to scrounge some jackets and shoes for us.

Twice in the morning the planes came. We lay flat and scared until they were gone, and then got up and helped clear the road and bury the dead. One of our Chetniks had his arm cut by a bomb fragment, but otherwise we were lucky.

Luckier still when the lieutenant returned. The Germans had refused him, but he had located some Chetnik shoes, rubber auto-tyre soles with thin leather uppers. There was no arch support, but at least our feet were enclosed, and it took several hours that day before the slush soaked through.

And I was lucky in the afternoon, when I flopped in a field right on top of a German during one air raid. He didn't mind the bruising. He was a youngster, not more than eighteen, and he was grateful for the company. We lay on our bellies, cursing the planes together, he in German and I in Serb, and when it was over he gave me some cigarettes and a ration can of blood sausage.

Later, we fell in with a civilian family : an old woman who looked to be seventy, her daughter, middle-aged, and her grand-daughter and grandson. The girl was about seventeen, the boy about twelve. I helped them at one point pull their cart out of a ditch. Then a couple of Chetniks gave them a hand, both making a play for the girl, whose name was Mlada.

In the late afternoon, one of the Chetniks gave up, and

then two of our boys took his place, and the other Chetnik got angry. The mother looked worried and the daughter scared, but the grandmother was too old to care about anything but setting one foot ahead of the other.

That night, too, we were lucky. Just before dark, we spied a barn about a quarter-mile off the road, and we spent the night there. The Chetnik and our two boys who had been promoting the girl all afternoon, squabbling and snarling at each other in between, found all their effort wasted. Grim, frightened, she refused their invitations to come along, even though her mother and grandmother said nothing during the discussion—just stood silently, looking down at the ground.

The Chetnik was all for dragging the girl along, but our boys had the decency to stop that, and the last we saw of her, she was helping her grandmother up the road behind the mule cart in the gathering darkness.

I shared the sausage with Arky. Some of the others had scrounged German rations, some had dried bread or raw potatoes, and some had nothing at all. My stomach was a tight, painful knot, but my kidneys troubled me more.

It was in that barn that Arky found the first louse. He pulled it off his neck, held it up while he cursed and we looked at it, and then threw it in the fire.

In the morning, there were spots of blood where I urinated in the snow.

(It has become worse each day since. The pain is always with me now, and my urine is half blood. I don't know how long I can keep going.)

All that day, I bothered the lieutenant about a doctor, and for several days after that. But he could do nothing. There were just no doctors about.

(I think now that if it continues to get worse, I shall hunt up a German army doctor—there are ambulances and medical units scattered all through the retreat—and if he finds out I am an American, at least I will get the treatment I need to stay alive.)

The pain came and went in intervals that morning, and I marched without great difficulty. We were well up in the mountains by then, and the road became narrow and more rugged, and the retreat slowed down. The cars and trucks moved in first or second gear all the time, and the starts and stops were more frequent.

When the planes came, there was not much open area to disperse in ; a few yards to either side of the road, the slopes climbed sharply. But there were rocks, and scrub brush, and undergrowth that gave the feeling of protection even if they really offered none. Not planes but hunger bothered us most the second day. During one raid, Arky and I crouched behind a boulder.

‘I can’t take it,’ he said. ‘I’m going to rob the first dead German I see of his rations when this lets up.’

‘I have a better idea,’ I counselled. ‘Let’s hike down the road. One of the German ration trucks or wagons must have been hit, and there’ll be a lot of stuff lying around.’

We started off when the last plane had gone. The lieutenant stopped us 50 yards away, but when we told him what we were up to, he was enthusiastic. He sent five men with us, and another group back down the other way. Wreckage—burning and demolished vehicles and equipment—and the dead lay strewn along the road. We went up ahead almost a mile, but none of the wrecked trucks had held rations.

Three times during the day, we repeated the tour sifter raids. The second and third times we were lucky and got

away with armfuls of cans before the Germans drove us off. Coming back after the third time, I ran into the girl, Mlada, and her family. I didn't have the heart to pass their hungry eyes like that, and I gave them some cans.

What we had retrieved, however, couldn't fill up twenty-two men. It helped; but we were hungry that night, too.

The next morning, Griff and I begged some rations from a squad of Jerries. In the afternoon, during a driving snow, a jeep, with the big, circled white star that was the U.S. Army insignia still covering its hood, came whining up the road behind us. We stepped off the road, cursing under our breaths the two bull-necked Kraut officers in it. The back was piled high with cartons. As it pulled slowly past us, Arky reached and lifted one off. It held potatoes and onions and cornmeal. At nightfall, we had Mulligan stew, of a sort.

We were crouched down in a little gully, around a fire that kept hissing as the snow fell into it. The Partisans woke us during the night with an attack less than a mile away. I lay on my belly, wrapped in my blanket, watching the fireworks and scratching idly, when suddenly panic struck me. I sat up, thinking, 'My God, I'll bet I have lice, too!' and fumbled frantically through my clothes to the bare skin, scratching furiously. I found one, then another. Oblivious to the battle down the road, I fought my private war against the insect kingdom, killing about ten or eleven of my personal enemies.

I remarked to Griff the next day that I had the cooties, too. He said he had had them for two days. 'What do you expect? Look what a filthy bunch we are.' I looked around at my buddies, seeing them as they had become for the first time. We were all bearded and dirty and haggard, mud and dirt streaking our faces, our hands

and fingernails black and our eyes bloodshot. We looked as though we'd been on Skid Row for years.

The snow let up several times during the day, and the planes came in, but no ration trucks were hit that we could find. The German units ahead of and behind us were surly when we begged for food. It was clear they were beginning to worry about the future, too. In a dozen tries, I sponged only one cigarette.

I think it was Aclan who came up with the idea of the whole unit marching behind a ration wagon and pilfering as the opportunity offered. The lieutenant went for it, and we waited an hour by the side of the road, trying to look nonchalant and unsuspecting while watching for an unguarded wagon. We gave up, finally, and fell in behind one with only one guard. When he got off during one raid, we stole a couple of cases of cans, enough for about two cans per man for the entire day. The Germans, of course, had two per meal per man.

And that night, no sleep. We were well up in the mountains. It was bitterly cold, but the lieutenant kept us marching in hope of finding shelter. The whole column was now moving at night, faster than during the day because there were no planes. Most of the civilians pulled off the road to rest and that speeded up the movement, too.

During our own rest periods, I dozed off, to be slapped awake by the lieutenant or Arky, and to help awaken others who had fallen asleep. Our shoes became cakes of ice, and our faces and hands became numb. Once, during the night, a Chetnik stole up behind a ration truck and tried to steal some food. A German came running up from behind us and shot him dead.

We gathered around the Kraut, shouting and screaming at him in anger. He was a fat, middle-aged *Unter-*

oβzitr, and he was afraid but held his ground, waving his pistol at us. We would have killed him, but a Jerry platoon came up and surrounded us and pulled him out.

For a few minutes we stood around the dead man, the retreat flowing around us. The lieutenant, sad, defeated, said, 'Let's go on, men.'

One of the Chetniks said something about burying the slain man. The lieutenant shrugged. 'Push him over by the side of the road. He won't know the difference.'

And since then we have not bothered to bury our dead.

The dead, civilian and Chetnik, lie by the side of the road at random intervals, and we no longer look at them as we plod by. They lie stiff, and there are usually little beaded ice drops on their eyelids, around their nostrils, at the sides of their mouths, the last warmth of humanity frozen solid.

They lie as they fell, in grotesque and horrible and often obscene positions. Those who dropped by the way-side from hunger are usually sitting up, backs against a rock or a tree, staring straight ahead with sightless eyes. Those who dropped of weariness are usually reclining, or sprawled flat on their backs, their mouths open to the sky. Those who were killed lie mangled or contorted, sometimes crouching or kneeling or huddled in the precise positions their lives had last willed ; others lie twisted in the crazy shapes their bodies had fallen into when they were pushed or lifted and flung off the road.

It is noticeable that most of the dead children lie curled up in the foetal position.

The Germans, too, have grown careless with their dead. Those who die on the road or near it are still carried until some officer decrees a cemetery in some barren field along the way. Then they are buried in mass graves,

one cross serving up to thirty men. But those who ran off the road during air raids, and were killed at some distance, lie where they met death. You can tell they are Germans because they lie naked. Their boots, their uniforms, even their woollen underwear have been stripped from them, and they are clothed only with the snow that lies in little drifts in the hollows of their frozen bodies.

One of the first civilian corpses we saw unburied was that of Mlada's grandmother. She had been one of the weary ones and in death had received a last tribute of love from her family. She lay flat on her back. Her eyes had been closed and two pebbles placed on them, her hands were folded peacefully across her stomach, and her dress had been smoothed along her withered thighs and stones placed on it, so that no stray gust of wind might betray her into indecency after death.

I looked at her and recognized her without shock and wondered numbly what the four men who had lusted after her grand-daughter thought as they saw the corpse.

Not far away, a German field kitchen was set up and, as the German units drew abreast, the soldiers would fall out and get coffee and doughnuts. Our lieutenant didn't need any suggestions. He led the way, but was halted yards short by a *Kapitän*. He pleaded eloquently and persistently, but the *Kapitän* just looked and sniffed and acted as though he weren't there.

I looked at Arky and Griff and Mac and Aclan and Martin. We were all remembering the same thing—coffee and doughnuts at Red Cross clubmobiles and air bases and leave centres all over the U.S. and Africa and Italy. Martin had tears in his eyes.

Arky said, 'Never liked them things nohow unless they was covered with powdered sugar.'

Back on the road we waited for a ration truck and fell in behind a big, covered, horse-drawn wagon that lumbered along. It had rubber tyres—its wheels had been stripped off a truck—and it was heaped high with cartons. A tough-looking Kraut with a machine pistol sat on the boxes, feet dangling over the tail-gate.

We followed it for hours, slowing when it slowed, speeding when it sped, stopping when it stopped, waiting for the guard to get down for just a moment, to stretch his legs, or to talk to the driver, or to relieve himself. He sat there stolidly, watching us, weapon across his knees.

Our tongues must have been hanging out. We forgot cold and fatigue and hardship in the slow, unending pursuit. I remember thinking at one point of the donkey being led by his rider, who holds a carrot dangling from a stick just in front of the animal's nose. The guard looked at us without expression, as though he didn't know what we wanted, as though he didn't know we were there.

He never got off. Not even when the planes came in, spitting fire. We lay in a ditch, peeking over the rim now and then to see whether he was still there. There were four planes and they came down the length of the road for the half-mile straight downgrade between curves, their cannon and machine-guns chewing into the road and what was on it. The last plane got both the Percherons that pulled the wagon.

We were on the horses as they fell, whinnying and thrashing. The lieutenant put one out of his misery and I shot the other, and then we were all hacking, cutting away at the warm and bloody flesh. We were all crowded close, and one man lost the tip of a finger to another's greedy knife. I came away with a dripping piece of hindquarter that weighed about 8 lb.

Civilians, old people and women, stood about

hungrily, waiting for us to finish. The three Germans who shared the driver's seat watched open-mouthed, in mingled disgust and wonder. The civilians got the head and entrails and what meat could be scraped off the bones. It could not have been twenty minutes before both horses were skeletons.

Over fires that sprang up suddenly on both sides of the road we roasted the meat. The lieutenant was a wise one. He let us all have as much as we wanted that night, and then collected the rest to be shared equally the next day. It was tough and tangy, and it tasted like the best beefsteak in Texas. We finished it up the next night, boiling the last of it with some potatoes and rice for which we traded part. The two days the meat lasted, although we slept in the cold with no shelter, we felt better than at any time since starting the march.

The next day we reached the river outside Podbisća. Where the bridge had been were only the cracked and shattered stubs of the concrete pillars that had supported it. Along the banks were the wrecked remnants of pontoon bridges erected by the Germans and smashed by our planes. German M.P.'s gave us passes and directed us off the road. They told us it would be two or three days before our turn came to cross on the huge rafts they had built for ferrying. The rafts could be used only at night or in bad weather. Other times, the planes were over constantly, and the rafts, heavily camouflaged, were drawn up on the banks.

Thousands of troops and civilians swarmed the area, waiting their turn to cross. Small one-storey houses, whose rooms added up to not more than 20 by 30 feet of floor space, held as many as twenty-five Germans or fifty civilians. The lieutenant consulted higher ranking Chetnik officers and then called a consultation with his men.

'We won't get across sooner by waiting here,' he said. 'The Germans are methodical and thorough and they will only pass each in his proper turn. Food is scarce here, because it is so crowded. I propose to strike off to the west for a three- or four-hour brisk march. We ought to find a deserted farm-house for shelter, and we'll have a better chance of foraging.'

Some objected to the extra hike, but the rest overruled them. Another officer and four men joined us, and we set out. It was a little over four hours before we found what we were looking for, a sizeable stone house with the wintry decay of what had been a garden around it.

Despite the full meal the day before, and half a can each of German sausage earlier, we were hungry when we arrived. Arky found a fork and went right to work. A few Chetniks found spades and joined him, digging at random in the garden. The rest of us began searching the house and grounds.

I was crawling under the house, aiming at a barrel, when Arky whooped. Surrounded within seconds by the whole group^ he held up two tiny potatoes, about the size of apricots. There was wild commotion. Men ran this way and that, hunting implements with which to dig. Others fell to their knees and began hacking at the frozen turf with knives and bayonets.

The lieutenant bellowed for order. When all were at attention, he said calmly, 'There are two forks and four spades. Those men holding them will dig for the next half hour. The men standing to the right of them will relieve them, and then the next men to the right. Meanwhile, all others continue searching elsewhere. We shall all share alike.'

Sheepishly, all but the diggers moved off. Back under the house again, with Aclan's help, I reached the barrel.

It took us ten minutes of shoving and straining to get it into the open. Inside, half-way to the top, were small apples, half rotten. We ate a few, then carried the barrel into the house.

There was more whooping out back. In the barn, some men had found a wine-vat. It was a giant, about 200 gallons in capacity, and there was fermented wine and lees at the bottom. The lieutenant had ordered some men to bring buckets when Arky came up. He looked inside and said. 'Damn. That's good sour mash. I can distil it.'

He started persuading the lieutenant, who looked doubtful at first, then brightened as the ridge-runner continued. Bits of pipe and rubber hose and plumbing ripped from the walls of the house were soon assembled under Arky's supervision. He was in high glee. 'Ain't nothing to make a man feel at home like the mash bubbling,' he said. 'And man, oh man! No revenooers!'

Within an hour his still was set up and, as night fell, it was in operation. We all crowded around the mouth of the hose, waiting impatiently. After a while Arky said, with a touch of worry in his voice, 'Course, it ain't corn, but mash is mash.' A little more doubtfully, he added later, 'Ain't no reason I can figure wine mash should be different.'

'You're a fraud, hillbilly,* I said. 'Closest you ever been to a still is a package store.'

Signs of success brought back his humour. 'Man, are you kidding? I brewed my first jug when you was getting drunk on mother's milk. I've distilled more'n enough to fill a lake you couldn't paddle across in a day.'

Aclan laboriously translated the conversation for the lieutenant, who saw nothing funny in it at all. We shrugged and crouched by the mouth of the hose, waiting. Some of the men were arguing about what mistakes

Arky had made when the first drip fell. Soon another, then another, and then the pace quickened. Arky intercepted the drip with his tin cup. He gulped it down with a great show of fervour. Then he smiled. It was so beatific, it couldn't have been faked. We all whooped for joy.

So that night we had boiled potatoes, apple-sauce, some German rations, and brandy. The still went all that night and all the next day, and we forgot about eating in drinking. We drank, slept, drank, got sick, and drank some more.

In between occurred a dramatic scene. The lieutenant and some men were playing cards. One man cursed the lieutenant. He took his cane, a heavy oak mountain stick, and slashed it across the man's face with all his might. The man fell backwards, then got up and ran out, spitting teeth. No one said a word, and the card game went on. Chetnik officers were direct in their discipline.

Before starting back, each man filled his canteen with brandy and then we drank up what was left over. The return journey took us only three hours. It was a cloudy day, and we calculated that the rafts must be going at top speed. We timed it close: our number was called within an hour after our arrival. Just as we started down the bank, I saw Mlada, and her mother and brother, sitting by the side of the road. She smiled shy recognition.

ii 'How long have you been here?' I asked.

'Three days.'

'When will you cross?'

She shrugged. Her mother began to rock and moan softly.

'Come with us,' I said.

The rafts were tremendous affairs, hauled across by

cables that stretched from bank to bank. Upstream, the Germans were taking tanks and trucks aboard even*^{*} larger ones. I led the mule down the bank, and the Germans assumed the two women and the boy were part of our party. At the water's edge, the mule balked, his forefeet on the raft, his hind legs on the bank. I slapped him, cursed, shoved, hit him again: he wouldn't move.

The blond young German soldier in charge came up behind me and barked. Nervously, I hit the mule again and again. Mlada tugged him from the front. He was as immobile as a statue. Behind me, the German began cursing, loudly, guttural as a seal.

I turned around. My rifle was slung across my back, and, as I turned, the barrel caught the German across the left cheek and jaw, hard. He went down, off the raft, into the soft mud of the bank. He came up dripping, fighting mad, his cheek gashed.

Christ, I've done it! I thought. After all we've gone through, to get caught in something like this !

As he pulled himself out of the mud and began clambering on to the raft, I kept telling myself: Keep cool—use your head; don't fight; let him hit you and it's over.

I must have stood frozen, looking stupid. He came at me swinging a haymaker right. I couldn't help ducking, and he missed, the swing carrying him off balance. And then as I straightened, I felt a sharp, excruciating pain in my kidneys, and I bent again. Jerry, raging, came back swinging. I thought, I can't afford to let him work me over, not with this kidney.

I took a left on my shoulder, ducked a right, and with all the strength I could muster, planted my right fist solidly in his gut. He bent double, staggered backward, and toppled off the raft again.

Now my kidney was like a bonfire inside me. I grasped

my side, and knelt, fighting the pain. It was probably lucky I got the attack just then. I was surrounded in an instant by Chetniks and Germans, shouting and raging at each other. The Jerry I had knocked down was hauled aboard dripping, no longer in a fighting mood. A German officer came running down the bank, yelling curses and orders. In a moment, he had broken up the crowd, restored order, and the raft pushed off.

t| Some time during the fracas, the mule had changed his mind and come aboard. I lay flat on my back in agony, cursing it, the Germans, the Chetniks, the war, and the whole world. Arky knelt over me. I could see Mlada anxious above him.

‘You all right?’ Arky asked.

‘It’s just my kidneys again,’ I said. ‘Your fault. You and your goddam stills.’

But by the time we crossed, the pain had eased and I was able to clamber up the bank with the help of a Chetnik. And lucky for me, we didn’t have to go far that day. The lieutenant was waiting for us with the news that the Grand Duke had set up headquarters only half a mile down the road.

Mlada, whom I had half-forgotten, came over to thank me. Looking at her, thin, haggard, dirty, hollow-eyed, I thought: how can I complain when seventeen-year-old girls can go through this? I mumbled, shook her hand, and turned away. I wondered about Donna, somewhere up at the front of the column, and felt sad.

The Grand Duke had a sizeable house just off the road. About a thousand Chetniks swarmed around it. Arky and Aclan located the adjutant, told him I was sick, and he cleared a corner of the barn for us. The pain in my kidney was a dull ache now, and I ate with relish some German rations, wieners and sauerkraut. When I

went to relieve myself, however, my urine looked to be half blood and then I felt weak. I staggered back to the barn and collapsed.

Bombs awoke me the next morning. When I opened my eyes, Arky and Griff were kneeling beside me, anxiety on their faces.

‘What’s going on?’

‘They’re bombing the town and the river traffic,’ Arky said. ‘How you feel?’

I sat up, ‘O.K., I guess.’

Griff looked relieved. ‘You sure had us worried. You passed out and didn’t move all night.’

‘I’m all right,’ I said, and struggled to my feet. The effort brought back the pain, but it wasn’t so bad as I had feared. More annoying were the cooties that swarmed all over me. ‘These cooties are killing me,’ I said. ‘Let’s get out into the cold air so they’ll stop.’ My urine was still half blood, but the pain was bearable.

‘You sure you feel all right?’ Arky said.

‘I’m all right.’

The planes left after a while, and then the Chetniks poured out of the house and the woods around it. We sat against the barn, watching as the Grand Duke and his staff lined them up and began sorting them out. He was apparently reorganizing them into new companies.

Something happened then that still stands out in my mind, etched with vivid distinctness from all the other horrors we lived through. Two soldiers began an argument with the Grand Duke. He looked at them silently and then abruptly, without a word, drew his pistol and shot both dead. No one moved until he ordered four men to cart away the bodies and bury them.

Later we learned that the two men were brothers who protested against being assigned to different units.

No one disputed the Grand Duke's assignments after that.

We had intended to talk to the Grand Duke, to find out what was happening in general, and, in particular, what was going to happen to us. But the incident soured us,¹ and we stayed at a distance from him. He was aware of our presence, however. We had a better meal than most of the men, and late in the afternoon the lieutenant came over and told us we were being transferred to a new unit.

The new unit turned out to be the headquarters company we had been with at the schoolhouse in Podgorica, with our old friend, Capt. Vlado, in command. We soon marched off, sandwiched in the middle of a German battalion. It began snowing an hour later, and after a while I was stumbling in a daze. The rest while crossing the river had done the Germans more good—they broke into song at intervals while we marched.

We had been given food for only one day. We ate it that night. In the morning, we started off again, still marching with the Jerries. We learned from them during breaks that they had been mostly headquarters, supply and clerical troops, and had been newly reorganized into infantry. They were older men, friendly, and they shared their rations with us.

Twice during the afternoon we were bombed and strafed. The second time one of the German trucks ahead of us caught fire. We waited about ten minutes while it burned down, and then started past it. Just as we were about 10 yards away, the gas tank blew up. I was conscious only of the sudden burst of flames and the *whoom* of the explosion. I threw myself flat on the road, thinking planes had sneaked up.

When I got up, the kidney pain was bad once more. I

shuffled along, praying for another bombing so we could rest. But the planes did not return. Every foot forward was agony, but somehow I went on.

We had no food when we camped that night. I walked around the bivouac area until I found some of the Jerries with whom I'd fraternized during the day and sat with them at their fire. They gave me a can of cheese and some hard biscuits and cigarettes. After a while they began singing, 'Heilige Nacht . . . Stille Nacht'.

I had forgotten Christmas. I thought about home, and I broke down and wept. Some of the Germans commiserated with me, and some wept, too. Later, I joined in with them, humming along as they sang carols I knew, 'Adeste Fideles', 'Silent Night', and others we enemies shared in common.

I slept with them beside their fire. During the night, shots awoke us. There was a fracas nearby. 'Partisans,' I thought, and went back to sleep.

The next morning, the lieutenant passed out two tins of German rations to each man, warning us to eat them unobserved by the Jerries.

'What gives?' I asked Arky.

'They stuck up a German ration truck last night. They're going to do the same thing every night they get the chance. Grand Duke's orders.'

'I thought it was Partisans doing the shooting.'

'Let's hope the Germans thought so, too.'

The next days were blurred and passed as in a dream. My whole side was aflame continually now, and I was oblivious to almost everything except the pain. These general impressions linger with me : I remember walking, walking, concentrating on putting one foot down in the slush, then raising the other and bringing it down

ahead, hour after hour and day after day, thinking of how my feet were wet and cold and freezing, my hands and face numb with the cold.

I remember one day concentrating on all the deer I had ever shot back home, recalling every detail of every hunting trip; concentrating on every horse I had ever ridden ; concentrating on all the girls I had ever known, trying to recall every word and caress we had exchanged. I concentrated on everything desirable in the past in a useless effort to forget the present.

I remember, too, some crazy incidents that stand out:

Arky had bartered a spare rifle for some commeal. He ground it up, pounded it, mixed it with melted snow to make a flat cake which he put into the fire. He scratched something on the surface. When it had baked, we took it out of the fire. On the charred crust, the words, 'Merry Xmas' stood out clear. Somehow, it tore something inside both Griff and me. We leaped upon him, screaming and cursing. The other men pulled us off.

We were crossing a river on a pontoon foot bridge when the planes came in. Griff was in front of me, and he took off like a bird. I followed, stumbling, frantic at my own slowness and clumsiness. There was a culvert, a corrugated iron pipe about 2 feet in diameter, on the bank under the road. I crawled in after Griff, and Arky after me.

One bomb exploded near the mouth of the pipe. Inside, the sound of the explosion was as a dozen thunder-claps at once, magnified enormously. My eardrums shrieked pain. We were out like a flash, scrambling into a ditch. Ears ringing excruciatingly, we lay there for close to an hour while the planes shattered the pontoon bridges, rafts, and the trucks and material on both sides.

When they left we stood up. We shouted at each other, but none of us could hear.

I remember crawling up the bank, dizzily, and then near the top I crawled into a corpse. I looked up and it was a woman's body. As I got to my knees, I saw it was Mlada's mother. I retched for ten minutes. Beside the road was the family cart, wrecked by a bomb, the pitiful remnants of what had once been a comfortable household strewn in bits around it. The mule had already/been carved up.

Among the dazed refugees moving among their dead I looked for Mlada and her brother. I did not see them.

I remember the last night before we came here we were sleeping in a beat-up shack. There was a stove there, and we kept it going full blast. The Chetniks, who had been out pulling a 'Partisan raid*' on the German ration wagons, stumbled back around midnight with food. I woke up, counted they were two men short, and fell asleep again.

Almost instantly, there was a terrific explosion beside me. One of the Chetniks was hopping around, screaming, slapping at his blazing coat. He had fallen asleep by the stove, his coat had caught fire, and a home-made Chetnik grenade—just powder with a fuse in a tin can—had gone off. His side was hamburger, and I fell asleep again while the lieutenant was patching him up.

I don't remember coming to this place, but we are now in the kitchen of a house about 25 kilometres north of Prijepolje, and I must have slept for some time. It is warm here, which is wonderful except that the warmth brings the lice into activity, and I have to keep one hand free for scratching all the time.

I have washed and shaved for the first time in two

weeks. Mlada is here. She has apparently been nursing me. I can't talk to her because I still can't hear anything less than a shout, and there are too many people around to conduct a conversation that way. I still have the pain in my kidneys and my urine is half blood and I have to get to a doctor. But we have some German rations, and as long as we have food I won't squawk too much.

*'Beechie Dobra,*⁹ is our slogan now—'It's getting better.'
God knows, it couldn't get worse.

VII

FEBRUARY 15, 1945

i spent yesterday reading through this diary and thinking of all that has happened since I began it almost seven months ago, and especially of all that has happened since I last wrote. What strikes me now is how little we knew at first of real misery, pain, horror. How much we had to learn ! And how we have learned how much the human body and spirit can take, and still stand up, and still come back fighting.

**Beechie Dobra'* was the last thing I wrote, and consoled myself that things couldn't get worse. I think if I had known then that they would get worse, if I had known how infinitely worse matters could become, I would have finished myself off rather than go on. I remember thinking then that I had already hit bottom; but what my feet touched and mistook for bedrock was only sand. The bottom was deeper, deeper below, and I was sucked through the sand, all the way down.

Now I can say **Beechie Dobra'* knowing the words must be true. I have been down there, clear to the end, and I have come back.

But when I last wrote in my diary more than six weeks ago, it was all still to come. I sat in the kitchen, near the stove, scratching, plucking cooties from my skin and squeezing them into lifelessness with one hand, and writing with the other, getting up from the floor only to wash and to relieve myself. I sat, and scratched, and wrote, and slept, for two days.

I couldn't hear very well yet, and I remember looking at Mlada and wanting to talk to her. She looked different. Her face had grown older and harder, but curiously, it was still the face of a child. She had washed, scrubbed herself clean and combed her hair. The gaunt look was gone, and the tired hollows from beneath her eyes, and although she was still quite thin, I remember she didn't seem frail at all. I thought: So young a girl to have gone through so much and to be so full of strength.

I remember looking at her and wishing she were Donna, or one of the other girls I'd known in the old days—the gay, laughing, warm girls back home—instead of such a sad, pathetic, brooding creature. And then, I remember thinking that few of those girls could have come through what Mlada had come through, and still retained the dignity and the presence and the fortitude she had.

The other men left her pretty much alone. One or another of the Chetniks might bother her sometimes, but her coldness drove them off after a while. She seemed to have dedicated herself to watching me get better. I remember thinking of the small favours I had done her and reflecting how much of a contrast they must have been to her experience with other men to have won such devotion.

At night, she slept on the floor by my side. Outside the weather was bitter, and the house was crowded with men huddled against the cold. We all slept practically shoulder to shoulder, head to foot. Sex was the furthest thought from my mind—or rather, I thought about it, academically, but I felt no desire, and, in any case, I hadn't the strength.

The third morning my hearing was better, and my side was improved. I was just finishing up my diary when

Capt. Vlado brought word that we were moving on. I got up and rolled my blanket, slung my carbine over my shoulder, and took Mlada's hand and started to say good-bye. She was shy and pale, and her hand trembled in mine. I was at a loss for words.

The captain came over. 'We're only going up the road, just a few kilometres,' he said gruffly. 'She can come along. You're not well yet.'

She brightened up at that and put on her coat and made a roll of her blankets which she slung over her shoulder. I was resentful of the captain's interjection. I didn't want responsibility for the girl. But I was grateful for her nursing, and I didn't know what to say or do that wouldn't either sound ungracious or commit me to an involvement I didn't want. Wordlessly, we stood shivering in the cold, waiting for a ration wagon ; presently one came along and we fell in behind it. The day was black and windy, and there were no planes. We trudged along in silence, Mlada and I bringing up the rear of the group.

Back of us was an American truck, a six-by-six, with two Germans in the cab. Now and then, during halts, one would open the door and lean out and shout to Mlada to join them and ride in warmth. She pretended not to hear.

The cold stopped the lice, but soon the ache in my kidneys returned, and as the march lengthened, it grew more painful. The road was steep, bordered at times by sheer cliffs that fell away for 500 feet and more. After a while, I asked Mlada, 'What happened to your brother?'

'After my mother was killed, he ran away. He said he would join the German Army somehow.'

'Have you a father?'

'He is a Chetnik officer. We have not heard from him for many months.'

‘What are you going to do?’*
Her face was taut and grim. ‘Keep on going/
‘But what’s to become of you?’

She was silent. I looked at her and thought: she could be a pretty girl, with a few pounds of flesh added ; or even as she is, if she had a little lipstick, powder, and rouge; or even without make-up, if she were dressed right. She wore a long Italian soldier’s overcoat, like mine, and heavy woollen trousers, and only the hair, long and black and reaching to her shoulders, showed her to be a woman. And the soft, unblemished olive skin. And the depth and the softness of her dark brown eyes.

It snowed sporadically. Some time later, the truck behind us bogged down in the slush-filled edge of a bomb crater, and I thought vengefully that it served the two Germans in the cab right.

Just outside Rudo, Capt. Vlado found an abandoned farm-house and he announced we would stay there for a few days, pending new orders. We had food enough—he and the men had been raiding German ration trucks every night—and he sent details out for firewood.

That night, as we sat on the floor waiting for sleep to come upon us, one of the Chetniks began to bother Mlada. When she pushed him away, he seized her arm brutally. I told him to let her go.

He laughed coarsely. ‘What do you care?’ he said. ‘You’re too weak to do this hellion any good.’⁵

I lifted my carbine on to my lap and shot the bolt forward. I said, calmly, ‘Let her go or I’ll kill you.’

He released her arm and crawled to the other end of the room. Mlada was shivering and breathing hard beside me. I stood up and spread my blanket on the floor, and I gestured her to lie on it. Then I took her two blankets and placed them on top and crawled in beside her.

We both wore our overcoats, and I was warm, but I could feel her shivering beside me.

I took her hands. They were as ice. I held them in mine, and still the shivering did not stop. She was still trembling when I fell asleep.

The captain and the men shot up the column that night, but what they had mistaken in the dark for a ration wagon turned out to hold only artillery shells instead, and so, aside from a few German dead and wounded, the raid was fruitless. But one of the men came in during the morning with a whole case of cigarette papers.

At that time, cigarette papers were worth more than any currency, more than their weight in gold. We smoked a mixture of tobacco and dead leaves, carefully hoarding what was left in each butt for re-use in the next smoke, wrapping the shreds in whatever paper, or leaves, we could find. The captain divided the cigarette papers among us, and told us to bargain individually with the Jerries and the civilians for food. It came to over 100 packages of papers each, a small fortune. Each package was easily worth two cans of German rations.

We stayed near Rudo three days. I rested most of the time, gathering strength for the next move. Mlada traded my cigarette papers for food. I didn't lose much by feeding her on my share, as she seemed to get more in her barter deals than most of the Chetniks and easily twice as much as any of my buddies, except Arky, who had, among his other gifts, a special talent for haggling.

The second day at Rudo, Arky came over to me. 'I'm through,' he said. 'I'm taking off this afternoon.'

'What's up?'

'I'm getting way off the road, down into the country-

side. Til find some family that'll let me hide out until Spring, or, if I can, join the Partisans.*

'I'll go with you.'

'Hell, no. I aim to travel fast. You ain't in shape.'

'Good luck.'

When Arky didn't show up that night, some of the boys came over to me and asked if I had any idea where he was. He'd told only Griff and me, not that he wanted to keep it secret from the others, but just that he wasn't speaking to them at the time. It's hard to explain what we were going through mentally. We had all sunk into ourselves, wrapping ourselves in our immediate experiences and our private memories as a shield against the outside world. We rarely spoke to each other. I don't think I had exchanged a word with Aclan or Mac or Martin in four days. We were apathetic, not caring about anything but the next step on the road, the next meal we ate. I told them what Arky had done, and none felt any resentment.

The respite in Rudo gave me a feeling of renewed strength, although I worried a good deal about the girl -and what was going to happen to her. Capt. Vlado solved that problem, however, by announcing that we were going to leave the Germans and strike out straight for General Mihailovich's headquarters, which were somewhere near Loznica.

He said all the Montenegrin units were linking up for the march, so as to be able to fight through Partisan country if any attempt were made to stop us. In response to shouted questions, he said one of the units had food for all.

I took Mlada outside. I didn't dare look into her eyes. I said, 'I'm leaving you now. You can't come with us. Good-bye.'

‘What do you want me to do?’ she asked.
‘One woman alone with many thousand men,’ I said.
‘I won’t be able to protect you all the time.’

She said nothing.

‘Stay with the retreat,’ I said. ‘Join some civilian family. As long as you stay on the road, amid civilians, you’ll be safe.’

She was silent still.

‘Don’t you see?’ I insisted. ‘The Chetniks are going off on side roads, through wild country. God knows what we’ll go through before we reach Mihailovich. Maybe there’ll be battles with the Partisans. Not once, many times, before we’re through.’

And still she said no word.

‘Don’t you see? I’m sick. I can’t go on long. And I can’t watch out for you.’ I felt helpless and not a little frantic at the thought of being responsible for her during the march that lay ahead. I looked at her. She gazed at me steadily, her eyes brimming. Oh, no, I thought. She can’t be all that deeply in love with me. I looked away.

‘You must understand,’ I said, in despair. ‘I’m an American. I’m going to run away. I’m an officer. It’s my duty to escape from this country. I’ll never see you again. You mustn’t become attached to me.’

She said then, in a dead voice, ‘I suppose you are right.’

‘Of course, I’m right,’ I said. ‘Tomorrow I may be dead. It will be a miracle if I live much longer. And, if you come with me, it will be more than a miracle if you stay alive. Each of us must think now of only one thing—how best to stay alive. I’m an American. I have no choice but to go with the Chetniks now. You’re a civilian refugee. Your best hope is to stay with people like yourself.’

She said, ‘You do not want me to go with you.’

‘I want you to go where it is best for you to go/
‘If you do not want me to go with you, I will not go
with you.’

‘I do not want you to go with me.’

She turned abruptly and walked away. I watched her go, and then I shouted, ‘Your blankets! You forgot your blankets!’ She kept on walking. I ran after her and caught her, and took her arm. ‘You forgot your blankets/ I said. ‘You’ll freeze without them. Wait here and I’ll get them.’

I didn’t look at her face. I ran back toward the farmhouse, slowing down to a walk when the pain became too great, got the blankets, and started back. She was standing motionless where I had left her. I put the roll over her shoulder. Then I took my cigarette papers and stuffed them in her coat pocket. She protested, but I told her my comrades would see that I did not starve.

Then I said good-bye again. She said good-bye, too, this time, and she was almost dry-eyed.

Later, as we marched in the snow, our feet frozen and our hands and faces numb, Gapt. Vlado dropped back for a moment to ask me what had happened to the girl. I told him she had decided to stay with the German retreat, to attach herself to some civilian family. He looked at me curiously.

‘It was for the best/ I said. ‘Wasn’t it?’

‘Maybe/ he said, and shrugged. ‘Who can tell?’

We joined up with the other units, and we were several thousand strong. The food transported itself—it turned out to be herds of cattle and sheep. In the mass reorganization, we six Americans were transferred to a new unit and placed in the middle of the column. I thought it was because they wanted to be sure we didn’t

run off to the Partisans, but the others, more charitable, felt it was done for our protection. Our unit stayed on the road, but others went parallel with us on both flanks, guarding against the Partisans.

Our second day on the road, they brought Arky in. He looked sheepish. He had been found sleeping in a barn by a Chetnik rear-guard patrol. They had almost shot him on the spot, but he talked fast and told them about the Grand Duke being our special protector. He hadn't run into any Partisans. His experience ended our thoughts of escape.

Now, higher in the mountains, the temperature dropped to below zero. At times the snow drifts were waist deep, and there was no crust. We waded through them. The 20 miles to Višegrad took us three days. Once a day, our company of 200 men slaughtered a cow, and we each got a share of the meat, boiled, or baked, or roasted over a camp-fire.

We bivouacked in the snow, huddling around fires during the night. Even Višegrad offered no shelter; it had been bombed and burned out. We pushed on, and then ran smack into the German retreat again.

Our notice that we were rejoining them was the sight of the planes, dipping in and biting away, looking from the distance like a cloud of angry mosquitoes. The retreat had turned away from the road to Sarajevo and was now headed for Zagreb. The rumour was that it was to link up with the forces fighting the Russians in the north-east, and battle together with them on through to Germany.

And now the Germans were no longer the high-spirited troops we had known for so long. Their discipline was relaxed; their appearance was no longer trim, and whole units looked almost as slovenly as we. There

was no more a shouting of *'Sieg Heil!' and 'Heil Hitler'*. No more goose-stepping and singing along the road. The winter and the relentless bombing and strafing were taking effect.

In the deep snow, the German vehicles bogged down regularly and often skidded off the road on curves, crashing over cliffs, hurtling into deep gorges. In the deep snow, too, they were sitting ducks for the planes. No pilot or bombardier could mistake the bull's eye on a field of white. We tried to keep away from them this time, away from their tanks and even from their ration trucks.

Almost as shattering to their morale as the bombs and bullets were the propaganda leaflets showered on us nearly every day, eagerly sought for to start fires. I remember one leaflet in particular, showing a map of Europe with arrows marking all the Allied drives. Our part of Yugoslavia was circled with arrows, and it was clear now that the whole retreat was hemmed in on all sides.

The first day after we rejoined the Germans, I looked for Mlada. Then I realized that in the 100-mile long column it was a hopeless task. For a time, the sight of flowing black hair on the collar of an Italian overcoat would start my pulse pounding. Gradually, the thought of her faded, and in a week I forgot her completely. Survival was all I could think of. My carbine became heavier day by day, and finally I bartered it for a bag of potatoes. When the lieutenant in charge of our unit spotted me without it and started to ream me out, I said, 'I couldn't carry a gun any more, let alone fire it.* He looked at me sharply, then walked away without a word.

It soon became clear to me that I couldn't last much longer. And although I told myself that I had reached

the point where I no longer cared, something within kept forcing me on and on. At last I reached the end.

I remember it quite distinctly. For three days my urine had been all blood. That morning I awoke feverish, but I kept on. We were off the road, a group of 200 Chetniks cutting across country through the woods and the deep snow, trying to get away from the air attacks and the bogged-down trucks, taking advantage of a short cut.

As we floundered across a field, thigh-deep in snow, a jackrabbit suddenly bounced out of a thicket, and hippety-hopped across just ahead of us. Instantly, every soldier had his rifle out. The shots echoed and re-echoed in the still, cold mountain air. Every man emptied his rifle, and it sounded like a major battle. And the rabbit scampered away untouched.

The ludicrousness of the scene unhinged me. I began laughing. And then the laughter was uncontrollable. Hysterical, I fell back in the snow, my stomach and chest quivering with laughter despite the added pain it caused me. Soldiers stood around me, looking at me, smiling at first, and then puzzled, and then frowning. The lieutenant came over and told me to get up.

I was still giggling, weakly. With an effort I stopped, and then I found I was too weak to rise. 'I can't get up,' I gasped. The lieutenant thought I was faking. He kicked me on the shoulder. 'Get up,' he ordered. I said, 'I can't. Help me.'

He must have understood at that point that I wasn't faking. Arky and Griff lifted me to my feet. I took a step forward and collapsed again.

The lieutenant pulled one of the men out of line, a wiry, middle-aged man with a thick black beard. 'Stay with this man while he rests,' the lieutenant ordered.

‘Then bring him on. And be sure you do because your life depends on it.’

Arky and the boys gathered around me. I could see in their eyes that they thought I was a goner.

‘We’ll wait for you where we camp tonight,* Arky said.

‘Don’t worry,* Aclan said. ‘You’ll catch up with us right away.*

‘I’ll see you guys in a couple of hours,* I said. I never expected to see them again.

They walked away with no sign of emotion. Nor did I feel any myself. We had grown used to death, and every man’s thought was for himself alone. I lay flat for about fifteen minutes, the Chetnik standing over me, pleading with me to get up. The sky was a dull slate colour. I could feel the sub-zero cold in my bones, and I thought, without sadness : What a hell of a way, and what a hell of a place to die.

‘Go on,* I told the Chetnik. ‘Go on ahead. I’m *kaput*’

He began cajoling me. He told me it was all in my head. There was nothing wrong with me, he said, but addled brains in my head. It was silly to lie there, he said, when all I had to do was get up and walk. If I lay there much longer, he promised, I’d soon really be in a fix, really be unable to get up. He swore that I’d be frozen solid as a stone within a few minutes unless I got up.

And I could feel the cold in the marrow of my bones, and I could feel the chill creeping up my veins to my heart. But the pain in my kidneys was gone—I thought : Frozen solid—and the hunger and the cooties. I said, ‘Go away. Let me be. Let me die in peace.*

Then he pulled a gun on me and ordered me to get up. I laughed * and laughed, again hysterical. When I

calmed a little, I said, 'Go ahead. Shoot me. It will be quicker and more painless that way.'

That frightened him. He put away the gun, got down on his knees and pleaded with me to come. The lieutenant had sworn to kill him if he left me alone, he said. The lieutenant had told him unless he brought me along he might as well dig his grave and lie down in it.

I thought : What an easy death freezing is.

The pain came back, a great searing fire in my side. 'Help me,' I said. 'Help me up.'

We floundered a few feet in the snow, and I fell again. I heard him shouting as I fainted. When I came to, I was being carried by two men, and I could hear my companion cursing and threatening them. They carried me—at times dragged and hauled me—through the snow for two hours to where the tail of the column, the wounded, the ill, the old, and the stragglers, rested by the road. Here they were no longer afraid of my guard's threats, and they soon moved off with the others.

Urged by the pleas of my companion, I stumbled along for another hour, supported by him, until we came to a small village. I leaned against the wall of a house and slipped to the ground and told him, 'It's no use. I can't go on.'

'These are Ustashi,' he said. 'We can't stay here.'

But I couldn't move, and presently he carried me into the house. I saw dimly three or four tall, bearded men before I slid into darkness.

The Chetnik awoke me in the morning. There were four men, tall and bearded as I had remembered, standing around the stove, looking at me with cold, hostile eyes. I tried to get up, but my legs refused to obey my will. I became frightened, and I summoned up all my

will power, all the energy I had in reserve. My legs wouldn't move. I told my guard, 'The blood-poisoning must have spread from my kidneys. My legs are paralysed.'

He pointed his gun at the men. Two of them hauled me upright. But my legs were rigid, and I couldn't stand. They set me down.

'He can't stay here,' one of the men said.

'Get him out,' said a second. 'You brought him. Take him away.'

The Chetnik said, 'He is an American. He is under the protection of the Grand Duke. The Grand Duke will kill you if you let him die.'

'I urinate on your Grand Duke,' the first man said. 'In a few hours the Partisans will be here. If they find we have sheltered a Chetnik they will kill us.'

'I'm no Chetnik,' I said. 'I'm an American.'

'You wear Chetnik rags,' the first man said.

In the end, partly under the menace of the gun and partly for the bribe of some cigarette papers, two of them agreed to carry me to the main road, some miles distant. They nailed a blanket to wooden poles, in a crude stretcher, and placed me on it.

The journey to the road was the worst of all. My whole body was a tight knot of pain. They deliberately bumped and jostled and shook me up with every step. I could feel the cold coming up through the blanket beneath me, seeping through my coat, enveloping my body, embracing me. When the litter-bearers stopped to rest, they made no pretence of laying me down. They just dropped me on the ground.

It occurred to me at last that they wanted me to die, and the Chetnik didn't care. As long as he brought my

dead body in, he couldn't be accused of abandoning me. I pleaded, 'If you want to kill me, shoot me. Don't do it this way.*

The two men regarded me indifferently. One shrugged and said, 'Why not?'

'He must not be shot,' the Chetnik said.

It was hours, several lifetimes of pain, before we reached the road. This time they did not drop me. The poles and the blanket were theirs, and they meant to keep them. They rolled me over in the snow, into the middle of the road. There I lay, semi-conscious, for how long I do not know. Groups of Chetnik stragglers were passing. They stepped over and around me, ignoring my guard's pleas for help.

Twice I tried to get up; twice I tried to crawl off the road. Both times I collapsed. I lay still and thought: I've come to the end of the line—I'm ready to get off now. A horse kicked me in the shoulder, then stepped daintily on. I thought hazily of the ranch in Texas, and then about my mother, and then I prayed for a swift and easy death.

I must have been close to it when loud voices brought me back. There was an angry shouting over my head, and I was dimly aware that my Chetnik guard was being beaten by an officer. I was lifted on to a horse. I sank into unconsciousness again as the horse began to walk. When I was lifted off the horse, consciousness flickered dimly, but I blacked out once more.

Some time later I awoke to find myself sitting on the floor of a house, a voice saying, 'Lieutenant ! Lieutenant ! Wake up ! You must eat !' It was a moment or two before I recognized the face of Capt. Vlado. The sight of him brought a rush of memories—not of our most recent meetings, but of happier days : the schoolhouse in Pod-

gorica, Donna, the saloon where the Germans boozed. My eyes swam in tears. They fed me hot soup, and I slept on the spot.

All the next day I rode Capt. Vlado's horse and he walked ahead, leading it up the steep trail. I was conscious only intermittently. That night we slept in a warm house, and I ate more, and then the next day I rode Capt. Vlado's horse again.

I recall telling him once what a great and wonderful man he was, and how I would be eternally thankful to him. Another time, I opened my eyes to notice my Chetnik guard walking beside me. I called him. 'Remember how you-----' I started, but his eyes suddenly darted to the captain, who had fallen behind on hearing me speak, and they were so full of fear that I stopped and closed my eyes and pretended to have fallen unconscious again. I remember thinking: I've got that bastard where I want him now; he knows I can have him shot with just a word, and he's scared. Immediately, I repented. I thought: He did his best for me, keeping me alive and on the move. I opened my eyes and said: 'Thanks for keeping me alive.'

We rode late into the night, arriving at length at a small house hidden from the road that seemed somehow to have escaped the ravages of the war. It was apparently reserved for higher-ranking officers, for it was well-kept and almost empty. Two men carried me upstairs and laid me on a bed. It was the first bed I'd slept in for months, but my first thought was: What a shame; it will get full office.

They fed me before I fell asleep. In the morning they fed me again. Around noon, as Capt. Vlado and I were talking, the door opened, and the Grand Duke came in. He seemed surprised to see me, and genuinely

concerned, plying me for details about my symptoms. He was still as strong and proud and dignified as when we first met, although I could see the retreat had taken its toll from him, too.

He said we were nearing General Mihailovich's headquarters, that we would soon leave the Germans altogether to join the Chetnik chief, and that conditions would be immeasurably better when we reached him. Meanwhile, he said, there was a field hospital a few days' march ahead where I must stay until I recovered. He was taking Capt. Vlado with him, but he would leave a horse for me to proceed on when I felt stronger.

My guard was brought up. 'I am assigning you to accompany this officer,' he said. 'Serve him and care for him. And if anything should happen to him, I will personally cut your heart out and feed it to the wolves.'

It was bizarre language, but having seen the Grand Duke cold-bloodedly murder two brothers in the name of discipline, I believed he meant it. So did the guard, who stood white-faced and shaky.

I slept through a day and a night. I awoke feeling infinitely refreshed, and several cans of German rations buoyed my spirits even more. My guard was different now, solicitous and humble, and he helped me out of bed and into my clothes, which he had washed in the interval. The horse the Grand Duke had left for me was a small roan pony, about ten hands high, with a wooden saddle—a frame affair with rope stirrups—that was too large for it, and without much padding beneath. The saddle had rubbed a sore on its shoulder blade, and the abscess resulting was about 4 inches in diameter. It festered and stank, and it took a lot of the pony's strength.

We rode on for days, how many I cannot recall. It was obvious from the first hour that the horse could not

last long, and I felt terrible about my part in killing him. But I had to get to the hospital, and after the first day I was as ill and weak as before. My feet almost froze. Every scrap of rag we ran across that was not tied to a corpse I had the Chetnik wrap around my feet. We rode through civilians and Chetnik units and through German units, on what seemed an endless journey, with the hospital, like the horizon, receding in the distance every mile.

Nights we slept in shelters of one sort or another—houses, barns, hovels, whatever had four walls and a roof and was near the road when the dark came. All were crowded unimaginably with refugees and soldiers desperate for warmth.

I remember one dirt-floored bam, not more than 20 feet square, where over a hundred men, women, and children jammed in for the night, sleeping in cramped sitting positions, body against body. When we rose in the morning, there were eight on the floor who had died in the night, seven men and a woman. There was a four-by-four board across the bottom of the doorway, and when the soldiers dragged out the bodies, the heads banged first against the board and then again on to the ground. Typhus was rife, and I worried about the efficacy of the shots I had taken a year before.

It was the fact that I rode a horse that got me shelter every night and food along the way. No one questioned but that anyone with a horse and an orderly to lead it must be a personage of importance. No one dared deny a Chetnik officer riding a horse. Even the Germans gave me not only rations, but an occasional cigarette.

And I took good care of my pony. The Chetnik guard always slept outdoors with him, to make certain no one would steal him. But he had had no experience with

horses and had no idea of the care necessary. Nightly, we went through the same argument as I ordered him to take off the saddle, melt snow for the animal to drink, and scratch around for fodder. Usually all the horse had was the scrapings off the floors of sheds and barns.

Then one night, there was no shelter of any kind. We were passing through country that had been devastated by the Ustashi, and every house and barn had been burned to the ground. We pushed on till long after midnight. When my companion could no longer march, we turned off the road and slept in the snow, huddling against the horse for warmth.

The next day I was violently feverish. I couldn't keep food in my stomach. More anxious than ever to get me to the hospital, the Chetnik kept urging me on. All along the road that day, we saw not one house intact. Night fell, and I could hardly keep myself in the saddle, but we did not stop. And at last we stumbled into a small village. Civilians and soldiers slept against the walls of the houses. The Chetnik went exploring and soon reported there was no room in any house. But he had found some vacant wall space that promised a little shelter from the wind.

Actually, it offered almost no shelter at all, even with the pony as additional barrier to the freezing cold. My nose was numb, and then my face and then my hands. At the same time, I felt myself burning with fever. When I could bear it no longer, I stood up. The Chetnik slept soundly. I stepped over the horse and made my way around to the front of the house. A soldier slept on the threshold. I stepped over him and pushed the door open.

Warmth hit me in the face like a blow. In the middle of the one room was a pot-bellied stove, red hot with a

roaring fire. I closed the door behind me. There was a lamp on the table near the door. It lit up half the room, and there was no one there. In amazement, I thought of those sleeping outside, and then I leaned against the wall and slid to the floor.

Suddenly, there was a stir back in the shadows, and a thump, and there was a bearded giant of a naked man standing over me, pointing a Luger at me and screaming with rage.

'Who are you?' he shouted in hoarse Serbian. 'How dare you come in here? Stand up before I shoot you! Don't you know who I am?' At the same time, he was cursing hoarsely, spitting and slobbering in his beard. Through it all, I didn't have the chance to utter a word.

When, at length, he stopped, I said, 'I am under the protection of the Grand Duke.'

My accent must have caught his attention. 'You are not a Serb,' he said. 'Who are you?'

'An American flyer,' I said. 'Shoot me and the Grand Duke will shoot you. My men are outside the door.'

He was half-drunk. My eyes had grown used to the light now, and I could see in the shadows against the far wall a bed-roll, and the outline of a figure sitting up in it.

The giant placed his gun on the table. 'I won't shoot you,' he said, thickly. 'But get out!'

I felt weak and limp inside. I said, 'I'm going to sleep here.'

He was all fury again. 'Get out!' he shouted, over and over again, and grabbed the gun once more. 'Get out before I change my mind! Get out before you force me to kill you!' He reached down and pulled me to my feet. 'Get out!' Then he raised the gun to hit me.

A woman shrieked, and two slender hands caught at his upraised arm. 'You mustn't hit him! Don't hit him!'

He turned to meet this unexpected onslaught, releasing me, and I fell to the floor.

It was a weird sight I saw—a big, bearded man and a small, thin woman, both naked, wrestling in the flickering lamplight for the gun, their shadows on the wall monstrously contorted, their voices hysterical. ‘You mustn’t strike him!’ the woman cried again and again. ‘The Grand Duke will kill you !’* And the man bellowed, ‘Let-me go ! Get off me !’*

My God, I thought, this can’t be real, it must be a nightmare, and I leaned against the wall, sitting erect, shaking my head to waken myself. Then I knew the scene to be real, and it struck me as so grotesque I began to giggle.

Suddenly the man caught the woman’s arm and bent it, and bent her entire body over backwards. He was huffing and puffing with the exertion, and now with pain she fell silent. I saw that her body was thin, and young, and she was only a girl. Her long black hair fell back, and the light fell on her face.

I started to get up. ‘Mlada!’ I said, ‘Mlada,’ and tried to lift myself from the floor and couldn’t.

The Chetnik was bending over me, shaking me, and I opened my eyes to the daylight. He was half-crazy with panic. Awakening in the night to find me missing, he had hunted everywhere, but had never thought to come in the house. When the colonel emerged in the morning, shot the orderly who had been left to guard the door, and rode off, he had suspected for the first time I might be inside.

I asked, ‘What happened with the woman?’

‘She drove away with the colonel in the jeep.’

‘What did she look like?’

He smirked. ‘She was small and dark and young.’

‘What was she wearing?’* I asked, thinking of Mlada in her absurdly long Italian soldier’s overcoat.

‘A fur coat and fur hat.’ He looked at me curiously. ‘She was one of the girls for the high brass. What else should she wear?’

I thought of Mlada, trembling and fearful, and told myself it couldn’t have been she. It must have been one of the girls of the high brass, I thought, one who had heard about the Americans and how the Grand Duke was protecting them, and who had acted only to save her own protector from trouble.

And then I thought: God knows anything can happen in this crazy war and in this crazy country—look what’s happened to me in just ten days, and it’s been over a month since I left Mlada. I racked my memory, and I visualized the small, hot room in the flickering yellow lamplight and the nude girl with her long black hair hanging back as she bent in pain, and I thought I could see the profile—and it was Mlada’s.

I thought for a moment that I was going to stop breathing, and then with an effort I rejected the vision. It must have been the fever, I told myself. She was a fat and ugly old woman; hallucinations come with sickness.

Fortunately, late in the day we caught up with the hospital and I was able to rest. The hospital itself was all the horrors of the retreat refined and multiplied in intensity. Hundreds of sick and wounded lay on the ground around the four houses the unit had taken over. Inside, the patients lay on the floor, jammed side by side. The dead were heaped high in a shed, their corpses preserved by the freezing weather. The doctors were haggard and worn, their uniforms stained with blood and dirt. Equipment was negligible; medicine was almost non-

existent. When bandages were changed, the old bandage was washed for re-use.

But there were food and rest. The doctors told me I had a ruptured kidney. There was nothing they could do for it, they said, but with rest it would heal itself. I stayed three days and then I could bear the horror around me no longer. I was strong enough to move on now, and inquiry had revealed that my buddies were only a few days away. My Chetnik guard had camped outside with the horse, and we moved off together.

We found the boys the third afternoon after leaving the hospital. They were in a small, unpainted shack where they had been billeted for a week. Griff and Arky were in the yard when I rode up. They whooped when they saw me, and I let out a rebel yell. We had never expected to see each other again. Only Arky and Martin were in fair shape. Aclan had a deep chest cold; Griff had stomach trouble; Mac had the flu.

We exchanged experiences and found we had little to say to each other. They had been through more of what we had shared together, and what I had gone through did not seem so much worse as to occasion any excitement.

The shack was outside Zvornik, a few miles from General Mihailovich's headquarters, and we waited there for several days for the word to move on. My kidney, which had started to heal in the hospital, now took a definite turn for the better. I moved about as little as I could and, amid my buddies, my will to live and escape, which had all but vanished before, revived again.

We talked mostly about the desirability of surrendering to the Germans. Escape to the Partisans we had given up as impossible; it had been a long time since the Chetnik units had been in contact with the Partisans, and we

had no idea where to seek them. One of our men insisted over and over that the only thing to do was to surrender ourselves to the Germans. In all fairness, I think the argument that most dissuaded the rest of us from doing this was that we had never seen any prisoners among all the German units we had travelled with, and we feared that the Germans were so hard pressed they just wouldn't bother to take prisoners alive.

We got the word to move early one morning. I had given up my horse, who was on his last legs, and in the first hour of the march I became stiff and sore. Griff, plagued by stomach trouble, fell behind in the column with me. About noon we reached Zvornik, which was swarming with German troops. A wide, swift-flowing river split the town, and the road forked, one branch running off to the west, the other crossing the river. At the fork, Germans and Chetniks diverged, the Germans crossing a pontoon bridge and the Chetniks continuing along the bank.

It looked as though we were leaving the Germans for good, and our spirits rose.* Entering the town, our Chetnik unit, ragged and slovenly, straightened up and marched almost as briskly as the Germans. Coming down to the fork, where a German M.P. stood directing the traffic, we were in almost perfect formation.

And then, as we drew abreast of the M.P., one of our men darted out of line. Before we realized what had happened, he was standing in front of the M.P., saying, loudly, in English, 'I am an American flyer.'

The M.P. didn't understand. He looked at the man questioningly, and then with a grimace of annoyance motioned him on. The gesture seemed to drive our man to panic. He shouted, 'I am an American flyer!*' and

waved his arms frantically. '*Americano!* Pee-lot!*' He made motions with his hand to illustrate a plane flying, then pounded himself on the chest saying, '*Americano!Americano!*'

Understanding dawned on the M.P. simultaneously with the arrival of two German officers who were passing by. In a moment our man was surrounded by a gabbing, gesticulating group of Germans. Angry and dismayed, we hurried on, passing him as he shouted, repeating the words slowly and distinctly, 'I am an American pilot! Surrender!'

And the last we saw of him, he was marching across the bridge, a German infantryman with a sub-machine gun at ready behind him.

I do not give the man's name because he was so ashamed of what he did that he later denied it.

I know now the rest of his story. He was held in Zvornik in the town jail for several days and then flown to a prisoner-of-war camp near the French border. The camp was liberated within a week after his arrival. Within a month after his surrender, he was home in the United States, hailed as a hero.

My mother read a newspaper story about him, recognized his name, and drove from Austin to see him and ask about me. He told her the same story that he told the Air Force, that he had strayed off from the group and was captured by the Germans. He said that we were ragged and diseased and half-starved and that he doubted very much that we could live.

I can't say that he was wrong in surrendering. Certainly, he reached freedom long before we did. And it may well be that if he had remained with us, he might not have come out alive. But since he has been so con-

science-stricken as to repudiate his own conduct—even blandly insisting to those of us who met him after the war that we were suffering from hallucinations and that what we saw had not really taken place—I can see little point at this late date in giving his name and reviving old bitterness.

We put on distance between us and the town as fast as we could. The Chetniks were even more furious at the surrender than we were. Stepping out of a Chetnik formation, in Chetnik uniform, he had put them on one hell of a spot with the people who were supposed to be their allies. And, worse, there was no way of telling what more he might give away to the Germans under questioning. We felt certain that he would tell the Germans about the rest of us.

Weary and confused, we were quite dispirited when we stopped by the side of the road late that day to rest. As we discussed the incident, speculating on its possible effect on us, a tall, broad-shouldered major came over and said, in excellent English, 'Are you the Americans? Come with me and I will take you to your countrymen.'

It was so unexpected, we leaped to our feet in joy. As we went up the road, the major explained that another group of flyers had reached General Mihailovich's headquarters some weeks before. We stopped before a two-storey house and waited outside while the major went in. In a few minutes, five Americans and an Englishman came out. We shouted and ran to them, and then stopped short. They had drawn back at the sight of us and stood aloof, regarding us with mingled shock and contempt, as though we were a disgusting species of poor relation.

'We're Americans,' I said.

‘Jeez, how long you been here?’ a tall G.I. asked.

‘Almost eight months. And you?’

‘Two weeks. Holy cow! What happened to you?’

We were filthy and we were gaunt and we were sick and we were verminous. They were as clean and neat and freshly shaved as though about to stand inspection.

I said, ‘We’ve been through hell.’

‘Oh? . . . You look it.’

They shuffled their feet, restless and ill at ease. The major, embarrassed, walked away. I felt suddenly sick to my stomach. After a moment, Griff said, ‘I bet you guys been having a picnic.’

‘No war at all,’ one said. ‘Nice quarters, good chow, girls, nothing to do but loaf.’

‘You got it made,’ Arky said.

‘I’m set for the duration,’ one of them said.

We looked at each other, and in our group there was sadness and despair. Griff had his jaw set in angry, bitter tension. They must have sensed what we were thinking, for, in a moment, one said, ‘What outfit you guys from, anyway?’ with an obviously uncomfortable attempt at friendliness.

And then we stood around in the cold, chatting pointlessly about units and home towns and did-you-know-so-and-so? The only good news they gave us was the word of the Allied advances through Italy and France and into Germany and of the Russian advances in the east. But we had been with the Germans long enough to know that they were beaten anyway.

After half an hour, we were just about freezing. They hadn’t invited us into their house—they told us they had the whole top floor, a bed to each man—and they hadn’t so much as offered to shake hands. I called the major. ‘Where do we go from here?’ I asked.

He looked at them, oddly, and then with sympathy at us*. Without a word, he led us down the road to another house. There was only a bare room, but it was warm and clean. We flopped down on the floor. No one uttered a sound until the major had left. Then we exploded.

‘Dirty sons of bitches.’

‘Americans! I’ll take Chetniks any day!’

‘First-----, and then these guys. I’ve never been so ashamed of my own people.’

‘Did you notice how the major looked at us when we were standing in the cold talking to them? I’ll bet he lost all respect for Americans.’

Then we lay down in our blankets and slept.

That was only three days ago, Since then we have bathed three times. Our clothes have been deloused—steamed in an oil drum. We have shaved every bit of hair off our bodies to rid ourselves of lice eggs. We have eaten well. We are warm and comfortable. Mac’s flu is still With him, maybe a little worse, but otherwise we feel better than we have for many months.

Mihailovich’s headquarters are close by. We have sent a radio message to the 15th Air Force in Italy and are expecting an answer at any moment.

Vili

FEBRUARY 28, 1945, EXACTLY SEVEN MONTHS.

WE SHOULD have known it was too good to last.

First Mac got worse. The flu deteriorated into pneumonia; he was delirious two nights, suffering awful nightmares. Both nights he got up twice and defecated in the middle of the floor, an awful mess. A doctor left some pills which have done little good.

We sent off another message to the 15th A.F., notifying them that Mac is seriously ill and in danger of losing his mind. The next morning, a wagon came by with a note from the major telling us to pack up and get cracking. The wagon was for Mac. We kept the other group of Americans off it, travelled about 15 miles, revelling in the thought that we had evened up our score with them. But when they caught up, they had a wagon of their own.

We were ferried across a river, camped two days, and then were ferried back. 'Well, goddam,' said Arky as we landed where we had started. 'They must have got an American general to take charge.'

We sent a third radiogram to the 15th, but the major says the U.S. Army is strangled in red tape, and that they'll have to interview our grandmothers before they believe we are who we say we are.

MARCH 18—Mac has almost recovered. Meanwhile, we have our usual ups and downs.

We got this radio message from the 15th:

CANNOT GIVE YOU ASSISTANCE UNTIL YOU GIVE US YOUR EXACT LOCATION STOP SUGGEST YOU SEND EIGHT NUMBERS WHICH ARITHMETICALLY ADDED TO A SERIAL NUMBER OF ONE OF YOURS WILL GIVE US YOUR LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE STOP GIVE US NAME OF MAN REFERRED TO STOP IF POSSIBLE ESTABLISH LIAISON WITH THE PARTISAN YUGOSLAV ARMY OF LIBERATION GO OVER TO THEM AND THEY WILL EVACUATE YOU TO US STOP FOR YOUR IDENTIFICATION SEND FIRST NAME OF YOUR FATHER AND STREET NAMES OF HIS RESIDENCE AND EXTENT OF YOUR EDUCATION AND WHERE EDUCATED.

We messaged back all the information they asked and advised them we couldn't join the Partisans, who have been harassing the Chetniks every night, while wearing Chetnik uniforms. We asked for a parachute drop of clothes and equipment, plus medicine for Mac.

Two days later, the Partisans pushed in force, and once more we were on the march. When we stopped today, we sent this message to the 15th:

'H.Q.,, 15th U.S.A.F., Italy:

'Life is and has been miserable for the past eight months. Our one hope has been to get here where we could get in contact with you. We have been in contact now over a month and have received only one message from you, asking our position, which we sent promptly. Our need for food, clothes, and medicine makes our situation desperate. We are very disappointed in our command because you are apparently doing nothing to aid us. If we do not hear from you by April 7, we will be forced to attempt to escape without proper equipment.'

This message ought to show whether they give a hoot about us or not.

april 15—Easter Sunday . . .

We built one house and it burned, so we have just built another, excavating a cave in a hillside and erecting a lean-to in front of it. We have had an addition of seven more flyers, giving us a total of sixteen Americans and two Limeys.

The second bunch are good fellows, much different from the first. They are on our side in all the squabbles with the first group, who we all wish were Germans so we could treat them as they deserve.

These are the men with us (without distinguishing between the first and second groups) :

2nd Lieut. Harry A. Blank, pilot, Granite City, IU.

2nd Lieut. John N. Turk, co-pilot, Pasadena, Cai.

Cpl Thomas E. Kaballa, flight engineer, Charleroi, Pa.

Sgt William S. Seely, tail-gunner, New York City.

2nd Lieut. Larry G. Zellman, pilot, Carnest, Pa.

2nd Lieut. Alfred B. Gill, bombardier, Akron, O.

Cpl Marshall Kellan, ball-gunner, Kansas City, Mo.

Pfc. William G. Masters, nose-gunner, Erwin, Tenn.

Cpl William L. Downing, waist-gunner, Wilmington, O.

Cpl Helmar W. Eltrke, tail-gunner. Chicago, Ill.

Cpl Savino Santamauro, radio operator, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Lieut. Ray G. Cummings, pilot, South African Air Force, Germanstown, Fransnall, South Africa.

Flight-Sgt Walter M. Monkman, pilot, Leeds, Yorkshire, England.

Larry Zellman and I have become good friends. Arky has teamed up with his co-hillbilly, Masters, and with the Brooklyn boy, Santamauro, and they make up a comedy trio that should go on the stage after the war.

But our most exciting experience was meeting General Draja Mihailovich. He has everything the Grand Duke has in the way of appearance, dignity, and presence. But he has much more. The Grand Duke's men fear him ; Mihailovich's love him. He is tall, with a heavy beard and piercing eyes. He speaks softly and has more the air of a professor than of a general commanding thousands of guerrillas.

He came and talked to us, mostly about the political situation, and promised to return us to Allied lines. His talk, explaining how it happens that he is formally at war with the U.S. and Britain while he is fighting on the same side, helped explain why our Air Force has been so laggard about rescuing us.

april 17—Arky and Mac in the hospital with infected sores. I should have gone, too, but remembering my last experience, refused at the last minute.

The 15th has radioed us to send details of any landing strip in the area. We are going to try to fix one up.

may 16—It has been a month since I wrote last, and believe me, there has never been a fuller month in my life. I will try to reconstruct it as it happened.

We pulled out on the 19th, after skirmishes had been going on for two days, with the Partisans nudging us back all the time. At one point, we refused to retreat with the Chetniks. We had fixed up a landing strip and radioed the location to the 15th, but General Mihailovich persuaded us that we were in danger from the Partisans if we stayed.

Two days later we camped near the Sava river. Here we got a radio from the 15th advising us they could not come for us for security reasons and asking if the Chetniks objected to our joining the Partisans.

We took it up with General Mihailovich, whom we saw every day now. He said the Partisans had been driven off, and we were now surrounded by the Ustashi, the Nazi puppet troops.

We broke camp on the 22nd, moving northwards. The general promised that when we reached Partisan territory again, he would arrange for our transfer to their lines. We marched all that day and on through the night, about 10,000 men.

We stayed with the advance party. We hoped to make contact with the Partisans and desert to them. Just before dawn the second day we ran into an ambush. We hit the dirt at the first flashes of gunfire and stayed down until the half-light of the rising sun showed we were on top of the shooting. Crawling back, we made it to a clump of trees and then back to where the general had set up his headquarters.

He was in a wood about half a mile from the front. It was like a Civil War scene, and with his beard, the general looked right out of an old engraving. Calm and collected, he watched the battle through field-glasses, maintaining constant supervision of the action by an endless stream of runners who commuted between the front and headquarters. Bullets and mortar-shell fragments whizzed through the trees, but the general never faltered in his decisions.

He told us the enemy were some 500-odd Ustashi. By noon, they were routed, and we marched triumphantly on. It was the first time since we had been with the Chetniks that they had won a fight.

Soon it became clear why the Ustashi had offered such foolish resistance. We were in the heart of their country, in a fertile valley, and these particular Ustashi, we were told, had committed many atrocities against the Chetniks.

And now the Chetniks were giving back what they had got. For 15 miles up the valley every house was on fire. Chetniks, drunk with unaccustomed victory, looted and pillaged. They were loaded down with poultry, wine, whatever they could carry. What they could not take, they laid to the torch.

The road led right up the middle of the valley. Through the night, the fires lit up the countryside. Old men and women stood in front of their homes, wailing and sobbing.

The general shortly issued orders there were to be no more fires. Any man caught setting one was to be shot. I do not know how the word was carried ahead of the headquarters so soon, but, within an hour, there were no new fires.

There were «still Ustashi, however. Just before midnight we ran into another ambush and all hell broke loose. Arky and I hit the ditch alongside the road, and it made no difference to us that the ditch was half-filled with stinking water.

That fracas was soon over, but twice more that night we were raided. During the next day there were more brief but bitter gunfights. It was miraculous that, with men falling dead and wounded all around us, our group of airmen remained unscathed.

A day or two later we bivouacked along the Sava river west of Brod. Here General Mihailovich reorganized his forces and waited for intelligence reports to tell him

what lay ahead. The reports persuaded him that he was so heavily outnumbered that he had no chance in open country against both the Ustashi and the Partisans. He had pretty much abandoned the Germans now. The Jerry units we encountered were few and small, badly demoralized, fleeing to join the remnants of their once mighty army around Zagreb.

During the three-day encampment the general gave us a small bull, with a supply of potatoes and onions. He advised us not to slaughter the bull for food until we really needed it. Our first night in the mountains, just as we stopped to camp, the ground under our feet exploded with a surprise attack, and we fled, leaving the bull—and even our blankets behind.

Arky and I ran through the darkness with one of the group who had been hurt. He had difficulty keeping up, but we kept him with us, carrying him when he lagged. Suddenly, with the firing still going on all around us, he broke into tears and began weeping uncontrollably. I slapped his face three or four times, and he regained some measure of self-discipline, but whined and whimpered for a time like a baby.

We were on the move all night, the shooting ebbing and flowing around us. After a while, it began to drizzle, and then the raiders either retreated or were beaten off. At daylight we found the general's headquarters, and another miracle : a few of our airmen were injured, but none were dead and none seriously hurt. It was too much to expect to find the bull, too, but we searched vainly during the reorganization that morning.

Another day's hike brought us into the mountains just east of Banja Luka, a key Partisan stronghold. We could see the city 6 or 8 miles off, and tramping the narrow, rugged trails away from it left us heartsick. That

night, Arky, Mac, and I decided we'd go no further. We found a beat-up shack on the hillside and holed up in it, determined to wait for the Partisans.

We slept five or six hours—to be awakened by one of the general's aides. He insisted we get up and move on. We refused flatly. Then he swore to us that he had heard the general say we were to be transferred to the Partisans within a day or two. We trusted that, and decided to go along.

But for four days we travelled up the mountains, under conditions that were almost as bad as those of the great retreat of months before. Intermittently, it rained, sleeted, and snowed. The days were bearable, but the nights were below freezing. All through the march we were fired on by hit-and-run snipers, and often they were good marksmen. The wounded dropped by the wayside, and the number of dead along the trail grew each passing hour.

You'd have thought we five veterans who had been through it—and worse—before, would take it better than the rest. The fact is, we didn't stand up as well. They still had some of the fat of easy living, and not having had our experiences, they believed they were going through the worst torments a human being could stand and that things were bound to get better. We knew things could get much worse, and we felt certain they would.

The fifth day we had only some *kochamic-commtdl* mush—to eat, and the dead lay every few hundred yards along the trail. During one break I went over to share a tree against which one Chetnik was sitting. Politely; I asked him to move over. When he ignored me, I nudged him. He toppled over, and I saw his coat was soaked with blood, and he was dead. He had been

shot in the stomach by a sniper and had sat down against the tree to die in comfort.

That night an aide summoned us to Draja. The meeting was the most moving experience of our ten months in Yugoslavia. I do not think I shall ever forget how he looked, what he said, that night. I can hear him now, speaking in his soft, slow, professorial voice, his eyes gentle, embracing us all.

Apologizing for the way we had had to live, the general noted wryly he hadn't been able to live any better. Tomorrow, he said, we would cross a well-populated valley, and there we would be placed with a neutral family who would transfer us to the Partisans. He hoped the Partisans would be honourable and would return us to our own lines.

Then he talked to us about world politics and about the history of the Balkans, and of the importance of the Balkans in terms of world strategy. He told how for centuries the British and the Russians and the French had sought to dominate the Balkans and so control the Near East and the East. He spoke to us about Tito, told us how Tito had been trained in Moscow, for Moscow's purposes. Now, he said, Tito had been sent back to Yugoslavia, not for Yugoslavia's interests, but for Moscow's.

At the beginning of the war, he said, when the Nazis had descended on Yugoslavia, the Communists had collaborated with them, helped them to force Yugoslavia's King to flee. Then the Chetniks had taken to the hills, battled the Nazis and their Communist allies, and taken a heavy toll. But later, Nazis and Communists had split, and the Communists, too, had taken to the hills.

The ways of international power politics were strange, General Mihailovich observed, and the workings of the

minds of statesmen were even stranger. He said he could not understand how the Communists had managed to persuade Britain and the United States, who had been helping the Chetniks in their struggle against the Nazis, to divert their aid to Tito's men. Sadly, the general said that he believed himself that the U.S. and Britain could have made no more terrible mistake than to have supported Tito, the Kremlin's tool, against the Chetniks, the friends of democracy.

He called on us to witness that the Partisans had spent most of their energies, most of the supplies the Allies had given them, fighting not the Germans but the Chetniks. In the face of this, he said, he had no choice but to form a defensive alliance with the Germans. And yet, at the same time, some of us probably knew that he had sabotaged the Germans, fighting against them whenever he could.

'That's right! That's right!' I shouted, and Griff and Arky joined in, recalling the raids made by the Chetniks on the German column during the great retreat.

The general's last words have been ringing in my ears ever since :

'Soon your statesmen and your people will know how terrible their mistake has been. It will not be long. The Germans are now breathing their last gasp, and sooner than you think they will give up. And then Stalin and his servant, Tito, will no longer need you.

'They will be strong then, with the strength you have given them, stronger with the strength you lost by giving to them, and then they will turn your strength upon you. Do not mislead yourselves that Communism and Democracy can live side by side. The day has not yet come when the lion lies down beside the lamb.

'It will not be long. It will be sooner than you can at

this moment conceive to be possible, that Stalin and Tito will turn upon you. I shall not be here then, for I shall not be here very long. I shall not be here long enough to see that I have been right. But I see it now, and I know that I am right.

‘And then, you, too, will know of your terrible blindness. But then it will be too late.’

There was complete silence when he had finished. He waited a moment, but no one uttered a word. Then he rose from the fire, and said, ‘I will say good-bye to you in the morning. Now you must rest and pray for tomorrow,’ and walked away. It was a long time before any of us uttered a word.

In the morning he said good-bye to each of us, shaking our hands. He gave each man a gold coin—fabulous wealth in wartime Yugoslavia—and wished him, ‘God-speed to your homes and your loved ones.’ We lined up at attention and saluted as he rode off, up the mountain, proud and soldierly on his horse, knowing that he was leading his army, the tattered remnants of the hundreds of thousands who had once punished Hider’s Reich, to its last stand. It was a sad and moving sight.

Our transfer to the Partisans was not-effected so easily as the general had planned. The neutral family that was to have sheltered us had decided to hide, and we were taken in hand by a Chetnik major.

The major spoke excellent English. What was more astonishing, when we shook hands, he spotted my black onyx fraternity ring and exclaimed, ‘A Phi Psi! I’m a Phi Psi, too!’ and while I stood open-mouthed, he gave me the handshake and the secret word. I have never been so flabbergasted.

We didn't have much chance to talk. He wanted the ring badly, and I traded it for his .38. 'I die a Phi Psi to the last,' he said gaily, as we marched off.

He may have, too. Within an hour we were under Partisan fire, and by no small miracle we managed to surrender alive, the major leaving us cowering in a gully while his men led the Partisans a chase up the mountain.

Once they identified us as Americans, the Partisans treated us well. Those Chetniks who were trapped and surrendered were not so fortunate. Their hands bound behind th^m, they were shot in the back of the head. A Partisan officer commandeered the pistol I had obtained in trade only a few hours before. Within minutes he put it to use. Watching him empty it into the body of a young Chetnik boy, I understood for the first time why the Chetniks had never believed the Partisans would take us alive. The boy's body bounced inches off the ground with each shot, and the Partisan officer just grinned.

Then, his face showing concern, the officer had Larry Zellman and me carry a wounded Partisan down the hillside. The man had met a Chetnik grenade; half his scalp was torn off and he bled profusely, staining our clothes. He seemed to weigh a ton, and for a while I wished he were dead, until I remembered the Ustashi who had carried me and wished me a corpse. At the foot of the rise, where we had camped the night before, two nurses and a doctor took care of the wounded man, but he died almost at once. I had been without socks for months, and I asked for his. They gave them to me without thinking twice.

All night we walked, and at dawn were ambushed by Chetniks. When the bullets whistled closest, I alternately giggled and trembled with fear, thinking how long I had

travelled with and been protected by those who were now shooting at me. The battle lasted all day, and all day the irony filled my mind. At nightfall, however, the Chetniks withdrew.

And the next day we rode a train to Teslic, and a week or so later we were in Banja Luka. Here Larry Zellman came down with typhus, but we managed to get him into a hospital. We stayed with him for another ten days, and when we saw he was recovering, we left, hitch-hiking by train and truck to Brod. There the Partisans, who were remarkably efficient (they had an incredible wealth of U.S. and British equipment to be efficient with), put us up in a hotel. The sound of firing awoke us one midnight, and we crawled under our beds in the face of what sounded like the biggest battle of the war. When, after hours of hearing shooting but no damage, we finally screwed up enough courage to crawl out, we learned that the excitement was in celebration of Allied victory—the Germans had surrendered. The war was over.

And now I am sitting in a hotel in Belgrade finishing this diary. The hotel has been taken over by the U.S. Mission to Tito. I am wearing a clean, complete U.S. Army uniform, with silver bars on my shoulders for the first time. The mission was informed by 15th A.F. that my promotion came through the day after we jumped into Yugoslavia. We have been promised a plane back to Italy tomorrow, and I must finish this diary tonight, since we will all be questioned and probably searched by the Partisans before we leave. The colonel has promised to send the diary on after me in the diplomatic pouch.

Of all the bitter irony we have experienced, this

seems to me the most tragic—that at this moment, General Mihailovich's prophecy should have come true. For we have been informed that relations between our Government and the Partisans and their Soviet masters are very touchy here. We have been briefed to tell the Partisans that the Chetniks held us prisoner the entire time.

And as we prepare to leave this country and all its terrible turmoil behind, I can only think of that great, sad, and lonely man, fighting his last battle in the mountains, deserted by us whose cause he is defending. May God forgive us.

Epilogue

JAN. 1954—I have been asked by my publishers to explain how I kept this diary under conditions at best little short of captivity and at worst plumbing the depths of strain and terror.

Actually, it was not difficult. The diary, in fact, helped me through the worst of it. I began keeping it a few days after our jump into Yugoslavia, when our chief problem was tedium. It started as a record of what I thought would be a daring, but short-lived adventure. Soon it became a way of keeping my mind occupied so that I wouldn't brood and crack, as it seemed to me at one point that some of our men were going to do.

Later, I kept it up as a kind of unique war souvenir, of more meaning than the German medals or pistols some men collected. As time went on, it became far more important to me. It became a kind of escape, a confessional, as it were, a means of setting down all the agony and hate that festered within my system, and so purging it clean. Days and, later, weeks, went by when I did not set down a word. But after the worst experiences there came a time of repose and reflection, and then I felt that I had to set it all down.

Security? I never set down names, never once in the original used the word Chetnik. The Yugoslav names set down here, with the exception of General Mihailovich and the Grand Duke, are fictitious. I do not know which of my Chetnik friends may be alive under the Tito regime today, and I would not want to jeopardize any.

There were many matters I deliberately omitted from the diary. During our stay in Podgorica, for example, when we were daily expecting to be taken to Italy by boat, Arky and I pinpointed on our escape maps the location of every, enemy troop concentration and artillery emplacement in the area. Later, when we began frequenting the saloon which German soldiers used as a gold-bricking hangout, and had to face the possibility of capture, we destroyed the maps.

I was not greatly perturbed about the prospect of the Germans finding the diary. I kept it in my escape-kit pouch, under my shirt. I knew if the Germans ever got around to searching me, it would be only after they had learned my identity, and then it would make no difference if they found it. Most of it was written in an impromptu shorthand that even I had trouble deciphering months later. If they could have deciphered it, they would have learned nothing of value.

It is now more than eight years since the events noted in my diary transpired. Most of the men who parachuted that memorable day in 1944 are, miraculously, still alive. Pizion and Morley, who jumped over Ploesti, are, I believe, dead. I heard that Lieut. Peterson, who left us to go to Italy by boat, died soon after his first unfortunate experience.

Schuffert I ran into years later, in Tokyo, when we were both flying combat wounded from Korea. He told me that he and Perkins and Spain had not been shot by the Partisans, as we had been told. On their way to the abandoned German outpost, they had run into Sava and his son, who had joined the Partisans, and were led by them to Partisan lines. They were well treated, and within a month were back in Italy.

I have often wondered about Capt. Vlado, my

Chetnik orderly, other Yugoslav friends—yes, above all, about Donna and Mlada. From this distance, it seems too improbable a coincidence that it should have been Mlada who saved me that wintry night in the mountain shack—but there are nights when I wake up sweating and find it hard to convince myself that the coincidence could not have happened.

Re-reading this diary recently, after several years, the whole nightmare came alive again. But I had the feeling, too, that there were lessons in the experience that could be of value. There was the lesson, first, of how the human spirit can bear up under the most formidable burdens and never be vanquished, but fight on against odds to victory. And there was the lesson of hope and faith and courage, and of trust in friends.

I had just returned from Korea, though, and there was one lesson that struck me most of all. That was the lesson of General Mihailovich, of our betrayal of a great ally, and how we reaped destruction as a result. We betrayed a man who might have been a stalwart friend, and I believe the war in Korea was one result of that betrayal. We were not far-seeing, because we were not loyal to our principles. Because we compromised our principles, we are living today in General Mihailovich's last prophecy, come true.

At this late date it does not matter greatly, I think, what or who it was who influenced that betrayal. Recriminations over the past only distract us from the job that lies ahead. What matters now is that we should have learned the lesson of the past. Pray God we have.