

fusing and contradictory information from within the city. And on top of all that bad luck, there were signs that the Russian winter was setting in. The soldiers had not forgotten Napoleon's defeat in 1812 and the poet's words:

Who could believe it?
 Moscow burned to the ground,
 Surrendered like that to the French!

They were scared out of their wits. And what made things worse was that the German high command and those responsible for a winter campaign had made no provisions for it.

Indeed, even though the advance of the German army units was slowed, they continued to push forward, crushing everything that stood in their way. I remember watching sadly as the half-tracks rolled through the golden fields of ripe wheat. And then, with delight, I saw the stalks trying to right themselves. Some succeeded, as if to say, "We, too, are not ready to bend before the conqueror; we won't make it easy for the occupying forces." And neither would I! This was one Jewish boy who wasn't going to knuckle under so easily.

In the meantime, we had taken up quarters in a large Russian village northwest of Smolensk. It was decided to give us three days of rest. Some "clever finaglers" in the unit had come up with a slaughtered pig, God knows how. They had also got hold of big kettles, pails, and washtubs for communal baths, personal grooming, and washing our clothes. We were sweaty and covered with dust. Several soldiers discovered a deserted peasant cottage and turned its large kitchen, which had a huge stove, into a bathroom.

Soon the water in the kettles was boiling and the kitchen quickly filled with clouds of steam and the singing of soldiers soaking in the tubs. They bathed together, in groups.

Of course, I couldn't participate in that. They would have seen that I was circumcised. I still remembered—and always would—the terrible selection scenes when the Germans first arrived.

On various pretenses I declined invitations to join this or that group in the bath, waiting patiently until the last man had left the kitchen.

Carrying a towel, a piece of soap, and clean underwear, I went in and carefully bolted the door. I stepped into one of the tubs; the hot water reached to my knees. Outside a soldier was playing a harmonica, and as I washed myself I happily sang along; it was an aria from *I Pagliacci*.

Suddenly I recoiled. Someone nearby was whispering something. Before I knew what was happening, a pair of strong arms grabbed me from behind. I felt a naked body pressing against me. I froze. Thousands of bells went off in my head. As the man's erect penis tried to enter me, I jumped as though a snake had bitten me. It would have been smarter just to stand there, with my back to him, but I had instinctively freed myself from his embrace. Jumping out of the tub, I turned around.

Heinz Kelzenberg, the medical officer, stood before me, a forced smile on his flushed, dark-red face. He seemed confused and disappointed that he had been frustrated. It was very quiet in the room. For some moments we stood there facing each other, naked as the day we were born.

What was bound to happen did happen. His eyes traveled down to my crotch. He hesitated, seemed baffled, and then asked, "Are you Jewish, Jupp?"

A deadly fear overwhelmed me. I murmured, "Mama, Papa, come, help me!" Breaking into tears, I pleaded, "Don't kill me! I'm still young, and I want to live."

Mental pictures of the horrors I had been forced to witness during the last several days rushed through my mind. In a small village, men from the German military police who

had joined up with our unit had ordered the women to lock up all the village cats in a deserted house. And then the slaughter began. I'll never forget the sadistic joy they took in shooting at those poor animals through the half-open windows. The cats tried to avoid the whistling bullets, they cowered in the farthest corners, jumped high off the floor, mewling terribly, until finally there was a deathly stillness.

Now I stood naked and defenseless before a German officer, a toy in the grip of a gigantic annihilation machine, waiting for my death sentence. Perhaps it would be carried out with a shot from a revolver, just as in the case of the cats. And if he didn't shoot me on the spot, would he deliver me to the military police? For them it was routine to tear the clothes off men under suspicion and to hang a sign reading "I was a partisan" around their necks. On the women's chests they'd pin a sign "I'm a gun moll [*Flintenweib*]." After that, they strung them up on scaffolds set up in the marketplace or by the side of the road. That was intended to intimidate the local population, to keep them from joining the partisans who had begun to organize under the noses of the Germans.

As I write this, the thoughts I had during those moments that I was sure would be my last on earth come back to me. They were the thoughts one has before dying. . . .

Heinz came closer, gently put his arms around me, drew my head to his chest, and said softly, "Don't cry, Jupp, they mustn't hear you outside. I won't hurt you and I won't betray your secret. You know, there *is* another Germany."

Before he left the room, I had to promise him not to reveal my secret to anyone, especially not to my "future father," Captain von Münchow.

I dried my tears, finished my bath, and left the kitchen feeling much better. My troubling isolation had been lifted by a true friend. He had reached out to me as I was about to lose all faith in mankind, and to my surprise I discovered

that not all those around me were potential murderers, not all German soldiers were convinced Nazis.

Later, Heinz and I sat under a tree, far from the others, and I explained the puzzle to him. I told him everything from the very beginning, about my family and our expulsion from Peine. I kept nothing from him of what had happened to me, and he listened sympathetically. I was sixteen; he was thirty and deeply moved by my loneliness. After that, he stopped making sexual advances, and a genuine and warm friendship formed between us. He promised to take me home with him after the war, and we swore to keep my dramatic story secret.

But several weeks later there was a terrible catastrophe. The rapid advance of the *Wehrmacht* forces came to a standstill near the Moscow suburbs. From then on, there was only back-and-forth trench warfare. It was the end of autumn.

The army high command decided that we had to be content with the surrender of Leningrad, which had been under siege for months, since at this time we couldn't take Moscow. So my division was redeployed northward in order to participate in the Leningrad operation. On the way, we heard a rumor that we, the front-line troops, would all get leave so that we could regain our strength. After the German victory in Russia, we would be transferred to France. The rumor was intentionally started to cheer us up. Now there ensued endless discussions about French wines, the famous French cuisine, and the fabulous, incomparable women. Each soldier imagined the most daredevil adventures. I'm sorry I didn't write down these unbelievable fantasies. But then, I also dreamed about France and its wonders, and would much rather have been there than at the front. I had no desire to stay here where I was in constant danger of being hit and killed by a grenade fragment or a stray bullet. Just think: to be killed by an ally's bullet while wearing the uniform of my

enemies! What a grotesque tragedy that would be. Yet, in the end, what difference does it make whose bullet kills you?

A short time later we reached the forests around Leningrad and began to prepare for the attack. They brought in "Goliaths" intended to break through the city's fortifications. These new and mysterious war machines were actually tiny patrol cars filled with dynamite. They were supposed to penetrate the enemy's fortified bunkers and then explode.

The Goliaths failed miserably, sinking into the mud of the deep swamps that surrounded Leningrad. Moreover, the Russians had invented a simple and effective machine called the Iron Ivan, a two-engine armored airplane that, without making much noise, was able to sweep low over the German convoys in the bright northern Leningrad nights, wreaking death and destruction. After they had dropped several bombs, which consistently hit their targets, the Iron Ivans would continue their precise attacks, with machine guns fired from the rear of the plane. We were ordered to jump from our vehicles and to shoot at them. But it was useless. These scenes were repeated almost every night: I remember the screams, the loading of the guns, and the shelling from the overhead planes. I would use as cover any object that seemed big enough, duck behind it, and watch this surrealistic spectacle. Yet despite all the setbacks and losses, the Germans let nothing deter them from fighting to take Leningrad. My unit set up quarters in the Schlüsselburg section; from there we could see the gleaming roofs of the city. Once again I was close to the front line. All around me military preparations were being stepped up. Heavy guns were emplaced in the rear, while tanks were brought forward and everyone dug himself a foxhole. The junior officers were ordered to the command post to get their instructions. H-hour had been fixed for dawn the next morning, and nervousness and tension increased among the soldiers. They all wanted to win quickly, to stay alive, and to make it

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"Beat the Jew-commissar; his face just begs for a brick!" A German propaganda flyer encouraging Soviet troops to kill their political commissars and surrender, eastern front near Moscow, winter 1941. (Courtesy of Ehrenfried Weidmann.)

relationship was one of absolute mutual trust. He took all that to the grave with him. "Once I had a buddy, there never was a better one . . ." (so begins an old German song: "*Ich hatt' einen Kameraden, einen bessern findst du nit . . .*").

Many of the soldiers in our unit were wounded, others were killed, and a lot of equipment was destroyed. Less than an hour after the attack had begun, the order "Get back in the trucks!" was issued.

Retreat. For the first time the proud conquerors were forced to turn back. Nobody cared any more about appearances, discipline, or whether the top button of your uniform was buttoned. They ran hither and thither, gathering the equipment that had been left lying around and loading it onto the trucks.

Then a headlong flight to get away from the bombardment started. On an impulse, I decided this was the time to escape. I was going to wait until the last German soldier was out of sight and then, with my arms raised, I would calmly give myself up to the advancing Russians. My heart pounded as I thought of the opportunity I now had. But again fate had something else in store. . . .

I hid in a latrine, hoping that in all the confusion my absence wouldn't be noticed. Through a knothole in the latrine wall I watched the chaos as the convoy of vehicles began to withdraw. I could see them preparing Captain von Münchow's command car for departure. Suddenly Private Gerlach yelled at me, "C'mon, Jupp, hurry! This is no time to take a shit!" I couldn't stay in hiding any longer; I couldn't escape—several of the soldiers were watching me. So I left the latrine, fumbling with my fly and belt as though I had just been to the toilet. Someone threw me a steel helmet, and once I was in the captain's car, he reproached me for being reckless, adding that, had I been a soldier, I would have been severely punished. But a crinkling around his eyes indicated that I shouldn't take his rebuke too seriously.

through to the romantic leave they had been promised in France.

During the night the Iron Ivan had dropped leaflets signed by Marshal Kliment Voroshilov in which the Soviets declared they would defend the city to the last man. The enemy was no longer acting the way the Germans had expected. One hour before our attack was to begin, the Soviets opened fire. Our positions were subjected to massive shelling and mortar bombardment that cost lives and considerable matériel. In the midst of all this, I stood stock-still, as though in shock; it didn't occur to me to head for a safe place. Heinz saw the danger I was in. He threw himself on top of me and pulled me under a tank that was standing next to a tall building. The tank crew were already lying there in their soot-blackened uniforms. We nudged them aside to make room. The air was full of smoke and the acrid smell of burning.

A few minutes later Heinz was called away to care for the wounded. Before he left, he ordered me not to move from under the tank. I watched him as he ran off, bent over to make himself less of a target. There was a dreadful explosion and a blinding flash of light. I pressed my face into the ground and covered my head with my arms. Screams ripped the air. When I raised my head again, I saw Heinz lying on his back not far away, his face covered with blood. I crawled over to him and took him in my arms. Someone tried to close the deep wound in his neck, to pinch closed the artery from which the blood was gushing. In vain. His wide-open eyes stared into mine, and he murmured something I could not understand. Then he lost consciousness and died in my arms. To my dying day I will always remember him with high regard.

Heinz's death left me orphaned again, and I felt bitterly alone. I had lost my only ally and the hope and moral support I so desperately needed. A secret had bound us together; our