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MEMOIRS OF WORLD WAR II

BY

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PRISONER OF WAR

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2. CONDITIONS INSIDE THE CAMP (OFLAG 64)

At first (June 1943) Oflag 64 was a small camp, consisting of only 150 officers. By the time it was evacuated the roll call had reached 1400, still far less than Stalag Luft III, where more than 10,000 shot down British and American officers were held,

There was no wholesale torture *per se*, unless you considered never having enough to eat, and the cold Poland winter was a torture. No officer was forced to work, as was the practice in Russian and Japanese P.O.W. camps,

From the time the camp opened until the evacuation the German rations were very poor in both quality and quantity. The Red Cross parcels became the means of subsistence in the camp and the difference between complete misery and tolerable existence, The last few months there were no Red Cross parcels and the officers suffered accordingly.

For the first four months we had to live entirely on German rations. This amounted to only hot or warm water for breakfast, nothing more; a thin barley soup for lunch and occasionally some spoiled turnips and shriveled carrots for dinner. Sometimes, instead of the turnips and carrots, we got three small potatoes. The Germans, in addition, gave us one loaf of German wartime black bread, about 4 -5 inches long, to last a whole week. The accepted technique was to slice the bread as thin as possible, and toast it over the famous "smokeless heaters" made from old Red Cross powered milk cans, if we had one.

The camp doctors figured that all this amounted to about 700 calories a day. We always appointed a "food master" for each table. His responsibility was to insure that no one got more or less than his share. No one relished this job.

This diet sapped the prisoner's energy of course, and made the awful winter cold, even harder to take. The German stoves, one in each barracks, the tiles wouldn't get hot, only slightly warm. We took turns huddling around the stove in winter. The cold and hunger reenforced the urge to escape and somehow get out through Russia and Poland.

I knew, after we stopped getting Red Cross Parcels, that I wouldn't survive for another six to eight months, and I figured it would be better to get away. The Poles seemed most friendly. So we started digging tunnels, some 40 ft, deep, to get under the German so-called radar,

We "Kriegies" were guarded by soldier with dogs stationed all around the camp. They had flood lights on towers about 30 feet high every 300 feet, with barbed wire 10 feet high. We had several escapees but not one officer got back.

We had a few Signal Corps officers who rigged up a bird (radio). One officers was chosen to listen, and then go to each barrack and relay the war news from BBC.

The latrine was a 16 hole in a board over a large pit, that was emptied every two weeks. The latrine was only about 50 yards from the "White House", and several hundred yards from the wooden barracks. Once in awhile, in the summer, chemicals were used to reduce the odor. After dark, you couldn't get out to go to the latrine, without getting permission from the German guard, and only one man at a time was permitted to go to the latrine.

We arose at 6 AM, were counted by the Germans - sometimes it went rather quickly, but other times we were kept out-side in the cold and rain for perhaps two or more hours, standing at attention.

For breakfast we got only one cup of hot-to-warm water, in which we ground up parched grain to make "ersatz" simulated coffee, which always had a bitter taste. With a little imagination we could drink it as coffee.

At noon we either got three small potatoes or Kasha soup, made from barley, which was quite thick, but never the two together. Most of the time we got cabbage soup at the evening meal. Occasionally it was flavored with horse meat, complete with the worst part of the horse, the head, the hoofs and the guts. After being starved, anything tasted good even with its horrible smell and taste. After a few weeks in camp, repulsive as it was, we soon considered it a treat. We had no choice but to eat it or starve.

The Germans provided the camp (Oflag 64) with so many grams of meat per day for everyone; but the weight was on the hoof, which meant the bones, horns, hooves, neck and head were weighted. The Germans took the good meat for themselves and save us the head, neck and bony parts. Although we got the weight due us, as prescribed by the German Quartermaster, it was mostly bone. They would just throw the head of a beef into a tub of soup, hair, eyes, nose, everything. The Germans went through the motion of removing the hair, but we quickly learned that we were better off to not look at what we were eating.

According to our doctors, the Germans provided us with 700 to 900 calories per day. In order to maintain our weight we needed 1800 to 2000 calories. But after about three or four months, we started to get Red Cross Parcels. Late in 1944, the Germans began to take all our Red Cross parcels, and claimed that our bombers had destroyed the box-cars that were supposed to deliver them.

In addition to the German diet, we were allotted one small loaf of black bread, about 4-5 inches long, that was suppose to last each man for 7 days....just two very thin slices per day. We also got an addition to the bread, the quartermaster issued about 30 grams of sugar, made from sugar beets, about one ounce per day.

Telling stories was a great pastime in our first year of captivity. Most tales were chiefly concerned with one's heroics in combat. At first it seem to me that the tales were sticking to the truth the first year but began to lie the second. It became impossible to distinguish between truth and fiction. After six months as a P.O.W., women were never the topic. During the first year, we speculated when we would he freed, and during the second year, it was politics and a lot of religion. I even started going to Catholic Mass.

In the cold Poland winters, our beds, 2 ½ ft. x 6 ft., filled with straw, three beds, one on top of the other. Only one blanket per combat officer, which was totally inadequate for the climate. Two officers were forced to sleep together and use the two blankets to keep warm. We slept in our uniforms most of the winters to keep semi-warm.

A room 15' .x 15' slept 26 Officers. Our health, in spite of hardships, insufficient food, impure water, poor sanitation facilities, remained surprisingly good even under these circumstances. The plumbing or lack of plumbing was a constant source of concern to our American doctors.

3. MY ESCAPE FROM OFLAG 64.

The peak occupancy, in the winter of 1944, of Oflag 64, Szubim, Poland was 2000 Officers. We were terribly overcrowded for the facility, sleeping in bunks three deep, on nothing but straw or saw-dust mattresses. We had used our own bed boards (slats) for digging tunnels, some of us had no more than 3 slates to support the flimsy straw or sawdust mattress.

All of us remember the chronic hunger when food was our chief preoccupation. The Germans gave us about 700 calories per day, and we would have starved to death had it not been for the Red Cross parcels which we received once a month, during the fall of 1944 the Germans claimed we bombed the box car carrying the parcels.

The real purposes of moving the camps, which I later found out by reading G-2 reports, was to move all POWs back to Berlin, and shoot them, and let them go down as a monument to the Third Reich. This was ordered by Himmler⁶ and Hitler.⁷

The trek, through knee deep snow, to Berlin and Ruchenwalde was scheduled to take some 6 weeks on foot. No food was provided by the Germans, except to take food if from the Poles to feed us, that is if they found a Pole with any food. The Poles at this stage of the war had no food,

⁶Himmler, Heinrich, 1900-1945, German NAZI leader. He was a Nazi from the founding (1920) of the party, and after HITLER came to power he headed (1936-45) the secret police, or Gestapo. The most ruthless of the Nazi leaders, Himmler was responsible for the death of millions in forced-labor and CONCENTRATION CAMPS. He was also held in fear by members of the Nazi party. In the last years of WORLD WAR II, he was the virtual dictator of German domestic affairs. He was captured by the British in 1945 but committed suicide by taking poison.

⁷Hit-ler (hî't'ler), Adolf. Known as "Der Führer." 1889-1945. Austrian-born founder of the German Nazi Party and chancellor of the *Third Reich* (1933-1945). His fascist philosophy, embodied in *Mein Kampf* (1925-1927), attracted widespread support, and after 1934 he ruled as an absolute dictator. Hitler's pursuit of aggressive nationalist policies resulted in the invasion of Poland (1939) and the subsequent outbreak of World War II. His regime was infamous for the extermination of millions of people, especially European Jews. He committed suicide when the collapse of the Third Reich was imminent (1945).

however, the Germans had given each POW one loaf of black bread for the trip.

On our first night out, it snowed and temperatures dropped to 20 degrees below zero. We were nearing a barn in a small village where we were going to spend the night, when the German guard bringing up the rear of the column, moved up to speak with another guard. At that moment, Captain Bob Kroll, grabbed and pulled me into a small opening between the houses, until the column had slowly moved on.

A Polish man gave us "the thumbs-up sign" and motioned us to follow him. He spoke a little German, but no English. We followed him and he hid us. It was already dark, and we were fixing to move on somewhere. We were in totally unfamiliar surroundings. Both of us had decided that our friendly Pole was going to turn us in, to get an extra loaf of bread, which was a typical German bribe. Had the Germans found us, no doubt they would have shot us for escaping.

This Polish man moved us, that night, about 2 miles, and arranged for us to sleep in a barn with some live stock. The heat from their bodies was a great welcome, The next morning another friendly Pole brought us a cup of warm sweet milk and a piece of German black bread with hog lard spread on top, and was it good!

The Polish underground would move us 4 or 5 miles each night, and manage to give us enough food to keep body and soul together. We would sleep in barns. The Poles had little food. Cabbage soup, when we could get it, was a delicacy.

All HELL broke loose after the Yalta Conference,⁸ when Roosevelt and Churchill gave half of Poland up to The Cuion Line, to the Russians to keep them in the war. From then on the Poles abandoned us. When we asked for food at some peasant's hut, they would run us off or seek the dogs on us.

It was during this period, with absolutely no help what ever from the Poles, that I though we would surely starve to death. But HOPE is the last thing to die in a human being. I think it was Shakespeare that said, "The miserable hath no medicine but only HOPE."

⁸Yalta Conference, 1945, meeting at Yalta (Crimea, USSR; now in Ukraine), of British Prime Min. CHURCHILL, U.S. Pres. F.D. ROOSEVELT, and Soviet Premier STALIN. Because of the secrecy of the agreements and what were considered by some to be undue concessions to the Soviet Union, the Yalta Conference has long been the subject of heated controversy.

At night we had no choice but to find and enter a barn where there were some cows. I would spend most of the nights petting the cows, so they would let us milk them the next morning. By drinking milk and eating barley (cow feed) with rat turds mixed with the barley, which we never separated, we were able to survive.

One snowy, wintery day, Rob and I were walking along a secondary dirt road which was used by the refugees fleeing from Russia. I met a Polish woman, who had an 8 or 10 year old girl. The little girl's feet and face were frost bitten, and she looked like she couldn't go much further. I reached into my pocket, which I had filled with barley and rat turds. The little girl thought I was a Russian, dressed as I was with a long Polish overcoat on. She took the barley and said, "spaseba" in Russian (thank you). I don't think she could have survived more than a day at the most.

During several days that winter, some 900 to 1000 officers and enlisted men escaped from camps in the Polish area. Only 120 of us got back. Most were shot by the Russians as they slept in hay stacks to escape the cold. Some Poles told me to never take shelter in a hay stack, and I never did.

I was apprehended by the Russians, and placed in a refugee camp near Rembertov, Poland, along with a number of Czechs, Slavs, natives of the Balkans. Some 1500 of us refugees, both men and women, slept together in a two story building. The facility had no running water. It was cold as hell. The building had no heat. We all slept together on the floors, strewn with straw, crowding together to keep warm.

The Russians did bring us a few bags of barley (kasha) and dumped the bags over the barbed wire fence. No organization what so ever. The strong men took the barley. It reminded me of what General Sherman once said about war, "God is on the side of those that have the mostest." I have always believed this.

A few days later, a Russian Commissar⁹ (political) Major, who could speak some English, came into the Rembertov camp. He gave Captain Kroll and me "a dressing down" about how unkept we were. He said, we didn't look like officers. The only uniform I had on then was an old woolen army

⁹com-mis-sar (kòm'i-sär) noun. 1.a. An official of the Communist Party in charge of political indoctrination and the enforcement of party loyalty. b. The head of a commissariat in the Soviet Union until 1946.

2.A person who tries to control public opinion.

shirt, and old WW I, Ukraine breeches, with only one wrapped legging. We hadn't shaved in over 3 months, we had slept in barns and were covered with cow manure

The Russian Commissar Major gave us a hand written slip of paper, saying we could ride any transportation going back to Russia, The problem with that was that the Russians we showed the paper to, couldn't read, and they wouldn't admit it.

Going on thru Russia the condition didn't improve any. We lived by stealing and selling the extra shirts that we had stolen. When we got to the Black Sea we hit another obstacle.

There were a couple of British ships docked at Odessa, but how were we to get on one. I spotted a young Ensign on the bridge of one ship. We called up to him that we were escaped POW (American Officers), and could we come aboard?. His reply was, "Sure, if the Russians don't stop you". I thought for sure he would send an escort to welcome us aboard. We looked so much like the Russians stevedores, that no one stopped us, we walked right up the gang plank and had a terrible time finding the young "Ensign" who had told us to come aboard.

The British turned out to be most hospitable. They gave us some fresh clothing, which we were grateful to get. They fed us well on the way to Istanbul, Turkey. When we got off the ship at Istanbul, and were looking to find the American Embassy, which we finally did. What a nightmare that turned into. Although we were clean shaven and dressed in what ever clothes the British shipmates donated to us, neither of us had any identification whatever. We were asked to come back the next day. We left and hadn't gone one block, hoping to get better treatment from the British Embassy. The Turkish police arrested us, and threw us into a hoosegow dungeon, as vagrants. We were given only one meal of baked beans and corn bread a day. We got nothing else, except water.

We were put into a room 10 x 18 feet, with 15 other prisoners, none of whom could speak English. There were no toilets. We relieved ourselves in the corner of the room, if we could find a place to squat down. There were no beds, we slept on the damp concrete floor. During the five days we were there, both of us got body lice all over us. I thought for sure that our luck had finally run out. We couldn't get any message out, for no one could understand us. They let us out with absolutely no explanation. This time we looked up the street and found a Union Jack (the British flag) and we

headed for it.

They took us in, for I had known some British officers at Oflag 9-Az in Germany, that had been captured at Dunkirk and Create, and had been repatriated. Our knowing them stood us in good shape. The British put us on a boat and sent us to Port Said,¹⁰ Egypt, on the Suez Canal.

They gave us about 50 pounds (\$200.00) each, at The British Embassy in Turkey. I made good use of the money, when I got to Egypt. I had carried a shirt or two all over Eastern Europe in a tied up rag. I thought after that I should look smart, as a officer should. I bought what I thought were two camel skin suitcases, but turned out to be two goat skin bags. I also bought a "swagger stick" which the British officers carried, made from the foreleg of a goat, with the hooves attached. The British gave each of us an enlisted man's uniform, with their officer's rank each. They also gave us black, hob-nailed shoes, which you could hear a block away.

The British save us a two day tour of the Holy Land and put us on another boat going to Naples, Italy. When we reached Italy, Rome had just fallen to the Allies. Bob and I got a Jeep and drove up to Rome. Soon afterwards, we came back to Naples, where we were put up in the Italian King's quarters. The Allies had commandeered his palace for the Officer's quarters. Then we were put on a boat to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts.

The British were most economical, for when I got to Camp Miles Standish, they had already charged me with \$200 they had given me in Turkey.

My pay, at that time for a 2nd Lieutenant, was all of \$126.00 per month, with a few extra dollars for longevity and rations. I also drew \$1.00 per day for harsh and inhuman treatment by the Germans, until the day I escaped, then it stopped. The most hardships that I experienced were during my trek through Poland, after the Yalta Conference, and my trek down through Russia to the Black Sea.

¹⁰Port Sa'id (sā-êd¹) A city of northeast Egypt on the Mediterranean Sea at the northern entrance to the Suez Canal. It was founded in 1859 by the builders of the canal and was once an important coaling station. Population, 374,000.

4. MY TREK THRU RUSSIA TO THE BLACK SEA.

While I was living near Rembertov, Poland, some Russian soldiers arrested Capt. Rob Crawl and me, and placed us in a refugee camp, along with several hundred Croats, Serbs and Czechs from the Balkans.

In this refugee camp there was no organization whatever. The Russians would dump some "kasha (barley grains) over the barb wire fences; but the strong men would take it all.

No privacy whatever, men and women would sleep together on straw, over the cold concrete floors. No toilets, and only one tap of running water.

A Russian Commissar Political Officer came into camp, and gave Bob and me a hand written note, saying we were permitted to ride box car on the Russian Rail System. The problem with this note was that no one we presented it to could read.

After a few days we were able to get out and again some Russian troops stopped us. When they found a German newspaper with a Swastika in my back pocket, they damn near kicked me to death. I said, "Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, Washington, London, Moscow, Molotov," to no avail. I finally sputtered, "STUDEBAKER", and the soldier that was kicking me, said, "Da, da". I then assumed that he had ridden in a lend-lease Studebaker truck. Make no mistake about it, the word "STUDEBAKER" saved my life there in the snow, outside of Rembertov.

The Germans with their "scorched earth policy, had torn up the rail roads as they retreated out of Russia. The trains we rode from Rembertov, Poland to Odessa, Russia, could travel no faster than 10-12 miles per hour.

The Russian women, operating the train, would shoulder guns and get everyone out of the box cars, to cut wood for the locomotive. I saw the women operators, on two occasions, shoot several refugees, and left them there in the forest.

The weather on this trip was bitterly cold, 20 degrees below zero. The rail tracks in Stalingrad had been so badly damaged that we had to get on another train going to Odessa. We were marched through Stalingrad, which was total devastation. The fighting in Stalingrad had been very fierce. The German "scorched earth policy" didn't leave a building standing.

Not one refugee on that train from Rembertov to Odessa was given any

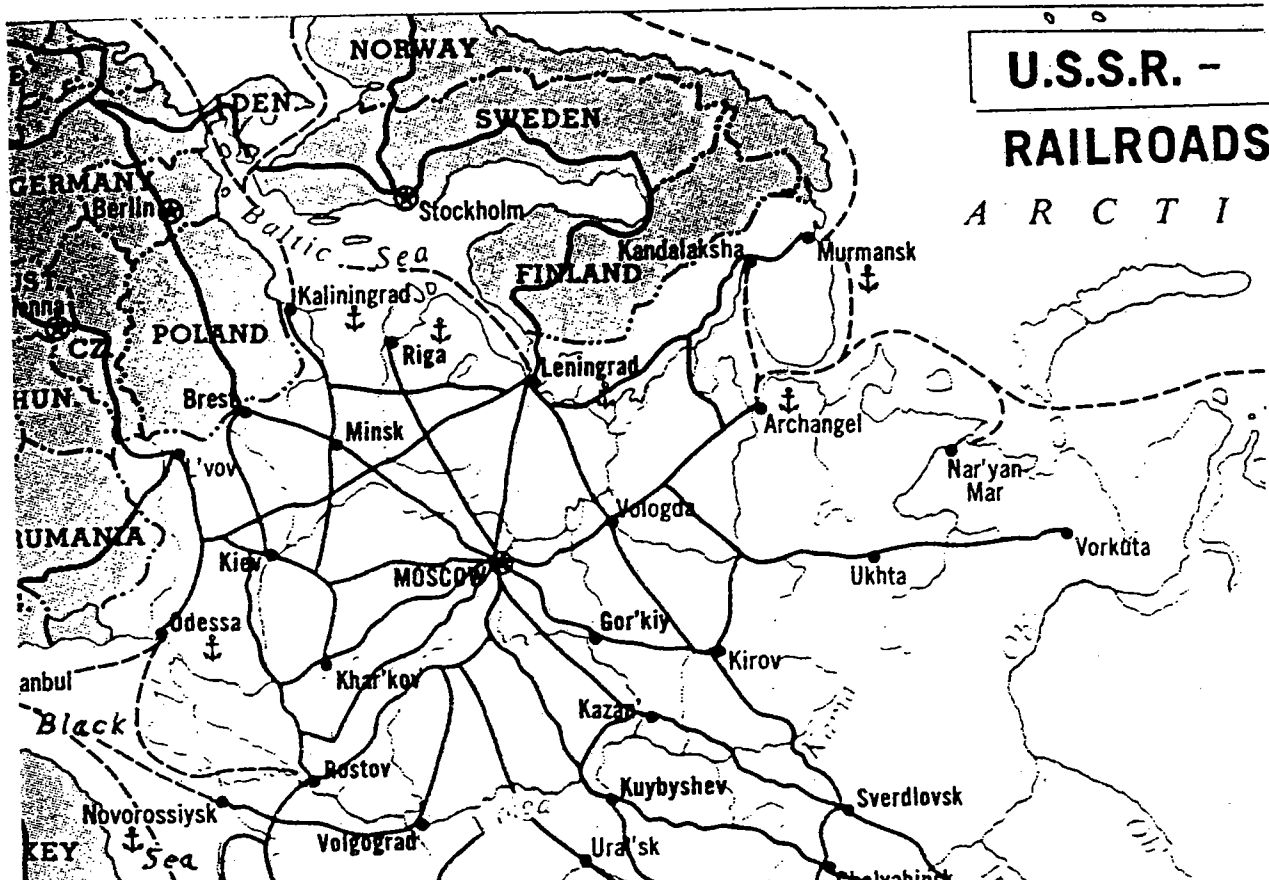
food. I had stolen a few shirts and socks, which I was wearing. When the train would stop at sparsely populated villages, I would trade a shirt or a pair of socks for some bread. I then had to hide the bread in my clothing, and eat it only at night.

A Serb woman, riding beside me in the boxcar car, gave birth to a baby. She wrapped it in her shawl, and 10 days later the baby was still crying.

When Bob Crawl and I got to Odessa, the Russians gave us some fish soup with the eyes still in the fish's head. This was the first warm meal we had since we left Rembertov two weeks before.

While we were still in Rembertov, Rob and I had met with two Ukrainian girls, who could speak some German. The girls had been abandoned by the German army. They told us that they would take us to Moscow to see Stalin. We told them that we would take them back to the United States and make them movie stars.

The next day, about 50 miles out of Rembertov, Poland, the train stopped at a small station. Russian soldiers enter our boxcar, took the two girls up to the platform, and beat them to death with their rifle butts. All we could do, was look on.



5. THE KATYN MASSACRE

This is what I know about the Katyn Massacre.¹¹ After I had escaped from the Germans, and was living on the outskirts of Warsaw, near Rembertov, Poland, I stayed all night with the wife of the Commandant of The Old Cavalry Academy at Remhertov, Poland, Her husband, the Polish Colonel, at that time, was with the exile government in London, England, an assistant to General Borr.

She told me that the Russians were committing terrible atrocities by murdering thousands of Polish Officers. She ask me to convey this to our government, if and when I should get back to the U.S.A..

I did, and our G-2 (Intelligence Agency) refused to believe me, saying I had been brain washed by the Germans, and threatened to throw me into a physico ward. They could not believe that our ally, the Russians, did this.

In a recent article, published, 10 August 1989, the Soviet Union admitted their guilt in The Katyn Atrocity, where some 10,000 Polish Officers were shot in the head.

What is now called the ,Katyn Forest Massacre was first discovered by the Germans in 1943. On a spruce-covered hill overlooking the Dnieper River near Smoiensk, Russia, Nazi soldiers had found, stacked in mass graves, the bodies of thousands of Polish Officers.

The Nazis (Germans) charging that the Russians had committed the mass murder after the invasion of Poland in 1939, sent teams of German doctors to Katyn to corroborate the findings and brought along several Allied prisoners to view the bodies. My Battalion Commander, Colonel VanVliet, who was captured with me in the Faide/ Kasserine fiasco was one of the

¹¹Katyn (kefin'), village, W European Russia, W of Smolensk near the Belarus border. It was occupied by the Germans in World War II. In 1943 the German government announced that the mass graves of 4,250 Polish officers had been found in a nearby forest, and blamed Soviet forces for the massacre. The Soviet government asserted that the Poles had been killed by the Germans. In 1990 the USSR admitted that Soviet secret police had killed the Poles, and in 1992 Russian officials released documents that showed STALIN had ordered the killings.

6. THE RUSSIAN PRISONER OF WAR

We had one barracks Russian POW's located right next to The WHITE HOUSE in Oflag 64. The Russians were in horrible physical condition, starved and looked like "walking death". The Germans made them work 14-18 hours a day, in all types of weather conditions, rain, snow or sleet, it made no difference.

At one time the Germans put a lone fat Russian soldier into the barracks. He was well fed, had a new German uniform, with an insignia that said, "FREE RUSSIA". The purpose of this Russian intruder was to enlist other Russians to join the German Army.

I became very good friends with the Russian "First Sergeant". He could speak five or six different languages fluently; German, Polish, Russian, two or three Solvic languages, and some English words.

He showed me where a German soldier had bayoneted him in the stomach. He pulled up his soiled, dirty tunic, and said, " This Is my pass-port back to Russia." Stalin had said that he never wanted any Russian's POW to enter Russia again. Stalin had the sergeant's son killed in a POW Camp that I was in near Frankfurt.

After a bit, we no longer saw the fat enlisted man that had entered the Russian barracks. Since I had a good relationship with the Russian First Sergeant, Colonel Algers asked me to find out what had happened to him. I asked, and the reply was, "We ate him".

The next morning the Russian soldier's uniform was neatly folded on the barrack's steps. Make no mistake about it, the Russians ate him. He was never seen again.