

**STALAG VIII B / 344**  
**Experience Report**

**Elfriede Hannak**



## Foreword by Guy Dirkin April 2021

Elfriede Hannak began setting expectations for the reader early in her book Stalag VIII B/344 Experience Report. In paraphrasing Hannak, she says that the reader of this experience report will possibly be waiting impatiently for the actual events, and experiences which took place, which is understandable. However, it is not always the case that the beginning, middle and end of the account will only feature the major tensions and experiences. She conveys to the reader that she offers her best effort.

Hannak was from a small town in Upper Silesia, and was in her late teens to early twenties when she began her job at Stalag VIII B in Lamsdorf, in 1942, as a typist and shorthand office worker in the Counterintelligence Department (IC). As the book was published in 1984, I assume she was writing in the early 1980's when she would have been around sixty years of age.

Stalag VIII B/344 Experience Report is a series of vignettes about her day-to-day life, as a young woman working at Lamsdorf. Interwoven with Hannak's vignettes, are powerful comments about humanity and the ever-present reality of being in a multi-national POW camp during a war; conditions; Nazi cultural pressure and the shift from initial German success to eventual defeat.

Stalag VIII B/344 Experience Report was translated by a professional German to English translator. The translation is excellent, but the English language reader may find some degree of awkwardness because of cultural differences, personal style of the writer, and the era. Spend the time to accommodate the meaning that Hannak is trying to convey. Elfriede Hannak provides a rare insight, especially from a female perspective, on the life of a worker in a POW camp. Her experiences may seem light, or even mundane, from time to time, but the gravity of her situation is seldom hidden between the lines. There are many powerful comments that emerge to surprise the reader. Her writing, perhaps, was intended to send a forceful wave to jolt the reader from thinking that reader is not, in reality, in calm waters. By being patient, you will be rewarded.



The author, coming from the area around the former Allied prison camp Stalag VIII B, later 344 Lamsdorf / Obersehlesien, was assigned to the camp as a stenotypist by a German labor office and worked in the German Defense Department in 1942 until her escape in January 1945.

Her field of activity was varied and full of tension, which is also reflected in this book.

Being exposed to innumerable encounters with people of all nationalities, of all denominations on this side and on the other side of the world's oceans, the appearance of her character was shaped, her senses open to her fellow man, no matter their country of origin.

The experience of those days consciously and absolutely absorbed, meandered on, and has remained alive to this day.

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Stalag VIII B/344  
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Elfriede Hannak

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## **Introduction**

If I were to dedicate this book to anyone, then it will undoubtedly have to be Captain Dakers. Captain Dakers, a Methodist clergyman from Melbourne, Australia. He - like all the others - was also a prisoner in a German camp, a rock in the sea, with alert eyes and senses. He could have been Moses, leading people from sandy, thorn-strewn desert to new shores, to sources of life, truth, and justice. He loved everyone on earth, regardless of their religion, skin color or nationality, abhorred violence, crime and killing.

Truly a man of greatness and stature.

Stalag VIII B, later 344, the Main Camp for enlisted prisoners of war, Lamsdorf / Oberschlesien. High fence - barbed wire - watchtowers - guard posts! Over the garden fence of my former East German homeland, I made my first acquaintance, my first sight with these prisoners, some of which had flat-helmets, some wearing caps, whose figure were covered by a khaki-colored brownish uniform. There they arrived, crammed into long freight train wagons, and shipped off to an unknown and unfamiliar future called captivity in what was the then dreaded evil Nazi Germany. They would later wear the word "Prisoner" on the back of their uniforms after being sent to the prison camp and the formalities associated with it, they would certainly all know that the way from the Channel coast into eastern Germany was a long one and that thoughts and intentions of escape would and could be an arduous endeavor.

The summer of 1942! Shimmering heat lay over the land. The blue of the sky arched from direction to direction. I stood in front of our closet, which was used by my sister and I, and took out my good dress, which I had acquired in those days on point cards. My dark blue bag with the transfer from the employment office of our district town being already set and waiting to go on its journey. It would not be a big one, oh no, just a short distance, one train station away from my parents' house, the passenger train would carry me.

Across meadows and fields. As a schoolchild, I had already been there once or twice, the name was familiar to me. At that time, we went there on foot, a school trip, so to speak, with a merry crowd of children, who this time did not have to carry their school bags, but only their provisions for the day: sandwiches and perhaps a hard-boiled egg. And, of course, a cool drink. This could not be omitted, not with the summer heat. The one time which my feet started to move together with those of my parents, and my sister and my younger brother were also present. Again, we went to that place to have a look at the military training area, which was still quite quiet at that time and only used from time to time, and the heroes' memorial cemetery. A large-scale final resting place for thousands of former combatants from different nations from the years 1870/71 and 1914/18.

Every now and then, delegations arrived, foreign delegations with wreaths, to lay them at the great memorial. With the trivialities I just mentioned, the reader of these lines, should there be one at all, will possibly be already waiting impatiently for the actual events, and experiences which unfolded. That would be his right. However, it is not always the case - not even with an experience report from past war situations – will the beginning, middle and end of the writeup be full only features of major tensions; great experiences, only need to offer top quality. Where there is writing, there are also a lot of accessories, which everyone should certainly know - that should be allowed.

The train had brought me to my destination, I had to get off. I did so with a heavily pounding heart. The expectation was huge. Would I fit at all where I was directed? What was awaiting me, what was in store for me in terms of people, material, and new things? Would I be able to cope with it emotionally at all? I was an extremely sensitive person and always had palpitations when confronted with the familiar, let alone the unfamiliar. The way to the Prison of war (POW) camp led along a clean, wide road, past the already known and visited Heroes' Memorial Cemetery. It was also possible to use the forest paths, but I did not dare to go up there that day. Only later did I go up there in the company of others who had also been ordered to go there. Great silence, an infinite peace lay on the paths. Only the rustling of the forest trees could be heard, as well as a bird song in the midday sunlight every now and then. After about half an hour of walking, a path on the right led to a sentry box, to the guardhouse. I asked the guard if I was in the right place and pulled the employment office assignment out of my purse.

“No”, he replied, “not quite yet, though on the right way to get there.” I still had to walk through the whole training area, past simple wooden barracks, but also one or two stone houses appeared. Then the camp passage was over. On a narrowly trodden footbridge, a so-called trampling path, I heard the first sounds of bagpipe music.

Then I knew that my steps were on the right path. My eyes again spied another sentry box, this time a much more modest and smaller one, than the first one might have been. There was also a barrier in front of it and a soldier behind it.

Again, I had to make my intention known. I was then sent to the guardhouse to repeat the same thing. The uniformed man reached for the telephone, while soft music sounded from an NS-era radio. Yes, well I am right! I had to step over a narrow path past flower beds into a low, long stone barrack. I spotted a door on the right and a loosely hanging sign that read, "Do not disturb - officers' meeting!" And Ic was inscribed on the door itself. I could only realize about half an hour later what the Ic meant. Suddenly the door opened, a soldier with files in his hand came out and asked me to step through the double doors with him. He casually mentioned that they were already expecting me, and that they needed a capable clerk who not only knew how to use the machine well but was also capable of writing shorthand. I thought I had both under control to a certain extent. In the half-height office, there were three long desks and a typewriter table with a Continental machine on it. I saw a lot of files, a filing cabinet, and several soldiers bustling back and forth. Suddenly a sliding wall door opened, and I was invited into the officers' room. The soldier who had been so friendly before accompanied me to the door. Of course, in those days one greeted with the state greeting "Heil Hitler!". One would not have dared to use any other form of greeting at authorities or public institutions, and it probably did not occur to one. Since this greeting was used too often, it had long since become a gray monotony, a uniformity. "Heil Hitler!" the officer loudly returned my greeting. He was a man of middle age, with a fat face too shiny for my liking at that time, his girth indicated he was well-fed. He was handsome in size, with the uniform breast decorated with the Iron Cross First Class and a sports badge. I handed him the assignment of my employment office, whereupon he offered me an armchair.

The soldier had already carefully placed the shorthand pad and pencil on the desk. Immediately I saw a very thick book in the hand of the captain and already I heard his voice saying: "This is the Geneva Convention, for us here in the prison camp, so to speak, the Bible!" He dictated to me an excerpt from it, not too slowly, but also not too quickly. I had to transcribe it into the typewriter. I was able to do that, everything went smoothly.

A non-commissioned officer, his military office manager, soon took what I had written and brought it personally to the officer's office. Thereupon I had to go to

this office again. Captain Brinkmann told me briefly and succinctly that I could start my service here, as early as the next day, Friday, at 8:00 a.m., and that the 'Ic' here would mean - counterintelligence. "Counterintelligence"? It went through my head and Mata Hari faintly flashed through my brain. Yes, I had heard and read about her. Although Mata Hari was and remained Mata Hari, and I, on the other hand, was just a little clerk who had been shipped here on the orders of the employment office. I might as well not have been one at all, and I could have been. In retrospect, I remember very clearly that the Friday date did not suit me at all and that I did not want to be harnessed into the so-called military machinery over the weekend. Since my mother had already died at that time, I thus informed Captain Brinkmann of this and that I would still have work at home over the weekend.

But that was not exactly true, since my older sister did most of the housework. I only wanted to be free on Friday and Saturday.

The captain only reluctantly accepted my pretense. I wanted to resume my service there on Monday at 8 a.m. That was then agreed upon.

Monday morning! At quarter to 8:00 a.m., I was already standing in front of the barracks ready to go on duty. What would be expected of me this day, the first day of my service? My heart was pounding heavily. The entrance door to the barracks was wide open, as was the double door behind it. I spied prisoners, with brooms and buckets, busy cleaning the barracks. Brave and polite, as I had been brought up, I stood in front of this door and did not dare to enter the duty room, since there was still three quarters of an hour to go before the normal start of duty. Since I had to rely on the railroad's traffic schedule, the morning time when I was supposed to be here could not be arranged any differently. At least not right from the start.

I did not know how I ought to behave towards prisoners. In a moment they would finish cleaning and pass me by. Should I lower my eyes and pretend not to have seen them, not to notice them, or should I look at them? I did not know. But suddenly a human feeling suggested me to look at them. If they greeted me or simply nodded their heads, indicating a greeting, I would return it. And so, it was.

However, on the same day I was instructed by Captain Brinkmann that all contact with the prisoners, including greetings, was to be avoided. Thus, an enemy image was created at that time, here and probably also everywhere in the world.

Liberality in this direction was not desired, not allowed, but thinking in terms of authority was a big concept. Prisoners who had access to our offices were of course treated in a friendlier way, they greeted when they came in and their greetings were returned. But outside the office, again, everything had to be taboo, you should not see each other, you did not know each other, even if the individual was almost at your feet. That was how it was then.

Shortly before eight o'clock in the morning, the camp barracks came alive. It was the same with us. The soldiers came, the civilian employees came. Some were silent and thoughtful; others had a conversation on their lips. In a moment, duty would begin, the bustle, and the military machinery would get going, at least what had to be started and moved here in the prison camp. Phone calls would roll, files would be shifted back and forth, from one office to another, orders would be made, for the benefit of some, for the detriment of others, just as it was and probably is everywhere in the world.

There he was again, there he came again, the friendly soldier from my introduction day, last week. I passed the double door right after him and was in the office. He casually said that I could have been in this office long ago and that I did not need to stand outside the door if I belonged here. While he took my bag to put it in a compartment of the locker present, I took a seat on the chair in front of the typewriter table. This was quite close to the wide-open window. So here I would sit and work, have a beautiful view, look at trees and flower beds, see the sun, enjoy its rays, and hear the birds chirping. What more did I want? Unlike with the prisoners, it was all good for me.

Our duty room was filling up with life, more and more. I counted five employees, soldiers.

Eight o'clock at the dot in the morning! The service could begin. Even for me, the newcomer, there was already lots of work to be done. Not dizzying, oh no, I just had to write down the on-call schedule for the noon hour.

It was already prescribed.

In the ninth hour of that morning, the officers' office also came alive. I immediately noticed that the figures of the soldiers were tightening up, getting ready for the "snappy" morning salute to their superiors. Here, they were fiddling with the wide leather belt, with the buckle, there they were pulling on the uniform end of the soldier's jacket, reaching for the neatly cut hair, removing any dust from the uniform, looking at shoes or boots.

The sliding door was opened. For a fraction of a second I caught sight of Captain Brinkmann's face, which immediately disappeared again behind the passage. He asked for me and I was invited to his office. With shorthand pad and pencil. This time there was a chair next to his desk. A chair with upholstery, a worn one of course, on which I had to sit. The dictation began. It was about the fresh meat supply for the prisoners of war. For the first time in my life, I had to write the word 'veterinar'. The work here was going to be varied, I realized that immediately. A wide field, a broad spectrum would open. I was looking forward to the work, but I did not like Captain Brinkmann that much. He was too arrogant for me, even more arrogant than the actual arrogance already was. And that bothered me, quite substantially even. I would have liked to have ignored him, to delete him from the Ic, to have him removed by magic. Though of course, that was not possible. Fortunately, I soon realized that I did not need to be around him all the times, but that some of the work to be done was assigned to me by the military bureau chief, to my relief.

Already on the first day of work I noticed that all the soldiers had the same smell; their boots smelled the same, their uniforms smelled the same. A little more boot wax, a little more disinfection of their 'state clothing, and the so-called enemy could have easily and effortlessly identified them in the trenches or anywhere else as odorous men - but that would be pure exaggeration.

The days flowed by, accompanied by work and bagpipe music. One day I spotted Scots in their tartan kilts. Of course, I had already seen Scots in their national costume, but only in the picture. Here I saw it for real. What would the Scot be without his beloved short skirt, without his mountains, the rivers, and the sheep?

Not just a Scot; the bagpipe music was of course part of it. Here in the camp, we got it free, often from morning till evening. One got used to it. Now I had found a daily, morning companion; Gundula. She came from a fine family in our district town and was a little younger than me. Although marked by different characters, we got along quite well. We respected each other in such a way that each one let her own life. My father had taught me and my brothers and sisters that each man would be blessed in his/her own way. And I had understood that; we only had one thing in common; we had a heart condition, Gundula and I. And that would not change. The sickness stuck to us tenaciously. Often in the morning we got out of our personal cradle with buttery, wobbly knees, complaining to each other about our suffering, also picking up on each other when it was time.

Gundula's brother was only nineteen years old when he breathed his last in the East, and thereafter her father went missing as well, as an officer at Dukla Pass. Gundula bore these strokes of fate with composure, from a purely external perspective. Though inwardly, she was one of those people with tremendous willpower and strength. One could admire her, one even had to. Since she had been here in the camp for a long time - only assigned to a different department, she was able to draw my attention to this and that, which I, as a newcomer, did not know yet - I was grateful to her for that. Gundula was a real worker bee and approached each of the tasks given to her with eagerness and verve. Her will to work was identical to that of her department, which was called ARBEITSEINSATZ (EMPLOYMENT OF LABOR). Her office, which she shared with some co-workers, military of course, as it was customary at that time, was lined up dead straight two or three rooms away from the camp commander's workrooms. Later we were joined by two female staff members.

We had a new clerk, Johannes. Johannes was a man in his early thirties white-blond and had studied law for a few semesters. He was of that fine reserve which we unfortunately miss all too often in people. I was visibly happy to know that I still had a SCRIBBLER close to me. Please forgive me this expression, SCRIBBLER, should he still be alive. Johannes became the first scribe in the Ic. He would probably often be entrusted with matters of military secrecy that I, being so young, would not be trusted with. However, I was never curious when Johannes

had to write his reports, and it would never have occurred to me to take even a glance, not even a brief one, at what he had written. It was a different matter when a private (Corporal) from my hometown, who also had to perform his service here at the camp. Later, when Johannes was no longer with us and was posted to Yugoslavia, I was made the first scribe at the Ic. That seemed to have suited that corporal. When he came to our office at noon, he had nothing more urgent to do than to head straight for my typewriter, to look at the stationery stuck in the machine and to greedily catch a glimpse of even a few scraps of words. I usually had to work over lunch, and he knew that. He must have known it because he often passed our office during the noon hour. But most of the time I was faster than him; I turned back the typewriter roller, as fast as lightning, of course, so that nothing of what I had written could be seen. I never told anyone about it. In my hometown, that older corporal was considered as being an arch-German, although he was one himself. Well, it would not do him honor.

Many prisoners came to the camp. More and more were brought in. The search lasted for hours, and the registration and photographing of them also lasted for hours. The camp had to be set up for additions. The number of civilian employees also increased. Male and female interpreters - the latter in the majority - came from all parts of the German Reich. They were accommodated in the large, semi-high-ceilinged Pü room - mail control room - just behind the Ic. They had to subject all incoming and outgoing mail to and from the POWs to systematic control. The number of female auxiliaries also grew steadily. They came from a wide variety of professions, most of them were saleswomen, but we were also joined by the unemployed, quite a few in fact: married and unmarried. The so-called Schnitzel tables, where the letters were opened, were more and more crowded. They stood in the left aisle of the camp barracks, free and open. The result was that a constant babble of voices, laughter and all other noises reached us. But almost the entire stone barracks with its mostly only half-height room partitions was a single source of unrest, with the clatter of typewriters, voices and other comings and goings.

Captain Nietzsche, a schoolteacher by profession - a particularly emotional person - had returned from traveling and was inspecting individual work details. This

meant additional work for me: writing travel reports. He dictated them to me in the shorthand pad. In between, he sometimes told me private things, today details from the film that had been released at that time: "The Golden City." He had a daughter who married a young officer when she was eighteen, only to be widowed again when she was exactly nineteen. "Fallen in the field of honor!", it was said at that time. Captain Nietzsche had tears in his eyes when he spoke of it.

Private Habicht, a sculptor by trade and the son of a doctor from the Sudetenland, became the only troublemaker in our office. From the faces of my coworkers, I could read displeasure, even great displeasure. Private Habicht walked around like a caged animal, mostly with his arms folded behind his back, up and down the only corridor of our office space and back and forth again and again, as he had time.

How long would he continue to do this and keep it up? It was not only the walking, which disturbed considerably, no, in addition also came words, usually of a critical nature and form, which however remained mostly incomprehensible to us all. They were drowned in his own grumbling. Even when he was working, he still grumbled to himself. Private Habicht was dissatisfied. His spirit of dissent seemed to have awakened; awakened against this and that and probably everything. He would have preferred to sit at home, model the stone, work on it, give it shape, form and life. However, that was probably what many people wanted, to lead their own lives. Although they could not. Unfortunately! It was war! The pressure, the power came from above. They needed you! You would probably be dressed in gray for a long time, wearing uniform, boots, steel helmet, cap, gas mask, belt, pistol, and rifle. Who knows for how long? And if you knew, maybe you would be surprised. A year, another, and a third? Maybe even a fourth, a fifth? Always away from home! You should have known that Private Goshawk when you were called to the flags. From the very beginning! No illusions.

Since reality was different, hard paved, with a lot of gray. All the lost wishes you can only dream of. But he was not to be with us for long, he was detached, entrusted with other tasks. We never heard from him again.

Captain Metz returned from an official trip. He had also visited the labor battalion, like Captain Nietzsche before him. These were carried out from cycle to cycle. They had to check up on the prisoners, on their housing, on their state of health. And after the work ethic. The food was also checked and subjected to an examination. After all, one owed this to the prisoners, if the conditions of the Geneva Convention were to be fulfilled. And these needed to be met.

Captain Metz had been widowed once before. "An irrefutable fact that one must cope with, come to terms with!" He always used to say when he came to speak on this subject. However, he had remarried and had two daughters at home, a big one from his first marriage and a little one from his second.

"You write as quick as a pistole shot!" he once said casually while dictating into the typewriter. I did not even notice that anymore. I had to write a lot and extensively: Travel and control reports, escape reports, daily schedules, service lists within the many work commands that the camp maintained, evaluation of English letter mail, prisoner complaints within the camp, and much more.

Well, Johannes, our first scribe, got more insight into all the things that were handled through the Ic. He could not take shorthand but recorded all the texts dictated to him in longhand. He used a form of writing that consisted only of longitudinal strokes, of infinite length, with occasional upward and downward squiggles interspersed.

Our new private, who took the place of Private Habicht, was a quiet, sympathetic man. He was always friendly and amiable. He owed that to his profession. He came from the catering trade. It was therefore very surprising that he neither smoked nor drank. There was only one weakness he had: that of sweets! His candy bags were always hidden behind or between the files. Whenever he took them out for inspection and processing, he had to reach into the respective candy bag. He had a surname that resembled that of the former French Marshal Petain. Marshal Petain was now not only solely responsible for France, no, he had also made his way into our office. "Marshal Petain!", it sounded again and again through our offices. Marshal Petain here - and Marshal Petain there. The corporal acknowledged it with a smile. But he was not to enjoy this name for too long. He

received a posting order to the east. Once again - for the last time - he took his well-deserved home leave. After that it was time to go to the front. He was killed in Russia only after a 14-day deployment. His only sister sent a message to our office about his death. Poor little Marshal Petain, so great in character! He had not achieved what he wanted so incidentally: To see us all again after the end of the war; he had planned a meeting at his inn.

"One - two - three - four! One - two - three - four! Farewell to you little Monika!" sounded from often rough male choruses past the camp. A troop of German soldiers who were sometimes no longer fit for war, marched past. 'Farewell to you little Monika!' Often, they were already old, and their wives at home may have been called anything but Monika, probably rather Maria, Martha, Anna. Here and everywhere where this song was sung, Monika had become a symbolic figure. Little Monika!

The supply of drinking milk to German prisoners in Africa had been blocked. I was dictated a letter to the English government, King George VI. This was to be forwarded to the government concerned through the International Red Cross, Geneva, and settled. The Germans threatened reprisals, countermeasures. They would not accept it and would repay like with like; by also putting blocks. Only that in this case it would concern the English.

"Do not go to your prince unless you are called!" had become the proverb to all of us in the meantime. But especially that of Johannes. This time, however, he had to go, he wanted to submit his request for leave, and he wanted a vacation. Therefore, it was necessary to go to "his prince". Johannes also got leave and traveled to Vienna beaming with joy. He wanted to get to know the city on the Danube. Was it a sign of fate that called him there? When he went there, he was still unmarried, but he had to come back engaged. This caused a huge laugh in our office, a well-intentioned one, of course, when Johannes talked about it and showed his engagement ring. One could not believe it, Johannes was engaged. This once so inveterate bachelor of the middle-age had tied the knot. His fiancée was no ordinary girl, oh no, she was a famous Austrian concert singer with a great pedigree. Her ancestral passport bore the golden crown of one of the most

famous German noble families. I also had the honor of meeting her in the nearest future. Johannes married his Lisa soon after. After the marriage, Lisa rented a room in one of our inns, not far from my parents' house. I got the order from Johannes to provide Lisa with news from him; So-to-speak, I became the courier for two freshly married people. I did it with pleasure. Lisa had a lot to tell, was not conceited at all. I heard news about this and that famous actress. Now my life had become even more interesting. I was young, I enjoyed it. - At that time, I also got to know a well-known Austrian operetta composer within our camp, although only very briefly, I would like to say only for a nose length.

A new force came to us in the Ic, though not in our office, but in the one outside the wing door. She came from this office, but for reasons unknown to me; she did not stay long in that office but sat down at one of the carving tables outside in the corridor. There she probably had more freedom, as she might have imagined. While opening the letters, people could chat and talk. Maybe she liked that better. Then Marla, a young girl, came and took her place.

A troop of English prisoners marched past our barracks, a so-called work troop. Nothing unusual in those war days. In the ranks of this squad was a young prisoner with bright red hair that immediately stood out. Of course, like most wearers of this hair color, he would have had a snow-white porcelain face. I could not see freckles because of the distance of a few meters. But they would probably have been there. His uniform was clean, he looked well-groomed. When I happened to look up at him, he nodded his head in a friendly way into my window. It was supposed to be a greeting. This went on for weeks and months: always the same friendly nod of the head. I gave the prisoner a name, secretly of course. I called him "Glenn, the Dawn!" One day a prisoner of the British Secret Service was discovered with us, performing courier services within the camp. He was subsequently taken back.

Morris, a student at Edinburgh University until the start of the war, entered our duty room, a loose-leaf binder of papers under his arm. Morris was of short stature, blond and redheaded. He had cool, light blue eyes. They must have been reminiscent of the cold mountain waters of Scotland. Morris always came to see

us, all through the years. He greeted when he entered and said good-bye with either "good-bye" or "good afternoon" when he left. His expression was short and straight forward, he never got personal.

Money was raised. The camp commander, a corvette captain from Vienna, as was well known, was about celebrating his birthday. Commander Giel was of imposing appearance, wore a monocle and always had his spotted mastiff with him. He was said to have been a frequent guest at the Count of my homeland, which I could well imagine. He was an educated, friendly man and this was quite visible. A few days after his birthday, one early afternoon, the door of our office was ripped open and none other than Commander Giel stepped through. I heard a shout of "Achtung!" (Attention!) and all the soldiers present quickly stood up straight, like wax figures in a cabinet. Of course, the shout of "Attention!", as it came, also pulled me up into the air and I too shot up like a rocket and stood frozen to a pillar, bolt upright in the room, while my lightning-fast standing up caused the two woolen blankets, folded, and piled on top of each other, to slide down from my chair, directly behind my legs. The commander, who saw this picture, quickly waved it off when he saw me standing upright like a soldier. I was permitted to sit down again, but I left the two fallen blankets on the floor for the time being. He came to my chair and thanked me for the birthday present. That afternoon, however, there was only laughter, and I giggled most of all. Again, and again and again. And at home it went on. - When Commander Giel was no longer the commander of our main camp and new ones started their duties, no one among them ever entered our office and workroom again. Also, I never heard again something of a birthday present to a commanding officer, because none of the new ones could measure up to Commander Giel. Therefore, there was no longer any collections or gifts. With Commander Giel, an era of distinguished elegance also seemed to have come to an end. He and his mottled mastiff matched each other. On its own, it could be feared when its respectable size appeared unexpectedly in the long corridor of the camp barracks. But usually, the commander was always behind it.

Sergeant Möbbius, who was our office manager for only a short time, came from Leipzig and was a businessman. He had a daughter who fell from the stairs during

an air raid and soon developed a back problem. Now good advice was expensive. He wanted his daughter to be placed in a good orthopedic clinic, where they could really help her to the best of their ability. It should be as quiet a town as possible. Did they even still exist in jet days? - One day, Sergeant Möbius told me that I would never achieve anything in my life, because I was too good by nature. Did I even want that? Was my innate sense of justice going to become a tripwire in life?

One change after the other took place. We had hardly gotten used to a new office manager before it was the turn of another. Coming and going were particularly frequent with us. Sergeant Möbius left, and Sergeant Piefke came. Though he too was not to stay long. Now the office was taken over by Corporal Albrecht, a jovial Saxon who was soon promoted to sergeant. Albrecht was married, had one child, and a second was to be added. He thought it was because of the good heathland air.

"Dash - comma - semicolon, exclamation mark - question mark - period!", the court officer dictated to me in the shorthand pad, while I sat on the wrong chair and in the wrong office just behind the double door, where Maria later had to sit. "Dash - comma - semicolon!" It was not only outside of the opposing camp that things happened, which violated law, regulations, and order, no, it was well also present within the camp of the prisoners. In this case it was not a big deal, just the events of two bullies, fighting cocks, with a bloody outcome. Well, where people, young people, immature people, sit together every day, with the barbed wire in front of them, the watchtowers, it is quite easy to trigger mechanisms of unrest and mutual hatred. This was understandable. For the sake of order, however, this matter had to be put on record and put back in order. The International Red Cross, which inspected the prison camp at least twice a year, was also to be held accountable. "Dash, comma, period!" The sentences went on and on, they looked like, but did not want to end. Expressing himself briefly, concisely, and precisely was not exactly the strongest side of the court officer. His dictation style included too many trivialities, which seemed to be infinitely important to him.

One day - an elderly soldier entered our duty room. He had probably chosen this time especially for it. He wanted to give me a small package, with jewelry, as he said. A necklace, a chain?", it went through my head. I was amazed and of course I did not want to accept this package. But he asked that I do, and casually said that it was a costume jewelry from Gablonz, but also silver jewelry. He himself was from Gablonz, and since he had no daughter, he wanted to make me happy. I had never seen the soldier before. Well, many walked past me without me paying any attention to them. "What should I do?", I thought back and forth. Accept the package or reject it? I really did not know. Would I offend him if I rejected the package? I really did not want to. How did he come to want to give me jewelry, even if it was only costume jewelry? But since he asked me so much, I finally accepted the package. But I never saw the soldier again.

The days of frost and dawn were soon in sight. The potato harvest was brought in. Various work parties of prisoners had the task of digging potato storage trenches not far from our camp barracks "Glenn, the Dawn", was not among them, that I could see. The trenches were of improbable length. Once the potatoes were in them, they would be shoveled up, that is, covered with soil. Straw and dried leaves of trees and bushes would come over it. In this way, the potatoes stored inside would be protected from rain, frost and cold.

A freight train of care supplies had arrived. The wagons stood sealed on the siding of the small station, waiting to be offloaded. Soon the boxes, cartons, would come in trucks, drive through the big camp gate, and rolled inside to meet the prisoners. Care supplies kept coming into the camp, several times a year. The trucks had to drive for days, the allowance was plentiful, adapted to the number of prisoners. To ensure the accommodation, large storage rooms had been specifically created for this purpose. The food plan, the daily kitchen list, would now be enriched many times more deliciously, for the benefit of the prisoners, both physically and psychologically. And that was a good thing.

Noon! The day still brought some warmth, at least at noon. The door was opened. In stepped a small, almost raggedly dressed boy. Even at first glance, I could guess that this could only be a so-called foreign worker. In my heart, shame and pity

balanced each other out. Shame because of the raggedness and pity because of the age. But, as it turned out, that "little boy" was already seventeen years old, while I thought he was only thirteen or fourteen. He already spoke a quite good German, admittedly only Low German, as the farmers and the simple people of our country communities did. This boy asked me for a pass so that he could be let into the prison camp with his ox team. His team was already ready inside the camp to pick up potato peelings, food and scraps that accumulate with so many people (prisoners) here. Being a farmer, he would then use them for the purpose of feeding livestock. I asked the boy about his nationality, whether he was Polish, Ukrainian, or real Russian. He told me he came from the Don region, and only had his mother. His father had been abducted, not by the Germans though, but by his own countrymen, the Russians under the so-called Stalin era. He himself went to school only for a few years because of the long way to school. He had no brothers or sisters; his mother had stayed behind in Russia. When I asked him if it was true that Russian men were always beating their wives whenever they were intoxicated with vodka, he answered me verbatim: "Oh well, the crazy ones beat them up. - At that lunchtime I urged the boy to go back to Russia to his mother after the end of the war and never to abandon her site again in his life, because it seemed as good as impossible that her husband, the father of the little Russian who had been deported, would ever return from exile to the hearth at home. Whether he saw his mother again? I very much doubted it!

It was almost astonishing to hear again and again in those days that many Russian prisoners were working as skilled workers, foremen, or even engineers in one of the large state-owned enterprises in their homeland. The Soviet Union strove to industrialize more and more. On the other hand, it was shocking to learn about the infinite suffering of the numerous deportations to Siberia, this ice-cold zone within the so powerful Soviet empire. Here, some lamented over their deported father, there, their brother or other relatives. The eyes of the Russians spoke a diverse language: longing for the missing and hatred and anger towards their tormentors.

I had to go to the photo site. I rarely went there. Today it turned out like this. A completed, and thus processed, personal prisoner's sheet with photographs - face

shot up to the chest, in front of it the conscious board with prisoner's number on it and profile picture on the side - had to be taken to the photo center. In the small, rather dark room there was always the camp photographer with some English prisoners. The side panels were provided with open-held shelves, in which photo material could be gathered. A small stove, a real narrow oven, was supposed to give warmth to the room, but it never truly got warm there. A tall Tommy with blond hair poked around in the sparse embers of the stove, and soon put a pot with cocoa in it on the embers. When the pot of cocoa seemed warm enough for the prisoner, he carefully took it down from the embers and placed it on a small table. He was gentleman enough to also offer me a cup of this noble beverage, so rare in those wartime days. The cocoa smelled wonderful, but it had one flaw: there were flakes of soot floating in it. I pointed my finger at it. There the Englishman laughed loudly and said in good German: "M-M-M macht nichts, m-m-macht nichts, D-D-Dreck rääumt den M-M-Magen!"

Of course, I would have to laugh out loud, too. The tall, blond Tommy told me that he was from London and had been employed in a bank there, also that he stuttered. Stuttering was something special, one either had it or not. He was eagerly studying the German language in the hope that one day he would be able to use it in his profession. Hard-working Tommy, you had to hand it to him.

A Christmas party was to take place within the camp. For some inexplicable reason, I had no desire to attend. So, on that winter day, as usual, I went home by train at the usual time. In the morning I had to get up early. At 1/4 past 5:00 a.m. I always had to leave my bed and get ready for the trip to the office. Mostly my sister accompanied me to the station and very often also our house cat, this silver-grey creature, which unfortunately remained behind when we escaped in January 1945. Even on the coldest winter days she was my companion. The winters of the East are so severe, with frost flowers of various decorations on the windowpanes. But even these winters had their sunny side, that is, the real sun, our so beloved summer sun, often shone freely from a clear, cold sky onto the snow load of the earth. Winds were almost always absent; they were not particularly at home in the eastern climes of my homeland.

"----- on each December, there was another May", which was at that time a hit in the throats of young people. The older ones may also have benefited from this ---" every December, another May will follow". And it was obvious that everything would pass. Everything passes here, over, in the earthly life, both the good and the bad and consequently evil. It would probably also be inconceivable if standstill would prevail.

Major Brinkmann had gone on leave and Captain Froohlich had taken his place. Captain Froohlich was a friendly man. He knew neither blame nor badgering. The former could have been expected from a schoolteacher, but neither I nor the other staff members had ever felt anything during the vacation replacement. One morning, right after he entered the officers' room, I reported to him that my sister was sick with scarlet fever. "For heaven's sake!" he said, "then go home immediately on the next train before an epidemic breaks out here." Holding his hands at his chest level as a defense.

My old Continental typewriter had its quirks and moods again: It would not move and was as stiff as an icicle. A substitute machine was available, of course, although not a great one. A camp prisoner, an Englishman by nationality, and a typewriter mechanic, was brought in. I was amazed at this well-groomed man. His uniform sat scrupulously clean on his body, his shave smooth and without blame, and his fingernails gleamed with purity. He was just like Glenn, red-haired, except that his hair was tinted with dark rust. The little beard worn for show above the upper lip was a semblance, a shade of color, darker. It had turning ends that almost seemed black. They must have been dyed so dark. This mechanic always came to the office whenever a typewriter broke down.

Leonor, one of my childhood playmates - though not for too long - was hired as an interpreter at the camp after she had graduated from the interpreting school in Leipzig and passed her exams. The joy on my part was enormous. Now I had someone here who came from my home community and whom I knew well. It was almost incomprehensible for me. Later, Christel, the forester's daughter, was to join us, only she was not housed in our office, but in the barracks camp next door. I also knew Christel very well. Now the "three-leaf clover" was together,

faithfully united in sunshine, rain, wind, and weather, taking its steps into and out of the camp: Month after month, year after year. And yet, compared to the others who served far away from home, the three of us had it infinitely great: we could eat from the same plate, drink from the same cup and sleep in the same bed, which at that time not everyone could do, in short: we were at home! And that meant happiness for us. To be at home, in familiar surroundings! Everything was much easier to bear there, even the worst adversity would be a little brighter. A new officer addition could be registered: Captain Perl, a secondary school teacher by profession. He had made his way into our office. Captain Perl was of tall, strong built, middle-aged man who came from Silesia. For him, too, I had to write, mostly camp reports on work detachments that were scattered far and wide in Upper Silesia, but especially in the Upper Silesian industrial area. I was directly spoiled by Panzer Captain Perl. He kept bringing me sweets: Sweets, cookies, chocolate, if available, even baked cake from his wife's parcel or package. However, the captain did not stay long in our office. Voluntarily - much to the chagrin of his wife - he re-enlisted and went to Russia.

In general, the question of food had become an important culinary issue at that time. Captain Metz raved in the highest terms about fried potatoes prepared from raw potatoes, with an uplifted look in an almost devout manner. The prisoners grew their onions right behind the commandant's barracks on long narrow garden beds, and the soldiers swarmed across the country and paid their visits to the respective farmers. Since my uncle also owned a farm in the neighborhood, naturally now and then a soldier will also get lost into it. One day my father learned that Captain Brinkmann, the IC's superior, who had been promoted to major in the meantime - now Major Brinkmann - was the most feared officer in the main camp. And it was regarding him, of all people, that I had to write. My father bemoaned that.

As so often and usually, I sat alone in front of my typewriter on one of the beautiful sunny afternoons. The large camp barracks, which was normally so busy during duty hours, was as quiet as though it was deserted. The windows were wide open. I was just eating the sandwiches I had brought from home when I noticed a shadow above my head, a jumping over the half-height demarcation of

the PÜ room directly toward the typewriter roller. With a single yelp, I took to the air as if stung by a wolf spider, while my arms flailed about in the air. What flew towards my typewriter was not a bumpy stone, an apple or anything else edible that I could eat in addition to my sandwiches in an original way "donated" by someone I knew who wanted to surprise me in this unusual way, no, what flew towards my typewriter was a cute little squirrel with a bushy tail that dared to pay me a "visit" during the lunch break. I think that we were both equally frightened: the little brown squirrel no less than I was. But the very next moment it had disappeared again. Through the open window it took the way to freedom.

In that time there was also the registration of a British air force officer, a terror bomber, as it was called at that time. Sometimes whimpering, sometimes screaming, he accused his superiors, who ordered him to fly to German cities and bomb them. Among the victims of his bomb load would certainly be women, children, and old people. He shouted and raved, and again and again brought out the same thing, that he alone and by himself would not have brought about this inferno. Nor did he want to know anything about the huge steel storm that raged over Europe and Africa; he accused the governments of the individual countries of being responsible for it. Was it just an act or was it despair and genuine remorse? He was referred for medical treatment.

Glenn passed by our camp window again with his work party, as did many German soldiers. At that time, everything that had legs marched pass, whether young or older, and most of them on orders. It was war on all fronts.

Europe's earth was shaking, a blood-soaked sea. Over it strode and stamped, millionfold the army!

It also marched on the cinema screen. Before each main movie, newsreels of victorious German armies were shown, laughing soldiers, disciplined, and marching in rank and file and always only forward. The Germans at that time seemed invincible, unbeatable. Dying soldiers, German soldiers, torn to pieces by lead bullets, grenades, or bombs, were not allowed. They were not seen in the newsreels, at most only wounded. It would have been a shock to the morale of the soldiers if they had seen these pictures, if they had met them, so they were

not shown. Death messages were transmitted only in writing. "Fallen on the field of honor!", it was then said. And some parents or wives also still put-on death announcements, conveyed by the newspaper, "in proud mourning!"

I was offered the opportunity to give shorthand lessons within the camp. I declined because it would have meant even more responsibility.

Catty, the prisoner's cat, was once again marching through the big camp gate behind a troop of Englishmen. How she got in, no one really knew. Perhaps a team of oxen had smuggled her in, or perhaps a prisoner working outside the camp had brought her along. Now Catty was there, and she stayed.

I had a survey report to write. The country of South Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in Africa was on the Germans' program. South Rhodesia was to be populated with German farmers one day. One sought everywhere to expand and gain living space. And South Rhodesia seemed welcoming and pleasing to the Germans. I also had my work to do, even though only on paper. Fortunately! The whole thing was dictated to me by a special guide.

One day it happened that a Maltese prisoner was screaming loudly and gesticulating wildly behind the large camp gate, calling on his daughter. He could not be calmed by anything, neither by good words nor by pleading. It should be his daughter, no more and no less. With all his might and the forces at his disposal, he wanted to pass through the closed camp gate. He rammed against the gate, beat it with his fists, he wanted to get out. As I learned afterwards, I was supposed to be his daughter, at least that was what he imagined. In his imagination this imagination was present. It may have come from the fact that I often sat during a dictation in the large officers' room in front of an open window while the prisoners marched past it. Poor, confused Maltese. I felt directly sorry for him. He would probably have had a daughter who might have looked somewhat like me, possibly had my curly brown hair, and wore it combed the same way I did, or at least had one of my features. Reality and fantasy seemed to merge here, should my assumption be correct. I never got it out. He was overpowered by the medical staff and taken to a sick barrack inside the prison camp. Hopefully, his brain would unravel there, and he would be able to think

clearly. The prison camp, our prison camp, had become a melting pot of the most diverse races and nationalities, as well as the most diverse political views and opinions, like a colorful palette, which ran right through that prisoner territory. One day I heard the news that some English prisoners also had anti-Semitic thoughts, and that there were also tendencies, inclinations towards fascist thinking. Of course, only on a small scale. To what extent this corresponded to reality is beyond my knowledge.

The NS-era radio in the small guardhouse was turned up to volume; once again, as was often the case in those days, a special announcement was made. Of course, this was to resound far and wide over the camp, to become audible, the message about a victory after a successfully triumphed battle, fight! Must a man always and forever be upset against another, fight him, "wage war" against him? Or is it a law of nature that forces him to do so? Then, of course, it would be quite cruel. In contrast to this, however, would be the Bible with the words of the Ten Commandments. And one of them is called: "You shall not kill!" But is this commandment also fulfilled, has it ever been fulfilled and observed? It probably has never been adhered to and may probably never be. That is saddening!

And yet, in those days, there was a case worth reflecting upon. A twenty-one-year-old soldier refused to kill with a gun. He referred to the words of the Bible. He was a Jehovah's Witness. His case was tried at the military court in Neisse. The verdict: summary execution. Why of all people did a Jehovah's Witness, a witness of a small sect of believers, refuse to kill with a gun, while other Christian religions allowed it? In the First World War, weapons were blessed by priests, blessed for the fight to kill. In England, too, hunting units are said to have been blessed during the Second World War, again for fighting to kill. I have never had anything to do with the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses in my life, I do not know anyone who belongs to that sect and I would never join it. But one thing you must give these people: they are steadfast when it comes to commandments. They are not indifferent to them. In general, indifference is one of the most dangerous elements in human existence: it is same as devastating fear. Happiness and fears are the worst worries of mankind. They are useless, absolutely good for nothing!

One day I was given the task of notifying relatives of prisoners of war who had died here in the camp, forwarded via prescribed channels: On this side and on the other side of the ocean and the seas. I saw the photos. The little that had to be sent back. - it saddened me. I paid the utmost attention to address and prisoner number, everything should and had to be exactly right.

However, the respective compassion which I packed into it would have been neither seen nor felt.

After a prisoner search, photos were handed in at our office. I looked at them. One photograph showed the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem, a high old wall, and some people in front of it.

Wailing Wall! How desolate it looked in its stone state. Not a work of art, for example, that exuded its magic on the environment, on the people who visited it. At the Wailing wall, the massive foundations of the temple built by Herod, where Jesus stayed, were preserved. The nine lower rows of the ancient outer wall are made of huge stone blocks, many of which measure 5.5 by 4.5 meters. "Master, behold, what manner of stones and what a building this is!" (Mark 13.1).

High ancient Wailing Wall of Jerusalem! Though not beautiful in shape and form, yet something special. Mankind spoke of you, everyone knew of you, that you were there, existent, and would probably continue to be there for a long time. Maybe forever!

How much suffering, prayers, thoughts, longings, despair - even hope - may have been absorbed and stored by your walls? How many? If you could give them all back, mankind would be surprised how tortured, how broken so many hearts have rushed to you to confide in you, to reveal their grief. To you alone! In silent or loud form of lamentations.

High, old, stony, lamented walls! Remain nothing more than what you were, what you are: The Wailing Wall of Jerusalem!

I was standing at the little Annahof train station, waiting for my train home. It was autumn and dahlias were blooming in the stationmaster's small wood-fenced garden.

In front of the garden stood a German guard, next to him a prisoner of war. He was Russian and no longer young in years. A full, ice-gray beard framed his round face. I got into a conversation with the guard. He told me that this Russian prisoner of war was here in Lamsdorf for the second time in his life: the first time during the First World War in 1914/18. He also knew a little German. I called him "Papa Russia". His kind eyes shone and got a wet glow. I felt unspeakably sorry for him, still in captivity at his age. He worked on a farm. Thus, his food was also secured. It relieved me immensely to hear and know this. His face radiated improbable goodness and a good measure of wisdom. I do not believe that I have ever seen a kinder face in all my later life. It was like a warming summer sun. And even today, a certain happiness emanates from those distant memories of that day at the small Annahof train station. Good old Russian, I hope you came home too! I wish it for you!

One day a sergeant entered our office. I saw him only for a short time, for a few moments, because I had to do something on duty and for this reason, I left our office. When I came back, that sergeant was no longer there, but there was talk about him and his fate. And it was already a fate - yes, a drama - which crystallized there, became audible. How many such dramas might there have been in those endless days of darkness and terror, where the individual could and was no longer allowed to be a human being, and had only to obey an apparatus of power without feelings, understanding, humanity?

I heard him say that he had been a Rhinelander, had just returned from his special leave and had to face the East again. At home he would have been bombed out and would have lost his wife and two children: To death.

He would have been assigned to a firing squad that liquidated Jewish children. The older prisoners, who were still able to work, would have to dig mass graves, and the children, often small ones, would have to present themselves undressed and then be shot from behind. He did not know what to do? If he went, it would slowly mean psychological death for him, if he did not go, search action, imprisonment, fortress, death battalion, shooting. In addition, his wife, his children dead, perished in a cruel and furious war. He was close to madness,

really did not know what to do. For the first time in my life, I heard about such terrible, inhuman actions.

All of us who heard his story did not know what that sergeant might have decided in the end in his situation, which seemed so terrible and hopeless.

Would he - how would he - have coped with his conscience to live on with such a high burden of guilt dictated to him by a merciless military machinery, should he not have resisted this order forced upon him? On my way to adulthood, I once read at home the book with the remarkable title.

"The Angel of Siberia."

The Angel of Siberia was a woman, the Swedish nurse Elsa Lindström, in immense service of charity to German prisoners of war in Siberian camps during and after World War I. One noon, sitting alone in front of my typewriter, I had to think of that book again. I longed for a reference to the actions of this so admirable and remarkable woman, Elsa Lindström. I would have loved to give similar help to prisoners, help to all who were suffering, regardless of their nationality. It was the person alone who counted, not the nationality. A beautiful, a great thought, but an undesirable one. One was not allowed to express it aloud, to make it heard. And help would have been so necessary. I think of the words of my former colleague Gundula, who used to work in an office here in the prison camp. One day, she told me about the teams of vans that carted out dead prisoners every morning at the seventh hour. They were Russians lying on top of each other, naked, arms and legs hanging out between the ladder rungs. I was horrified, Gundula certainly no less so. When more and more women moved in and had to do their duty here, the morning "seven o'clock" carting stopped. It will have been brought forward, probably to the fifth, sixth hour of the morning. They will have walked over lackluster, without human help. Suffering does not ask where the individual comes from, - comes from, death also does not ask about ancestral origins, or nationality. It is a natural phenomenon in this world of ours. And death was at home in Lamsdorf, - in fact, a lot of death. Ten thousand, - twenty thousand, fifty thousand, - or even more? I do not know. They were buried in mass graves in the military cemetery, which we called the Heroes Memorial

Cemetery, not buried, without names, without prayers, silent, lackluster. Here again showed the true, the brutal face of a war. Where were they buried, the numerous victims of a senseless event? ..... regardless of their nationality. Help!

We had been given access by an older sergeant. He sat in the same office as my colleague Maria. One day I had to write him. He told me that he had been a press stenographer at the Imperial government in Berlin. I did not write him often, but whenever I did, he urged me to become a press stenographer. "You will make it," he said confidently. That was tantamount to encouragement. Of course, the thought of it was tempting, and one day the war would be over and my service at the camp would have to be terminated. No matter how hard I tried in the weeks and months that followed to get the appropriate abbreviation booklets, I got none. Any effort to get them was futile. I also wanted to get my own typewriter. While Captain Metz found one for himself, I came up empty-handed in my efforts.

I had missed my early train. I had no choice but to go home again. But at 8:30 in the morning I would be at the station on time, as the second train was leaving to take me to the office. With this punctuality I had at the same time connected an oath, never to turn at the early morning hour so long at my hair curls.

Even before I could apologize for being late, the passage through the wall was opened, Major Brinkmann's face and his angry frown over the bridge of his nose became visible, and a thunderstorm was audible. It was only a short one, but it was quite violent. The blows certainly sat well and did not miss its purpose. Did I not know that we were all in the war effort, whether outside or here in the hinterland? I could not afford to be late again. And the wall door was pushed shut. This rebuke had sat, one had to give him that. This should not happen to me a second time, I swore. On that day, I avoided Major Brinkmann as best I could and as far as I could arrange it. It seemed to me that the Major was doing the same; but then a certain defiance also arose in me. "I had always done a good and clean job", I thought grimly, and to make such a fuss over a single late arrival? The same thing could happen to him at any time. One day, however, the dust settled. A newspaper report had also contributed.

A nephew of Sir Winston Churchill had been admitted to our prison camp. Not long after, a letter from Lady Churchill was sent to the camp administration, asking that her nephew be allowed to receive personal parcels with gifts of love on a regular basis. This request was not granted. The German answer was "No"! They did not want to roast or serve a so-called extra sausage to this prominent prisoner, even if it concerned here the nephew of the Great Sir Winston. He was not to profit from it.

The prisoners had decided to form theater groups within the camp to provide themselves with a little variety in the daily gray of the camp. Understandable! They were very capable in the production of wigs, masks, theatrical costumes, and tinsel dresses, as the frequent pictures of theater groups proved. One day the prisoners asked permission to invite us, the female civilian employees of this camp, to an upcoming theater performance. Again, the German response was a flat "No"!

Our so cozy Saxon office manager was replaced, once again. We got a new one. Rudi who came from Westphalia, was tall, light blond and super intelligent. He was an exceptionally hard worker, nothing was too much for him, nothing could frighten him. But he was also a great pedant. Outside the camp he was said to have had several love affairs, although he was married to a beautiful woman and the father of a little boy. But I cared little about all that, I heard it and did not hear it.

One day I heard the news that Stalin's son had been registered as a prisoner of war in the sub-camp. This meant long, tiring interrogations for him. How many could there have been? He would be neither domineering, nor ambitious, modest inside and out.

Jascha was a heating technology engineer, married, father of a little daughter. He was supposed to come to Berlin later. Thus, even the dictator of the Soviet Union, so powerful at the time and the undisputed master of the Kremlin, had his son serve a sentence cinsit with his mortal enemies, the Germans. It was not known whether he had to expect and would enjoy special treatment. Russia had not joined the Geneva Convention, and was not a member of that world organization.

Stalin's statement regarding a capture is said to have been: "Russia would have no prisoners of war in German custody and if there should be any, then they would only be enemies of the state, who would not serve his country, but would only harm it. He himself does not know of any prisoners." Not even his son? That would have been slander.

The British camp sheriff, a long-serving man in the British Army, a sergeant of his rank and reported to his government as sheriff of the large-scale prison camp, had a great deal of responsibility to bear, for calm, discipline and order were prerequisites for a smooth daily routine within the prison camp. It was also he who received respective Christmas and New Year's messages of His Majesty, King George VI, from the hands of the respective commandant of our camp, which was always a great day for the English. He usually passed our duty room several times a day, his legs always rocking back and forth as he stood. I did not see a more calm-thinking sheriff the entire time we were in camp. Though he also had his certain inner humor. This was especially evident in the frequent engagement and disengagement of his daughter Sally, who was on duty somewhere in Africa. Sally was once again engaged to be married. In this, she seemed to possess an incredibly special talent. Papa Sheriff attributed it to her excessive temperament; to her not yet consolidated inner personality. He acknowledged their respective engagements with a grinning smile in each case.

I was written off sick for several weeks by the doctor treating me, my heart once again causing me considerable worry. The illness held me in its embrace like firm arms of adenoids. Later, when I resumed my duties, a new civilian employee, still young in years, was sitting in our office. It was Alfred, who had just come from business school and was only 17 years old. He was supposed to relieve me. When Major Brinkmann heard the news of my illness, he was said to have uttered only one comment: "I guess she doesn't have much at the mill either!" Not a bit of sympathy, - nothing. Alfred was as calm in his nature as he was at work. Whenever his mother baked a cake at home, he would bring me some, saying: "My mother will send it to you! And she sent quite a lot in the short time that Alfred was with us: apple pie, poppy seed cake, cheesecake, and of course streusel cake. The latter could never be missing in Silesia. It was, so to speak, our

national cake. But Alfred did not stay with us for long, not beyond one summer. He was called up for labor service.

Interpreter Jahn again spent hours today inside the camp with the prisoners. There were rumors of an underground tunnel construction. It was his job to find this out. He was married to a Germano-Italian, a preacher's daughter, and had a small son who always said that Daddy would only earn his money so that Mommy could spend it again. He attended, like his wife, a boarding school in Lausanne/Switzerland during his junior years, where he met her. In his marriage only Italian was spoken. Although, as he always claimed, he was an atheist, he let his wife keep her faith and he also went to church with her once a year, to the so-called Christmas mass. She would appreciate that very much. Although already deep in middle age and with gout in his fingers, he wanted to turn his back on Germany after the end of the war, either to go to Australia or to Siberia. He probably meant the latter after Germany's final victory. He might still have gone to Siberia at the beginning of the year 1945, not however as a winner, but as a conquered one and perhaps never to return.

Sergeant Ross came from Poland, he was at home there, so to speak, thus, he was an ethnic German. When I once asked him about the relationship between Germans and Poles within the Polish Empire at that time, he said that it had been a good one, but only until the time before Hitler came to power in Germany. After that everything changed, it became worse and worse. People looked at the German with critical eyes. More and more, even then, believed to hear the distant boot kicks from Greater Germany.

Leonor and I had finished our service. Together we headed out of the camp, Gletch was still to meet up with Christel, before joining us. The road to the station led through a large, wooded area. With its many conifers, the birdsong, it offered us, so to speak, recreation on the way back. Often, a cute squirrel would be seen gyrating among the branches, and graceful dragonflies with transparent, clear wings, in which the daylight broke with its colors, flew over the mossy forest paths.

The summers of the East are almost invariably very warm and therefore very dry, at least that was how they had been in recent years. Little rain falls from the sky. The prisoners also benefited from this, but especially the British. Such warm summer days as here would of course be few and far-fetch on their windy, rainy island. If they were not at work, they sat in rows or in closed groups in front of the camp barracks on stools, chairs or even on the dry ground, some of them dozing, others laughing and chatting, the next ones reading or learning something. They praised these summer days in the most dazzling colors and several of them decided to stay here in the east of Germany after the end of the war. Of course, they had a completely different idea of what would happen to the East after the end of the Second World War. They could not have foreseen or known that, at least not to the full extent: the cession of the territory to Poland. They did not make the high politics; they were only involved in it here in an unpleasant way. Often the prisoners made the remark that we, the Germans, would probably lose this war, but they, the British, would lose their world empire.

Gregory, a very educated prisoner, a desert pilot from Africa, was once again in our service, raving about the beauties of his African homeland, about the free and unattached life he had enjoyed at home, except for his college visit to England. Gregory's parents owned a farm, a large sheep farm with thousands of lambs. Of course, there was work for them. But most of it was done by the "black man." As usual! He tended the sheep, sheared them, and on top of that was employed as a domestic staff.

On our way to and from the camp we often encountered squads of captured Russians. They were not housed in our camp, however, but in the camp next door. Their uniforms, if they had any, sat loosely on their bodies. Sometimes they were too big or too small for them. They might have been taken over from their fallen or deceased comrades. The badly, or not at all, shaved faces were covered by a pale skin, an emaciated skin. They were seriously marked by the very scarce food allotments. They greedily grabbed every cigarette butt thrown anywhere on the street, as well as every nail they found or anything else they thought was useful. One saw it, - bent down after it and had it. Around their shoulder always hung a carrying bag, a bag or something similar. Often even an old, patched sack.

They probably liked to use everything they found. Later, much later, the Germans supplied them with felt and paint and they made Christmas toys for our children: for German children, windmills with wide wings, nicely painted, wooden houses in the Russian dacha style and bicycle toys, and of course many other things. They also supplied us female civilian employees of the camp with sandals, wooden sandals, with crossed wide straps in front and straps around the back. Wood was familiar and handy to the Russians from their homeland. They may have loved it.

Maria was sick. She stayed away from work and at home for a few days. When she returned, she had difficulties. She was accused of unexcused absence. But that was not true. Coincidentally, I was in that office at the time when Maria was excused by phone. Had it been forgotten? Was it possible to forget something like that? Her alleged innocence was to be punished with a fine. That was when I "climbed up the palm tree", so to speak. For Maria's sake and for the sake of justice and honor. I wrote a letter to the camp commander stating that the accusation was wrong, that it was not true, since I was present in the outside office at the time the permission was granted to her via the telephone. This somewhat trivial matter seemed to have been swept under the table later, and the issue of a fine was no longer talked about.

It is insane to assume that Indians are only of small stature, of small body size, no, among them there were and are also true huge in shape and size. I have seen such tall figures with bronze faces and large eyes, their heads wrapped in white or red turbans. I literally jumped to the side when I once met such a troop, I was afraid of these men. This may have been due to the brown faces with the flexible dark brown eyes with which they looked at me closely. With Negroes, who were also in captivity with us and who marched past me, I did not have this feeling, there was no feeling of fear spreading inside. Well, we had more contact with people of black skin color, even if not personally. I think of my school days. On the windowsill stood a piggy bank, a missionary piggy bank, with a sitting negro-man on it, wrapped in a long white shirt, nodding gratefully when we children put in a penny, 5 pennies, or even less, or more.

In our camp the mortality of those Indians was usually more frequent than that among other nationalities, except for the Russians in the sub-camp. At least that was what I heard. So, every now and then I saw a black wooden coffin through one of the two windows of our office, which they carried to the Heroes' Memorial Cemetery. There all the deceased prisoners were buried. I absolutely disagreed inwardly with the black coffins in which the Indians were laid, but I told no one. Indians, in my opinion, should have been buried in bright coffins, bright like their homeland was with its eternal sunshine. And now they were resting in a black shrine. I did not like that at all.

Alma, a somewhat older interpreter, wanted to refresh the art of palmistry as well as the interpretation of destiny from the stars. I learned that she had lived in New York for years and earned her money there as a beautician. We also had some interpreters who had also spent long years in America, also a farmer from South America who had been there at that time joined us. The Greater German Reich had brought them all home to its borders. One day Alma complained to me that during a camp party, where it was known that she had mastered these arts and wanted to use them, only a few of the officers had found their way to her. Apparently, they did not think much of fortune interpretation, even the past could trace them back, but they did not want to know anything about that. "Who knows," said Alma, "what these all have to hide?" That was why they shied away from her. Later, Alma was to have her own way. One day I was offered to go to lunch in the officers' mess, where all the interpreters were present over lunch. Until then, it had always been enough for me to eat the butter or sausage sandwiches I had brought from home. "Officers' mess?!" ran through my head. Did they want to press me into a finer mold? But I did not go and continued to stick to my humble sandwiches. Again, another day, at another street ballad, I was given a meal ticket by a female civilian employee. She was not eating in the so-called officers' mess, but simply with the enlisted men, next to an unknown soldier. Expecting that I might be served noodle soup with beef, which I loved to eat, I made my way to the food barrack. And I was lucky: There was indeed thick, hot noodle soup, in which the pieces of meat were swimming happily. So, my going there was also worthwhile. But I should not have rejoiced too soon. I sat on

a long bench in front of some long table. I sat down in such a way that I had no other eater on either side, I wanted to be alone. At the long table, isolated soldiers were sitting, also to the side of it. The steaming noodle soup tasted excellent. I must have emptied my bowl about halfway, when I heard a clearing of the throat, a scratching, a cough, and immediately a soldier spat out a blob of soup in the middle of the table. In view of this spat out blob of soup I did not want to eat any more, I had lost my appetite. I took my bag and left the barracks. I did not want to receive another meal ticket as a gift.

A tunnel had been discovered inside the prison camp. Where a tunnel was dug into the ground, there were also escape intentions of individual prisoners. For days, the search was on for other underground passages. Counting valves were switched off. There was a great deal of tension in the camp. Where did the prisoners want to escape to? To Czechoslovakia, which was not too far away, or eastward to Poland? Probably! For there they would certainly have been kept hidden and helped along. As I remember today only very weakly, one spoke at that time only of a successful escape attempt of that period, which truly led to the goal of the set dreams and desires. A message from England was the price for this escape incident.

Once again, we had an extremely hot, almost unbearable summer day. The heat weighed down on every room, here as elsewhere. We did not really know how to get rid of it until our office manager had the idea of splashing a few buckets of cool water on the floor. The idea was soon followed by action. Now the wooden floor had got its watering trough. I slipped my sandals off my bare feet and sat barefoot in front of my typewriter, my feet in a small puddle. That was a relief! The windows had been covered with newspapers because of the glaring sunlight. Thus, it happened that mostly a "Völkischer Beobachter" hung upside down in front of one of the windows and a possible victory report that appeared in it was literally upside down, without having a certain belittling intention.

"It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go.....", the prisoners of war should have sung on their way to work. But their throats remained closed, had to remain closed.

That was not the case for the Germans, whose squad just marched past our barracks with Rosemarie's song on their lips. "It was so nice to be a soldier, Rosemarie, not every day brings sunshine, Rosemarie ....."

I was on my way to the duty station. A troop of Cypriots marched past me, fine-boned figures, not tall in stature, with dark hair and brunette faces whose evenness stung me directly. They would certainly miss their island home behind the barbed wire, just as all the other prisoners probably missed it, and could only remember it from afar, here and there, and everywhere, wherever they might be, depending on their own sensibilities and peculiarities.

Rittmeister Bönisch (Calvary Captain Bönisch) was angry at me. This was to be and lasted for a long time. I had tipped a bowl of dirty water from washing my hands out of the window, poured it out unceremoniously, onto the heads of the flowers. In our camp, we had no washroom or washing facility with running water in front. So, the hand cleaning was done by means of a wash bowl, which stood on a wooden stool in the long camp aisle in front of the carving tables. Under it a bucket with clean water, beside it one with dirty water. The latter was so full that day, right up to the edge and threatened to overflow at the slightest touch. How could I have tipped the bowl of dirty water in front of me into it? So, the water landed on a flower bed directly under the window. However, the above-mentioned cavalry captain, in fact, his soldiers, was responsible for the water supply and removal. But they had failed to perform their duty on that day and should certainly have received a decent rebuke for it.

Captain Dakers, a Methodist clergyman from Melbourne, Australia, had once again taken a seat on one of our wooden chairs in our office. He came to us quite often, to the Germans, who should have been his enemies. But Captain Dakers knew no enemy image, he had not made one of this kind, had not created one, and would never have one around him, he did not tolerate it. He loved all people of this earth, no matter what skin color and nationality they were and might be. He loved and respected the people. The love was for him order and commandment. Love - , nothing but love he wanted to bring to the people,

otherwise life would be meaningless for him, pointless "if it were up to him", he affirmed, "there would be no genocide, no war".

At that time, however, the love, respect, and dignity of mankind in Germany was in a kind of bad shape. In the land of poets and thinkers. How could we have slipped so low, so unspeakably low? Are there any words left? Guilty! The great peoples' multiplication table should be love, love for one another, peace with one another!

Again, we got a new colleague: Friedericke. Across from our office she was admitted. Friedericke came from Upper Silesia and spoke good Czech. Most of the time she had to process escape reports of Russians who had fled. Russians fled proportionally more than Englishmen, mostly they broke out of work commands.

I was on standby duty on the telephone over lunch. Sometimes Marla kept me company, i.e., when she was not riding her bicycle home. She lived not far from the camp. Hard work, almost no work was to be done during an on-call duty. Except for escape reports, the wire did not exactly run hot. Of course, sometimes a file was searched to see how far it had been processed.

The POW camp had a new commandant, an SS officer. I never thought that I would make his acquaintance at some point. But this one was not long in coming. On a gloomy Saturday afternoon, Gundula and I were standing on the small station forecourt at Annahof, waiting for the passenger train that was to take us home, when the figure of the camp commandant appeared. He already knew Gundula, who was on duty in the commandant's barracks only 3 rooms away from him, but he did not know me. When he joined us, I introduced myself with my name. I had hardly spoken it when he inquired in a military tone whether I was a Czech. My family name was of Czech origin. Of course, I denied this question since I was of German nationality like him. During the Third Reich, a stamp with a Hanakian folk costume was put into postal circulation. Possibly it was only through this that the commandant was made aware of my name.

Major Brinkmann dictated to me mood reports of the prisoners within the camp and the work detachments. In general, these were almost always kept the same, i.e., when nothing out of the ordinary was happening. The prisoners received

their regular meals, which were great indeed. In addition, the many care gifts that passed through the camp on a regular basis further enriched the food and kitchen list. Here in the camp, one adhered to the Geneva Convention in all situations and incidents of a prisoner's life. These mood reports were forwarded via the Breslau military district to the responsible and competent ministry in Berlin. The general mood of the prisoners was also documented by the lines they wrote home, which could be read from them. The postal surveillance officer had to record the general mood and transmit it in due course to the Ic, our department.

Representatives of the Swiss International Red Cross had arrived. This meant additional work for quite a few responsible Stalag officers. For me, too. I had to go to the large officers' room to write. A stenograph pad with shorthand written on both sides was sometimes not enough in one day to record complaints, deficiencies, and their elimination. I took dictation from all sides, each of the officers contributed his share, and I even had to record the interwoven sentences from the delegation. Military Attache, Beyer, was always a friendly, considerate man when he noticed that my fingers were beginning to strike and were barely able to hold the pencil. Then the dictation was interrupted for a few minutes. My hand had rest and could recover in the intervening break. It was also he who always greeted me in the morning most cordially, of course, as it probably belonged to a German-speaking Swiss: With "' Gruß Gott!" Grüß Gott, Fräulein!"

It could also happen that after the Swiss Red Cross had finished its inspection of the camp, the Swedish delegation followed immediately. The Swedes, usually of a stiffer nature than the Swiss, were correct but more inaccessible. Then it was again a matter of taking shorthand notes for me, the old deficiencies, often not yet eliminated and repaired, were reissued, certainly not to the delight of the officers responsible for this. I had sometimes hoped that Morris, the Scottish courier within our camp, would one day also show up with his tartan skirt, but nothing of the sort happened. Morris did not do me that favor. Rather, with his cool glacial eyes, he appraised me as coolly as was probably in keeping with his nature.

"-----Leader command, we follow you!"..... At that time, victory was still being won on all fronts. Prisoners were brought in. More and more they passed through the large camp gates. More German guards also had to go into action, standing at the gates, continually searching the larger carriages rolling in and out of the camp for any fugitives hidden inside, for civilian clothes intended to be smuggled into the camp, or for secret messages with information on it, which were indeed found from time to time. Often, even most of the time, it was difficult to determine who was the author, the real messenger, the prisoners stuck together, we, the Germans, were after all their enemies.

We had no office glue or paste, you name it. Soldiers, who usually brought it, were not there either. So, I had the task of fetching some myself. For this purpose, I had to go to a prisoner's barracks inside our advance camp. It was not far from ours. I had the glass paste pot in my hand - or rather an empty jam jar - and was just about to step through the barrack door when it was torn open from the inside. I did not go, no, I literally flew into the interior of this room. If a prisoner had not stopped me, I would have landed very roughly on the floor, fallen lengthwise. Stuttering, I expressed my wish. "Can I have a glass of glue, please?" "Can I have a glass of glue, please?" which made me giggle and the prisoners burst out laughing. Next time, should this be needed, I would know how to step through that camp door: that is, slowly and carefully.

"----- no beautiful country - no better country - at this time, than like ours far and wide"..... Yes, that was true, at least in those moments of that time. We civilian employees had a bottle. Since Leonor was going to celebrate her engagement at that time, she asked me to give her my allotment, which I did. Leonor was supposed to be even happier with this bottle of champagne as a gift, as she already was in those moments.

One day she told me - of course under the seal of strictest secrecy - that there was a staff doctor here in the camp who would not immediately write to each of the soldiers assigned to him kv - fit for war. He was a devout Christian and was, so to speak, in a real moral dilemma. Therefore, as far as it is possible for him, he

transfers them: to one of his professional colleagues. It would have been inconceivable if this had come out, but we remained silent.

Sergeant Günther was always in such a hurry to get out of our barracks at noon, which was immediately noticeable. So, one day I took the liberty of promptly sewing both sleeves of his coat shut, to the amusement of all the other soldiers present, of course. Only much later - after a long investigation - I confessed to him that I was the culprit. This funny joke was laughed about for a long time in our office. But I did not allow myself such a joke - or a similar one - a second time. The idea of tightening the sleeves did not come from me, it was supplied by another employee, only that I put it into practice.

Summer of 1942! A freight train of prisoners had arrived. It came from the Channel coast. The battle for Dieppe had been fought there: in our favor. Many Allied prisoners had been brought in. Now they were standing in the small station, waiting to enter the prison camp. All our only available forces, soldiers, were mustered to ensure that the search and registration process went as quickly and smoothly as possible. Our barracks looked empty, half of it was deserted, only we civilian employees, female clerks, and interpreters, performed our services. They were put on wagon columns and dropped off at the side of the prison camp: on the Lamsdorfer Heide. It was a glorious warm day with sunshine and bright blue skies. More and more prisoners rolled in, and the heath was continually filled up with these so desolate looking figures. Now the first troops came marching up, - the second, - the third. They passed the sign house, the barrier that had been raised especially for them.

I thought that I had made a mistake, but it was reality. A large part among them entered our prison camp in their shirts, in their white undershirts and wearing nothing over them, on their heads the flat steel helmet, many limping under it, and some of them supported. It was already a rather bleak sight, which offered itself there to the eye. Somehow, I was ashamed of this picture, the entry of the almost naked Dieppe people into German captivity. However, one consolation remained in those days, -at least in our office it was like that: the certain euphoria was absent.

My typewriter was carried into the big officers' office. As it happened, it was always carried by a soldier from our service. I was dictated a Confidential message, according to which oil spills was sold off the coast of England. Oil pots that had been pumped up with seawater would go up in flames during the German invasion of the island.

It coincided with that time when more and more dugouts were being built against splinter and bombing protection at our camp. Air raids were expected to cover the Upper Silesian industrial district. On the IG-Farben, which had built a large factory in the former Heydebreck, and of course also on the Upper Silesian cities with their coal mines. These were worthy targets for the task forces of the British Air Force. One day, an air raid alarm sounded, and we were in the so-called dugouts, when a violent detonation became audible and shook the air, Calvary Captain Bönisch thought that a bomb must have fallen, to which Captain Metz replied: "Bönisch, then it would no longer be standing there," whereupon a general laughter became audible.

Gundula's sister, Heidi, who had just come from a girls' Lyceum, also found a job at this camp, not directly with us in the barracks camp, but next door. Many of our female civilian employees also lived there.

One day there was a report that Alma, the somewhat older interpreter, had been caught reading foreign mail. She was to be put on trial. Alma reacted allergically to this by also filing a complaint, according to which the morals among the officers in the local camp were not always flawless when it came to the female entourage. Naturally, a trial ensued - a protracted one - which lasted for months. Soldiers were called in as witnesses, one summoned by this military unit, the other again by that one. There was incessant whispering about it.

Private Blüm had to search prisoners again. In the case of smaller groups, who came either to work detachments or from labor detachments, this search usually took place in our barracks corridor.

The camp's SS-Commander was relieved and a new one was appointed to us. He was an Austrian from Styria and a landowner. Soon after, Leonor was to become the commandant-interpreter. She was assigned her own small office in our

barracks. Whether she was envied by her colleagues because of her special position, I do not know, but it could easily have been the case, if not publicly, then perhaps secretly. I begrudged her this opportunity for advancement from the bottom of my heart. Leonor had mastered her subject, had graduated from high school, and was of an unusual kindness. In addition, she was incredibly good-looking. Leonor was not proud of her new rank. One day she told me that that day she had read a particularly beautiful letter; An Israeli mother wrote to her imprisoned son that she knew that much evil and injustice would happen, but that despite everything her son should follow the Germans and never attempt to escape. At that time Israel was still a British mandate territory. She would pray for him every night that one day, when the time came, he would be able to return to her, we wondered whether there was a difference between Jewish and German motherly love? In the end, love remains what it really is: love! Nothing but love!

Gundula had a colleague at work whose fiancé had fallen in the East after a short home leave. They wanted to marry. Since there was to be an offspring, she had herself married in a civil ceremony for the sake of the expected child: alone and without a groom. That was permitted in those days.

Today, again in the early afternoon, a gas alarm was to be tried. In the morning, there were talks about it. When I heard this news, my mood dropped to a certain zero point in no time. I sat sullenly in front of my typewriter and wished that that afternoon had already come and gone. I did not like gas alarms, in fact I hated them. Now the time had come. The siren howled and quickly we went to the bunker with our gas masks on. One would be in it for a while. Running gave me a tremendous palpitation.

In a moment we too would be prisoners, prisoners of that "bunker, although not comparable to the real prisoners of war. Only for a short period of time, but even that seemed long enough. I wanted to get out of the bunker and looked through the gas mask window towards the exit. I just had to wait for the right moment when the exit would be free and there would be no guard in the immediate vicinity. I succeeded. When I stepped through the door of the bunker, I saw two or three other girls from our camp who, like me, also did not want to endure this

gas alarm to the end. Individual prisoners of war had observed this process inside their camp fence. But since gas alarms were also monitored from outside, we always had to run around the bunker, sometimes even run, to avoid being caught by the guards. The prisoners helped us by showing us the direction we had to run, and it was always right.

During that time, the British shot down an airplane that was once again flying into the Upper Silesian industrial area to bomb it. This shooting had not directly taken place on us, but in the proximity. The pilot had parachuted into our camp, lying almost in front of our office door, bleeding from behind, the parachute still gruffly on his back. He asked for a cigarette. Private Blüm put it in his mouth. He was taken to a hospital in Neisse. In my opinion, he had been lying around with us for far too long.

A major train accident had occurred near the small station of Annahof. A military train had collided with a passenger train. The lines were closed for hours. I sat at our station and waited for my morning train, just like the many others. But in vain. It became noon - a train did not come. That was when I decided to go home. Who knows when and if there would be another one today. But in the late afternoon they passed by our house again. At that time, many military trains, open freight cars with tanks, guns of smaller and larger types, drove along our railroad line. Often for days and even at night. Then we knew for sure that somewhere in the East, another big offensive against the Russians would be launched.

I had finished work and was on my way to the station, as always, in the company of others. A troop of prisoners met us, marched past us. Suddenly I noticed that a prisoner put something on my shoulder, on my left shoulder. I let this "something" fall off. We were not allowed to accept anything from prisoners of war, that was forbidden to us. The prisoner himself might have meant well; it would also have been conceivable that he knew me by sight. But a young woman who went with us thought quite differently. She picked up this gift with the remark that she had a sick child at home, her child, and that this half bar of chocolate would be perfect for her.

In Teschen/Upper Silesia, a branch camp for prisoners of war had been established. As a result, many of our prisoners were relocated there. Our main camp had long since become too cramped and too small. It was bursting at the seams. Some of the guard personnel, civilian employees and officers also moved from there, among them Major Brinkmann. Also Gundula, who was married in the meantime. She wanted to be closer to her husband, who was based in a large city in Upper Silesia, in this way. That was understandable.

The Ic had gotten a new boss: Major Bach. He was tall, had a high, light forehead, his head hair was thinned. He was friendly, courteous, human. I immediately sensed that there would be good work and a good living with him, which was the case. In the meantime, our chief of staff had also been dismissed, and we had been given a new one. I already knew him from the PÜ room, he had been an interpreter there. After the somewhat strict Rudi, I was indeed quite glad that a new appointment of that kind had been made. Corporal Friedrich - later Sergeant Friedrich - was a high school teacher in his civilian profession and lived in a small town in Oderbruch but was a native from Berlin; Major Bach was also a teacher. In general, the Ic had a steady influx of teaching personnel. The Ic - defense seemed to be their destiny here in Lamsdorf.

Captain Dakers was a welcome "guest" - i.e., prisoner - of our service. He was loved here because of his pronounced humanity. And Major Bach, as well as Sergeant Friedrich, were also human. A good, extremely positive relationship developed with Interpreter Janßen. Although he - as he himself claimed - was only an atheist. Mister Dakers, on the other hand, a man of the church and faith, got along extremely well. Sometimes Interpreter Janßen brought books, books of views of "Beautiful Germany", which Mr. Dakers then looked at in our office. Once there was also talk of a suspension as senior clergyman within our main camp. To my knowledge, they suggested an Englishman for the eventual replacement. He was tall and a dark type and had once been in our Ic office. It was easy to imagine that Captain Daker's often repeated visits to our office might have incurred the displeasure of his fellow prisoners. But this contributed to mutual understanding between peoples, and this was so necessary! At a time when everyone seemed to hate each other.

Once Mr. Dakers also spoke about Australia being a huge country, and that many Germans could be allowed to immigrate there. Consider that not all Germans consisted only of bad and violent people, at a time when so much violence and treachery was happening.

Once, when a large pair of tailor's scissors was lying on one of our office tables and Mister Dakers was with us again and saw them, he said that he was not allowed to touch them, because scissors that had already been touched would only bring misfortune to a particular tailor's house. At that time, I was astonished that the same thing was said in the fifth continent of our earth as it was at home. There, too, people had the same opinion.

Mister Dakers usually wore his huge trapper's hat on his head, decorated with a long, wonderful ostrich feather that always bobbed back and forth so wonderfully when he walked. Once, when it was back on our desk, I mentally measured my body length with that huge hat length or hat brim. Since I am of small stature, I did not need to measure around much.

Christmas of 1943 was approaching. One planned to organize again a Christmas celebration. This time I wanted to take part in it and not lock myself out of it, as I had done the year before.

One day, Friedericke complained to me about something. Her boyfriend wanted to know little or nothing about her. But what is one supposed to do when a friend threatens to go rogue? Well, Friedericke seemed to want to know.

"You make a poem, and I will deliver a plump, fat Christmas goose," she said to me one day. Well, she could have the poem, but I knew right from the start that any love effort would be in vain. The goose may have tasted good to him, but the much desired and hoped-for return was not forthcoming, which was also to be expected. Well, Friedericke was young, she would cope with it. Later, she also reported for work in Teschen. Other girls who were sent to work in our camp had almost the same problems as Friedericke. It was the time for the many Lilli-Marlens who stood there in the evening in front of the big gate, next to or under a lantern, waiting for their compatriot. While the soldiers mostly thought only of a

short temporary amusement, the girls were inclined to strive for firmer ties, and even often thought of marriage.

Poetry, romance, and longing could also develop during this difficult time of war. One only needed to think of the song that was sung in and out of the country, even to the front, - and perhaps especially there - "Homeland, your stars, they shine for me even in the farthest country", which may have brought a tear of emotion to the eye of many a soldier, even the most hardened. A tear of longing. Not only the soldier on the Volga beach, no, even the soldier, who kept watch for his fatherland somewhere in the great loneliness of the infinite expanses of Russia, might have longed like the operetta "The Tsarevich" for some angel, perhaps for his mother, wife, lover, who always understood him, or even the faithful farm dog, who had to stay behind somewhere in the homeland and just like him, longed for him, but could not be with him. At that time that song was probably the song of all songs.

A few days before Christmas, our Christmas party was to take place. I therefore put on the best of my dresses from my closet at home: It was cornflower blue and had a white lace insert in the front, with a matching Peter Pan collar over it, a white knitted vest, a so-called Viennese jacket with embroidery.

This Christmas party went exactly as all the other Christmas parties had gone before. We ate, drank, though not much, and gave everyone a Christmas bag. The song of the Holy Night was sung, as well as the song of the snow and other festive songs. One looked at the baking candlelight of the Christmas tree, smelled the candle wax and was content. At least in those moments. There was a war, there were bad things, and there could be much worse things, and everyone present there was aware of that. By this time next year, who would still be able to sit so peacefully next to each other in golden-red candlelight? Nobody could know, not even if there would be a next Christmas for all of us!

Christmas, - humanity, Christmas, - brotherhood, Christmas - star events, Christmas - peace! And after? What came after? Again disunity, strife, inhumanity, conflagration and fighting? Did we not appreciate any other way,

could we not do it differently, did we know no other way? A game of questions without answers.

Before this Christmas party began, I had another experience. An experience that was not exactly pleasant. I wanted to freshen up, tidy my hair and so on, and for this purpose I went to a toilet inside our camp. I put white nail polish on my fingernails and began to dry them. Then it happened: the lock of my wristwatch must have opened at that moment; it slipped off my hand and flew directly into the drain of the toilet. I was speechless. To know that my hard-earned one hundred and twenty reichsmark watch was in the toilet pot was not exactly pleasant for me. Of all places, did it need to fall in there? Panic-stricken, I left the toilet and fled to a group of girls standing around in the corridor. I also found Maria.

I told her about my misfortune, my bad luck, which I had just suffered, yes, I literally spouted it out, whereupon a tremendous concert of laughter became audible. Loud and in all keys. Together we went to the toilet, and everyone had a look at the watch lying there so peacefully in the shimmering water. Was it still ticking at all? I did not want to take it out, nor did the others. I should not have expected it from them either. At some point, however, I saw Pauli and told him what had just happened. Pauli wanted to help me. He looked for a stick and fished my wristwatch out of the toilet with it. He also had the kindness to clean it in the hand basin. Of course, it was no longer ticking, it might have probably swallowed too much water. Private Pauli wanted to have it taken the next day to a camp prisoner who could repair watches. I had already taken her to that prisoner once before during my stay here. Only one had to wait longer time to get it back. But good Pauli would do it. The Christmas party was coming to an end. I secretly escaped from the large festive room. I wanted to dare to walk the path through the forest alone, unaccompanied, even if it almost sent a shiver down my spine. I wanted to be strong. Maria would ride her bike home, the other girls were almost all asleep in the camp, they had their rooms there. In the back the light of the headlights, in front of me the darkness of the night, under my feet the hard-frozen earth and snow on top of it, crunching under the soles of my boots. "The forest shone for Christmas!", exactly as we had sung about it during the

celebration. I might have covered about a good quarter of the journey, then suddenly I began to feel fear, but quite miserably and already wanted to go back. However, I said to myself, in the meantime all those present at the Christmas party would no longer be there, but in their barracks rooms. Therefore, I bravely walked on. By the time I would have gone past the Heroes' Memorial Cemetery, I would have covered a great deal of the distance," so I thought at that moment. "Then only take the bend and from afar, the little station will already be visible." When I finally saw the sparse illumination of the station, I somewhat leaped in excitement. A hundredweight load seemed to have been lifted from my heart at that moment, which had already been playing a special kind of drumbeat from the outset of this journey. It was only at that time that I slowed down my pace. I did not have to wait long for the night train. The way to my parents' house was not a long one. That night I did not even pass the station barrier but jumped over the railroad tracks and ran past our large, long wooden yard as if it were being ravaged by furies, provided the light of the station mast lamps was still burning. Afterwards, it would be in complete darkness again. I only came to rest when I was standing in front of our apartment door. That night I had accomplished something, I thought to myself. Something quite big, almost like a "heroic deed". Never in my life had I been out alone at such a late hour, let alone walking through a wooded area, and this would probably never had occurred if I had not stumbled into that office of all places and a Christmas party had taken place. I knew that there would never be another solo crossing of this forest for me.

Shortly before Christmas, also this year, the already familiar "British camp fever" broke out again. It seemed to go around, to capture man for man. People were waiting for the King's Christmas and New Year message. Such a message, such an event, meant a lot, if not everything, to the English. As is well known, the British were and are loyal to their Royal House. In the majority! They respect and appreciate the Royals. This "fever" would not subside until the message was read and then posted for all to see. I would probably have to transcribe the English text of this message onto a matrix, as I had done the previous year, so that copies could be sent to the respective work commands, which was also the case.

One winter day a prisoner said that he would only make fire in the big barrack stove, the only one of our post, for the writing Lady - for me, but the German soldiers could freeze and freeze to death for all he cared.

It was noon! Rittmeister Bönisch had locked his post office and handed the key to our office. I stood by the large, tiled fireplace and warmed myself, but immediately noticed from his behavior that he was carrying something on his mind. He stood there and looked down for a few seconds at his shiny embroidery lace. Rittmeister Bönisch had the habit of clearing his throat before he began to speak. So also, this time. He was still angry with me from last summer because of the water bowl I poured on the flower beds outside under the window of our camp barracks, or more precisely, the dirty water bowl. Now he wanted to reconcile, which was fine with me. It did not suit me for a long time, always, if it could be arranged, to "give it a little berth" around him. Now that would change. I was happy about it.

One afternoon a dashing officer entered our office room and asked that I be allowed to write something for him, as he himself had no strength of his own to do so. Of course, Major Bach granted him the permission. He had this unmistakable Viennese dialect about him and was also from the Danube metropolis. "A real Austro-Hungarian officer of the old Danube monarchy," it went through my head. As if cut out of a picture book. He was polite, courteous, and charming. He was also the one who persuaded me not to travel in the third class of the railroad, but to go from then on in the second class. So far, however, the third class had always been enough for me. Of course, riding in the second class was already more pleasant and the upholstered seats were soft. Leonor had been using them for a long time and Gundula had done the same before, only Christel and I had remained backward in this respect.

At that time, quite a few camp officers who were strangers to me found their way to my typewriter, even the British camp sheriff, of course only with permission.

One day, it must have been in the summer of 1943, internees were brought to our camp, mostly elderly or even old people. To imagine that they were not yet sent home was incomprehensible to some of us. Why were they kept here when they

were not really prisoners of war? What was more, not even was these people's age taken into consideration. Was there any consideration at all? Probably none!

A troop of prisoners had started to move, they were to be taken to a work detachment. Two guards were walking beside them. I was off duty and, like the prisoners, wanted to leave the camp as well. I, of course, wanted to leave voluntarily, but one of the prisoners did not. He wanted to remain in the camp, probably according to the motto: "What you have, you know, but what you get, you don't! Suddenly he refused to leave. I heard loud voices behind me and turned around. I saw the German guard with his rifle butt running towards the prisoner of war, he wanted to hit him. I still believe that my loud cry at that time spared the prisoner the certain piston blow. He was heard. Major Bach then opened the office window and asked me why I had shouted. I told him what had happened instantaneously. The prisoner squad was then stopped, and the sentry was ordered to the major. The next day I inquired about the outcome of that incident. It had ended satisfactorily, I was told. Did it really end satisfactorily? Despite his protests, the prisoner had to go to the ordered work assignment.

For a long time, it was not always the case - not even in a prison camp where many nationalities lived together - that every day was full of explosive, exciting news, no, there were also weeks of complete sameness, of complete uniformity, where nothing happened at all. Nothing significant, nothing exciting. Each day took its course, was accepted as it was and perhaps according to the motto: "No news means, Good News! Then again, a change occurred. So again, one day: Dutchmen were brought in, Dutch officers, twenty-five in number. I remember this very well, because on that day I had to write twenty-five interrogations, which interpreter Jahn dictated into the typewriter, while a New Zealand prisoner sat opposite me: dark, and like a Maori. They were almost all the same height, blond and blue-eyed. That was what you saw when they looked at you. They had attended the military academy in Breda, Holland, and had come from an arriving prisoner transport train.

The prisoner-of-war report was due. On Monday, he had to be in Berlin. It was Saturday, Saturday noon. While the signed letter was already lying there ready to

go, there was still no sign of the actual mood report. They talked about it but did not act by dictating the appropriate lines to me. Instead, I was just sent back and forth. Captain Metz referred me to Captain Böhnisch, Captain Böhnisch referred me back to Captain Metz, who, he thought, was solely responsible for this matter, but Captain Metz claimed the opposite. Finally, both officers had left and would not be available for that Saturday. I, however, had missed my afternoon train that was supposed to take me home. I sat brooding in front of my typewriter, alone in the large camp barracks. "What now?", I pondered. Should I finish this myself? I was divided with those thoughts. Finally, I decided to act on my own. Yes, I would write it myself. Since I had always written mood reports so far, I knew how they should be written. And there were no special incidents within our camp, so, I could indeed proceed according to the famous Schmea "F". I was not satisfied until I had sealed the double envelopes and registered the letter in the registration book. The next train would take me home at 4:30 p.m. and the post office would not close until 6:00 p.m., so I still had enough time to deliver it there myself.

Monday morning! Captain Metz seemed to be in a particular hurry on this one, because he had never actually appeared as early as he did that morning, not that I had ever seen. Well, the due mood report, which would have to be in Berlin already today, may have caused him a certain nightmare during the night, even if the lines remained almost always the same. In a panic, he had opened the admission door of the wall, barely stammered a greeting, but immediately remembering the mood report and asked me into the officers' room with writing utensils. I just smiled, looked at him a little longer than usual, and finally said that this had been sent out long ago. "What - how?!" - he said in astonishment. Thereupon I told him my whole tragedy which I had suffered on Saturday", which actually led me to the decision of drafting the mood report and even also sending it. He looked irritated at me, and finally asked for the copy of the report, read it and said in the dry manner that was inherent in him: "Miss ....., you are a bitch, a little bitch, but the report is good.

Was it civil courage, was it injured vanity that led me to that step? Well, I think it was both.

Where young people are together, ideas fall. There can be laughter, - there is laughter. I had brought along an already discarded and much too small, knitted vest, which I wanted to somehow convert. Only for which purpose, I did not know yet. We looked at this, in the color medium blue, and still quite well-preserved knitting and did not know what we should do with it. Then I had the idea to cut mittens out of it, big mittens for the winter, although it was only summer. Thought, - done! The gloves were cut, and I had brought red wool with me. They were in my straw bag, as well as a thick sewing needle with a large eye. Now my sewing work could begin. I had hardly started the first stitches when Captain Dakers appeared in our office. Until then, he had always seen a writing German in this room, but now he saw a sewing one. He looked at my mittens, which were cut much too large, and which I would later change at home, and said that German women and girls were the most industrious on earth. We all felt flattered by these words. The gloves, however, served us well during the winter days.

One day we were told that we would now have to work on Sundays as well: in turn, which I did not like at all. It was the time when they started digging trenches. One day I expressed my displeasure at this to Major Bach, who replied that there were much worse things than having to be here on Sundays, which he may well have been right. On weekdays I liked to be here in the camp and to do my work as well.

The time of total war had begun. Accordingly, each of our performance should be top-notch. One afternoon I was summoned to see the camp commander. What was I supposed to do with him? I already suspected nothing good and knew in advance what he wanted to allude to. And so, it was. He would see me every day after 16.00 o'clock in the afternoon with the bag in the hand strolling in the direction of the station, he said, whether it had escaped me that we were in a total war? Total here would also mean longer service. Now I had to take another rebuke during my stay in the camp, how many more would follow? I had to get up every day in the morning at quarter past 5 a.m., was in my office at a quarter past 7:00 a.m., in all weathers, was on duty over noon, if necessary, and in the opinion of the local commandant should sit in front of the typewriter until 6:30 p.m., at the least every second Sunday included. That was too much for me. I virtually

rebelled against it and wanted to request a termination of my service relationship in writing, which I did a few days later. Even before that, I had once debated with a staff physician about my length of service here. He believed it was long enough and expressed concerns about an extension. I decided to go to my doctor and get a written certificate about my heart condition. I wanted to enclose this with my letter of resignation.

Calvary Captain Bönisch had it in for me again. "Pst!- Enemy is listening!" These four words were literally hammered into the Germans at that time. They were present everywhere. So also, here! But even more: referring specifically to the camp's office, - "sieht mit, könnte auswerten" (looking along, could evaluate). The Prisoner-of-War mail! Therefore, over noon the barrack should be locked. Now question which arose in me was, where should I go in this time? Yes, nobody really knew. I put up with this a few times and left the camp barracks like the others. Only between me and them there was a certain difference. Since almost all of them came from outside, they also had their rooms within the campground. They could visit their rooms at noon, but I could not. And I did not want to impose myself on anyone. So, I finally refused to leave our office during those hours. I also informed our office manager, Mr. Friedrich, of this. He was on my side. One day, Sergeant Friedrich was still present in our office, also in Major Bach's officers' room, when Captain Bönisch passed our office again with the key in his hand, Sergeant Friedrich abruptly opened the small wall door and asked Major Bach to clarify the matter. Even today I remember the words that were spoken at that time: "I would not be the Captain's employee, over whom he could dispose freely, but only those of the Ic. And since I would also be writing G-affaires, I would have the right here to continue to stay in the barracks over noon. "Jawohl Herr Major, - jawohl Herr Major!" (Yes, Mister Major, - yes, Mister Major), Captain Böhnisch took note of this. Now I had my ancestral place back. That was all I wanted.

One day, Interpreter Jahn told me that he could buy a farm near Freiburg in Breisgau, plus a small donkey for each purchase, since the farm would be in a remote location. He had 5,000 Reichsmark in his wallet. Should he buy or should he not buy? He asked my opinion on the matter. I encouraged him to buy. And he

also bought the building, and the gray donkey was added. Bombs would probably not fall on a mining site.

The air raids on Upper Silesia had also increased in our country. They became more and more intense and powerful. The prisoners in our camp were extremely worried. But somewhat spiteful voices said, why this excitement among them? after all, it would be their 'brothers' who were throwing them down from the sky. Deadly brothers

I often avoided them, hid behind the office closet, or crawled under a desk and let myself be locked in the camp barracks.

Leonor had once again made it a point to listen to English news in her small office. While she turned the radio knob, I stood guard outside the office door.

Graudenz fortress! These two words alone could send a shiver down your spine: up and down. Graudenz Fortress, located in the east, - the infamously known! Graudenz meant imprisonment, strictly isolated imprisonment with all its terrible manifestations, unbearable for the individual who was sentenced to the gray fortress imprisonment. Not only Germans, who in the eyes of the rulers of that time no longer served "their" cause, who had become renegades in any way, could be sentenced to imprisonment, no, it was not enough for them, even foreigners were given this "prison sentence".

So, one day: In the morning! Two guards entered our office, followed by an Allied prisoner of war, ready to be transported to Graudenz. Our office manager and interpreter, Friedrich, spoke a few words with the prisoner. He asked him, knowing that any contact with German prisoners was forbidden. The prisoner just shrugged his shoulders and looked at me with a smile. Afterwards, Friedrich, the head of the office, said to me, "As if love were not international," shaking his head. I could not understand why he had been sentenced to imprisonment in Graudenz for this minor disregard for the law of the time.

Poor Tommy! How can one think you fared in Graudenz? I hope that the words of Father Dakers gave you some consolation and were food for thought for the long, dreary, arduous days of imprisonment in Germany.

One noon, Major Bach told me that I should remind him in the afternoon that letters had to be sent to five different work commands in the Upper Silesian industrial district. It was important and urgent! It was a question of the prisoners' contacts with Germans being too close in some cases, or at least of attempts in this direction. This was not allowed in those merciless and unforgiving times full of fanaticism. Fanaticism seemed to be an uncorrectable entity, which one could hardly or not at all get hold of. Essential forms of withdrawal did not seem to exist then, and probably still do not seem to exist today. Those prisoners of war who were involved were to be exchanged for others, new ones, who were then to be brought from our camp to Upper Silesia. There was to be no such thing as one person to another, one nation to another; it was considered by us to be a certain alarm signal and was consequently interpreted as such.

But, although I generally had a rather well-functioning memory, I forgot this matter. Major Bach also seemed to have completely lost his memory of it, not only for one day, but probably for a long time, because for long as I was in the Lamsdorf camp, this subject never came up again. It was wiped away by our oblivion.

However, one day the memory caught up with me again, although rather late and probably quite jagged, - but it was there: probably about a year after the end of the war!

It is possible that Major Bach had a similar experience one day after the end of the war. At that time, I was in the frightening and desperate stage of searching for a place to stay as a homeless refugee, because I and all of us in eastern Germany had lost our home. Right after the end of the war! I had never been able to find a new one, all the searches were pointless.

But there was one consolation in this forgotten affair: the former prisoners of the station remained where they were, were not exchanged, and hopefully were able to expand their tentative contacts with the Germans a little further and better. How far, I do not know. Our mutual forgetting may have been useful for them in this regard. Hopefully, it had led to and contributed to an understanding of the people, even if only on an exceedingly small scale. I wish it. With this oblivion, we

had not forgiven ourselves anything, on the contrary, we had only saved face, albeit in a rather unusual way.

One noon I was strolling across the heath. It was late summer. In front of me was an officer on his bicycle, still young in years. He wanted to show me his skills, maybe even impress me. But not for long. A sudden swaying, a lurching of bike and rider, and both lay lengthwise on the ground. First the bike, then followed by the rider himself. As quickly as he had fallen, he stood on his feet again and was gone.

I continued to walk along the path. My eyes discovered something: something standing high up. I still could not recognize what it was. Only when I came closer, I knew it; it became a terrible certainty to me. What stood there amidst the reddish-purple blooming heath was a gallows, an upright gallows scaffold. A gallows on our heath? Unbelievable! Then it had to fulfill the function of hanging. Why, why, why? Who on earth was delivered to the gallows? Russian prisoners? Well, I was remarkably close to the Russian prison camp. Other Eastern peoples were also housed in it. The heath, our heath had many paths. Why, of all things, was I walking along this one that noon? I did not know. Was it coincidence, fate or even destiny? Did I have to see the gallows scaffold with the hemp noose? Probably! I could not get it out of my head. Why did they do it? That was my question in those days. Why - why - why?

My letter of resignation seemed to have been filed away in the files of already completed processes. It seemed to have been ignored, not responded to at all. For weeks I waited for a statement, a decision. But in vain. Instead of that, I had to be on duty every day until evening. I knew then that I had to get behind it. I kept asking the friendly staff officer of the accounting department, who was also responsible for the human resource department, why I did not get any feedback regarding this matter, my situation. I did not give up on it. Until one day he explained to me clearly that I could not be dismissed, under no condition, since I may also end up writing, among other things, G-Affairs- secret things. So that was the obstacle! I had already thought about that though. But one day everything turned out well for me, to my satisfaction.

Major Bach had returned from dinner time. He must have known that the camp commander was also present in his office at that time. He pushed open the wall door and told me that he would now go to the commandant about my letter of resignation. Now it would become clear whether he was for or against it. Not long after, he returned with a result that was satisfactory to me: I was again allowed to go off duty after 4 p.m., as before. "Even today?", I asked Major Bach. - I was allowed! It was a load off my mind.

The early bird does not always have gold in its mouth! Especially not when it was about slips of paper, even if only small ones with spy material, which were found in the back of our office under a desk. A soldier from our office rummaged them up. How they got down there, nobody knew.

Where so many people were present, gathered, as was the case with us, there were also sick people among them, seriously ill even. They were to be repatriated by the Red Cross. They were to be sent home, to their home countries. In exchange, of course. A long train of ambulances with only second-class cars arrived. The prisoners were brought into these cars, some of them even on stretchers. The Red Cross was emblazoned on the roofs of the cars, conspicuous and large, and Red Cross personnel would also look after them. I knew when the train would leave the small station, so I stood in front of the railroad tracks at home. There it rolled. The huge Red Crosses caught my eye. I was deeply moved inside and close to tears. My wishes were that all – every single one of them - should reach their homeland, to be reunited with father, mother, wife, beloved.

Captain Dakers was with us again. It was afternoon! Only Sergeant Friedrich and I were in our office. In the officers' office, only Major Bach. Alone. He opened the sliding wall door and peered into our office space. Suddenly, Mister Dakers rose from his wooden stool, walked toward the sliding wall door and thus toward Major Bach, and held out his hand to him, which Major Bach promptly took. Here man and man stood face to face - nothing but man and man - a German officer and an Australian.

I found that in those seconds something really and truly human happened, young as I was at the time. Approaching each other was a matter of one's own contemplation.

Once again there was an air-raid alarm, the sirens were blaring, we went to the dugouts or splinter trenches, as it was also called. The excitement among the prisoners grew as soon as the big camp gate was locked. At that time "Glenn the dawn", no longer greeted me through my window. I wondered what was wrong with him, the red-blond, sympathetic-looking Glenn? Was he angry at me alone or with all Germans? I had not done anything to him, I was doing my duty just as he had been doing his. Glenn alone should have known.

I often had a hard time over noon, which stretched into the afternoon hours. Our office was not always occupied. Officers as well as enlisted men had their duties outside. Then I was always supplied with prescribed work. Here, on one sheet, sentences were written, there, on another, it went on, all mixed up, scraps of words. The writing was illegible, often only clues that I had to complete. However, I somehow got through most of the time and still managed.

The time came when the prisoners began to make sleds out of Red Cross boxes. They were anticipating the invasion of Germany by Russian regiments. Whether Sir Winston Churchill's nephew was also involved with a sled program, made one himself or had one made, I cannot verily say. It had long been planned by the Germans at that time to transport the prisoners further into the Reich, through the Czech Republic. Though Görlitz in Silesia was envisaged.

One morning, interpreter Dr. Lipschütz surprised me with the question of whether I knew we verily had here in Germany, vis-à-vis the politics? I answered him with "No"! To which Dr. Lipschütz replied: "A penitentiary dictatorship!"

The last Red Cross delegation of the Swiss and the Swedes appeared in our country in the late autumn of 1944. Interpreter Jahn had to play the translator again, just as in previous years. He was already a veteran in his field and knew his way around. The Swedes were also represented by a new delegate, a rather brittle man. I was riding home in the second class of my train, with the Swede sitting next to me, his long legs raised. When the passenger train stopped at my

home station and I had to get off, he made no move to retract his legs. So, I had the pleasure of stepping over them. I thought it was silly. Why he did it, I did not know. During the camp dictation I had sat opposite him in our large officers' room. Did he want to humiliate me as a German? Probably! Interpreter Jahn once said with regards to another delegate that he was always spying a bit between two fronts, sometimes more, sometimes less. He would have known it well. The German leadership at that time wanted to turn its back on the Geneva Convention and resign, but for some reason it did not happen.

For weeks I noticed that almost every day sweets were put into my open straw bag, which was kept in one of our military lockers, and to which everyone could find access if he wanted to. I have never been able to find out who the loving and joyful donor might have been.

During the Spring - summer of 1944! I had to write the lists for the voluntary Vlasov Army, which Special Leader Hinze, a man who spoke several languages, dictated into the typewriter: Name by name, letter by letter. There were many of them. They would simply not end. I had a long time to type, to write, they seemed to have no end. The German troops had long since been on the defensive, while the Russians were on the offensive. Since the fall of Stalingrad, the Germans were put on a damper. Always used to victories, they now had to accept defeats: one after the other. In the East as in the West! The fighting morale weakened, sunk, the war industry destroyed by bombs, no raw materials in the country, how could they still win? Faith alone did not do it, although it could be a tremendous weapon, and neither would a Vlasov army. At the most, they would bleed to death in their own homeland. Ilya Ehrenburg, the Russian writer, and poet had long since called his compatriots to patriotic struggle against the Germans, he sang hate songs of a special kind against us and spiced them up with his own "pepper". All this, and probably much more, gave them enough strength and impetus to hold out, to go on, to fight on. They may well have had some rather bleak experiences with us Germans, too bleak perhaps. The blows they now dealt us were nothing more than counterblows, a response to ours. And the certain pressure from above, the so-called "political whip", which was swung behind them daily, hourly, had done its part, indeed probably the most important part.

Russians are of a different nature than we, the Western people with our subtleties. Those who, after the battle, can fetch grain from linen or cloth bags hung around their shoulders just to satisfy their worst hunger, and to sip a little water, have all the prerequisites for an unusual stamina. I have seen this myself, experienced it when Russian regiments occupied eastern Germany. There is no doubt that General Vlasov with his volunteer army would have been an indispensable, perhaps even decisive support for the German army command and thus for the German fighting armies in the Russian campaign, had he not been held in German custody for many months. He was distrusted because of his national Russian attitude, which did not fit in with the idea of Germanizing Russia after the hoped-for final victory. But when more and more the former German victories turned into defeats, and help was needed, General Vlasov was brought out of his "oblivion". A rethinking process must have taken place in the German camp. But by that time, it was hopelessly too late. The initial Russian willingness among the people to join the Germans more and more, to get closer and to declare war on the Stalinist regime, was wasted and no longer correctable, for many reasons probably.

The last British Christmas and New Year's message from the English king reached the prisoners while already in the run-up to the German defeat and the subsequent surrender. When I wrote it down, I already suspected that it would probably be the last one here in the Lamsdorf camp. I invested feelings into it, feelings of farewell to people I knew, with whom I had worked and who had been in and out of our office and were now still leaving. However, for how much longer? But it was also a matter of course that the prisoners wanted to go home. At that time, I could not really imagine my future, but I knew one thing: that I would never again encounter such a colorful and interesting life; that I would never again meet such interesting people as were present here - a collection of the most diverse nationalities. For me, that experience was an absolute one.

At that time there were already certain thoughts of escape. The fighting front moved closer and closer into the German Reich. The Russians had long been in East Prussia and the first tank spearheads rolled into Upper Silesia. Captain Metz expressed the thought to kill himself and his family, to shoot them, and he had a

firearm for this. Whether he ever did it, I do not know. The trains, passengers, as well as freight trains, were crammed with refugees, one could hardly get into them. Standing on the platform, the concertina gate pulled out, I reached our duty station on one of the last days. What shocked me was the fact that little children were sitting on the platform, tied with rope and clotheslines, in the freezing cold of up to 25 degrees below zero, tears and nasal droplets frozen stiff as ice. They had become victims of a cruel war,- innocent victims. Who could ever make up for that? When would the eternal hate songs of the peoples against each other finally come to an end? When would people on this earth of ours finally be willing to bow before life, before all life, and to make it bright? Or Was this an impossible thing? Then man would have to be denied the ability to keep and maintain peace. Should he then still be the crown of creation? Would he then still call himself the crown of creation?

In those January days of 1945, there were hardly any trains available that could have brought me to our duty station. On the last day of my being there, Christel and I marched home on foot in darkness and deep snow. Never again did I set foot in that office of the Lamsdorf camp, but I left without saying goodbye to my co-workers. I never found out what became of them, only that Major Bach was supposed to have settled in Württemberg. Since he was a teacher in his civilian profession, he would probably have held this office again.

What might have become of the camp cat Catty? She had lost her brothers, the English, and that in the middle of a severe winter with ice, snow and cold.

A chapter of German history had come to an end. Truly, a sad and gloomy chapter of that time.

It is said that the course of history is preceded by its shadows, be they pleasant or unpleasant. History does not come out of nowhere, history is made, shaped, and forged by people. Gone was the great struggle, gone was the final battle. It has brought us nothing but sorrow and tears. Once beautiful Germany, what have you achieved? With your own sword, you killed yourself!

This is how I will end my experience report, which reflects to the time of the Second World War. I have no one here to look over my shoulder as I write, to remind me of this or that which I might have forgotten.

Morris, with the cool glacial eyes, was seen in Berlin after the war ended. I heard nothing more of Gundula, her trail was lost in southern Germany.

Leonor passed away, much too soon and to my grief. The only one with whom I am still in contact is Christel, the forester's daughter.

For my part, I did not feel at home anywhere, in any office, in any city. The shadows of the past stood between yesterday and today.

Prisoners of war from Lamsdorf - Germany, a kind fate may have guided you home.

