

way to a nearby village and would return to pick us up. Frank and the Australian elected to stay behind as they were now firmly entrenched in the blond's life and also with her girlfriend. So it was with mixed emotions that the Englishman and I bid farewell to Frank, the Australian, the two girls, and Wally Lange and his mother. I exchanged addresses with Wally and subsequently learned he was able to return to Australia where he married and resumed a normal life until his death some years later.

I never had such an antsy three hours before the Jeep arrived. I didn't budge an inch from the place where I spotted the Jeep. I wasn't about to miss my ride. We didn't go directly to the Americans, but had a night's layover across the river from Leipzig. The Red Cross official spoke fluent German and had made a number of contacts and acquaintances. We were to spend the night with one of these acquaintances, a German family. The Englishman and I didn't know for sure what was happening. The Jeep driver wanted to know if we could scrounge some food from the mess hall of an American troop detachment guarding the bridge near the river at Leipzig. It was our first encounter with American troops since our departure from POW camp and we felt funny asking for a handout, but the mess sergeant was quite considerate and gave us a good assortment of goodies. The Red Cross man then drove us to the house of the German family.

It was quite an emotional experience. Even to this day I don't know exactly what the Jeep driver's motive was for taking us to the German family. It was evening when we arrived. The family consisted of the old mother, and father, a daughter about the same age as I (then 23), the daughter's friend, a girl a little older and a small child, the daughter of a friend. We were to have dinner and spend the night. The Jeep driver would be back in the morning to pick us up, he said on departing. We began the evening. The daughter's friend spoke passable English and the Englishman spoke passable German. My contribution was passable Pig-Latin. After a few glasses of wine we began to relax and enjoy ourselves. It was at the end of the meal, after several hours of fraternization that it hit me. Here we were having dinner in the enemy's home, only days after cessation of hostilities. What were we thinking of? Were we not their enemy also. What had the evening's conversation revealed? I had been a prisoner of war, the daughters friend's husband, and father of the little girl was at this very moment a prisoner of the Americans. Something in common? I asked myself.

During the meal the mother goes to the fireplace and takes down a picture from the mantle. It was a picture of a young German soldier in uniform. She shows it to us babbling in German. I don't understand what she is saying, but it is all spelled out in her emotions. She is very upset, crying and disturbed. It is apparent the young soldier is her son, brother of the daughter of our hostess, and is dead. We share an intimate feeling. I can't help but think that she could be my mother wailing over me. What is so different the world over? Nothing, we are all flesh and blood, we feel, think, eat, sleep, and live, in similar ways. What is this all about? It is about the uselessness of war.

This warm friendly, good smelling room could be my room back home in the good old USA. She is my mother crying over me, I am thinking. Why do people have to fight? The picture slipped from her fingers crashing to the floor snapping me out of

my hallucination. Then deadly silence, everyone looking at each other. The spell is suddenly broken by the little girl saying in universal language, "Momma, Momma I have to pee-pee.

The mother has calmed down and we resume the evening in strained silence for a while. Finally, the dishes are cleared from the table and the table pushed to one side. Wow! This can mean only one thing. Back home when the table is pushed to one side, it means dancing, or trying to. "Hey Ma look I'm dancing." What will be next I am wondering? We've had a nice meal, a nice visit, the old folks have paid their respects and departed for bed. The little one is also in bed. I'm beginning to get ideas. Aw, no, Tref, I am saying to myself, this is too good to be true. Records miraculously appeared, to be played on a gramophone that too appeared suddenly. According to the word of someone whose name fails me at the moment, a pairing of males and females occurs spontaneously, fortuitously and (most of the time) agreeably to the parties concerned. The younger girl and I found ourselves together so the Englishman and the older girl paired up. The evening proceeded predictably. We all danced and it was great. We had more wine, some left over cheese also great, some more spam, not so great. Time passed rather quickly in this delightful mode. Now comes the inevitable moment when one's thinking I'm getting pooped. Where am I going to sleep? Mentally, I'm counting the rooms, beds, and the more I count and the more I see, more and more the conclusion is that it is going to be more than I could hope for. Could it be true? Yes it was.

The Jeep and driver appeared the next morning as promised. We bade farewell to our gracious and charming hosts, clambered into the Jeep and roared off towards the west. We crossed the river at Leipzig and were deposited at the end of the bridge. At last we were back home. This was American occupied territory and we were on the last lap. I remember asking an American soldier for a cigarette and he gave me half a pack of Lucky Strikes. The Englishman couldn't believe it, a whole half pack of cigarettes was given without a second thought. He said he probably would have gotten only one cigarette from his cohorts. I find this hard to believe, but at the same time he seemed elated over our gift, but at the same time was embarrassed and wanted me to return all but two cigarettes. Perhaps the Englishman was right and they were not as fortunate as us. As we were sitting beside the road enjoying the smokes, a lorry came by and he jumped on. He was gone just like that, waving a friendly goodbye. It happened so quickly we didn't have time to exchange addresses.

I was taken to an abandoned German airfield at Halle. This was a collection point for American POWs and when enough POWs were assembled a troop train was formed and we were transported to Le Havre, France. The flight from Leipzig to Halle was an event I will never forget. It was my first flight in an aircraft since being shot down. I really didn't have much time to think about it, which was good I suppose. I don't know if I would have done anything different than I did, which was merely to walk out to the aircraft and climb on board and wait for whatever would happen. It did seem rather strange to be a passenger and not a crewman. The trip itself was uneventful, not even rough air, and upon landing and departing the aircraft I thought, that wasn't so bad after all. I might even try it again some day.

The end.