

into any house of your choosing. Its owners or squatters make a quick bunk or retire to a deep cellar. There is no unfriendliness about it because civilians have little interest in being caught in crossfire. If you move in fast it means, for them, you will probably get out fast too.

This house had an atrium and a balcony looking down on it, and it was this balcony that drew us—really a large salon beneath yet another storey. Most of the men billeted themselves down here. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer who had freckles and surprised eyes. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot, relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. Once I came in to wake him and as I was doing so I fell asleep slumped over him and we only woke up at dawn. We got some very sharp words from above but senior officers rarely came down on us hard, knowing as they did that there were many battles ahead that would do their own cowing.

To get to the guns one took a winding path that couldn't be observed. Cava de' Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas, on Italy's western coast) was tiny then—no four-lane highway

ran at its side, as now. Its humped houses appeared to be piled on each other and it smelled the same as all Italian war-time towns—sun-dried herbs and old walls and wood smoke and sewage and chicory.

The vine terraces where we put our guns had a greater beauty than they would in peace-time because, as I see only now, their silence was so war-deep, devoid of the domestic clatter of normal times. And of course this silence carried with it a foreboding which enhanced even further the beauty. There were mossy statues and young trees. There were also a fountain and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines used to sit. We started digging ourselves in during the night but by dawn, that first morning, we were only down a few inches. We camouflaged the guns as best we could

The moment the sun put its first blinding tip an inch above the horizon there was a swift hoarse breathing in the sky and mortar-bombs crashed among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Jerry must have been able to see the whites of our eyes. Most of his first ones dropped near the benches and statues. A splinter caught a young Italian woman. She screamed frantically. Somehow her

screaming seemed to inspire the enemy and the bombs spread to the terraces where we were and we began scrambling up and down them, flung ourselves to the wet earth and as quickly jumped up again as the crashes came in clusters and the pungent smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the woman Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down close to me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that. But I think she was screaming at her first realisation that war killed and meant to do so.

I lost two men in that sacred green hollow. One was my own signaller, too badly hurt to scream. We got him into a hut and put him face down. He had two deep holes in his back, behind the lungs. One of the troopers asked him if he'd like a smoke and he managed to raise his head. The trooper put a cigarette between his lips and was about to light it when the man coughed blood into it so that it swelled up and fell with a plop to the cement floor. Then his head fell forward. And things were suddenly quiet and he was dead. My face puckered up against crying in that first compassion, you are crying for all the future ones, whom you will not cry for, as well as

for this friendly creature who spoke to you not a moment before so that you still hear him and see his particular way of smiling. He was a man I trusted and he was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, we had agreed about that. Just a glance and we seemed to understand each other. No need for orders—he was already there. This in your signaller is precious as gold.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking. We cursed Jerry who had done it because cussing gave us an outlet. The other wounded man got it in the arm but it was a bad one just the same and he was stretchered away to hospital, and I think died later.

In the manner of soldiers we griped and belly-ached. We asked how the hell could anybody have thought of putting twenty-five-pounder guns into a bloody soup-bowl like this, where we can't even fire the sodding things. To fire out of that hole you would need a vertical trajectory, the shit would fall back on you. You have to be a madman to put artillery into the forward lines where Jerry can just look down on you etc. etc.

Afterwards there were boring hours. A death isn't forgotten. It becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

We sat in the balcony area overlooking the atrium and I was asked to give a lecture. All because I let it drop that I had been on the set of a film called *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, which was shot at the Elstree studios. They wanted to know how a film was made. As all I remembered of that day was hanging about for just one scene—shot in a few inaudible moments—I had little to say. I would much rather have talked about the theatre, how my mother and father used to take me and my two brothers to the working men's clubs when we were tiny. You saw the top comedians in those clubs, on their way up. In my mother's arms I began to know about timing and pace and projection. But these troopers turned it down. They wanted the big screen, the passive sanitised dream.

I enjoyed strolling alone in Cava de' Tirreni's narrow lanes. One morning I looked up at a window and a man and woman were beckoning to me to come upstairs. In sign language they were telling me to

push the downstairs door open and, stranger from another land as I was, walk up. I waved back and smiled and walked on because once up there, for all I knew, I might disappear, then who would look for me? I expect all the harmless couple wanted was to barter for cigarettes, bully beef, sugar. In exchange perhaps for eggs. Discreetly they might have suggested a girl. I hadn't yet learned that Italians were as straight as a die, even when crooked.

It was a restless period for us. I was impatient to get my first F.O.O. assignment over and done with. It would have been useful to get some gen (our word for information) about this. But none came. It hadn't figured in my training either. You could be trained for surprise but not for the surprises when they actually came.

I knew the bare logistics—you took three or four men with you, including one or two signallers. Your radio equipment had to be with you at all times. This included batteries and, in very rare cases of unusual proximity, a cable for direct wire contact with the rear. Mostly you would have no chance of recharging the batteries so while you needed to be in day and night contact with your command post back at

the guns you had to be economical in radio use. Your firing orders had sometimes to go far beyond your own command post to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply had to come back down that hierarchy, so you needed plenty of juice. It was after the word Ready had been passed to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of Fire! went through and then, almost instantaneously, you heard the baleful whirring of the shells above your head.

The only thing you know as a novice F.O.O. is that you will have to observe the country carefully and consult your Intelligence map as you move across it. But that isn't much of a training. So your state of trepidation as your first F.O.O. assignment draws near, like mine now, derived from utter bafflement as to what to expect.

Obviously an F.O.O. must know something about the enemy that faces him. After all, he must develop so to speak an intimacy with him. He must know what kind of fighters these particular enemy regiments are, and in what strength they are at the moment, whether they are the 15th or 26th or 29th Panzer

Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44th Austrian infantry (the most amiable of opponents).

Such a man can be a treasure for the infantry since he carries about with him an invisible armour shield in the form of quick and heavy support from the rear. So the tendency of infantry officers was therefore to treat him with awe if he was good and amiably disregard him if he wasn't.

Once in a new position the F.O.O. must help consolidate it with so-called SOS targets, which may involve a firing programme lasting the whole night. You communicate this programme, with its timetable and intervals by radio, to your command post, having already given your exact map reference in code.

There was one thing I looked forward to---being my own master. I would be trusted or spurned for my decisions alone. I even felt a need to witness war at its demented heart. And for this the role of F.O.O. seemed exactly placed.

Before you get your first assignment the eyes of senior officers are on you sizing you up. The respect of your gunners (very few of whom saw the forward lines) is much enhanced if you go up, and it grows the more you go up. The unlucky ones among them are

those who have to accompany you. But more unlucky is that handful of men who become your favourites, the kind of men who, try as they might, cannot help being reliable. Never was there a better argument for that devoutly observed military rule—never volunteer.

Likewise if the F.O.O. was good he was always in demand. If he wasn't he stayed with the guns.

The French long ago had a more precise word for the F.O.O. and that was *le sentinel perdu*. He is to all intents and purposes a lonely (and frequently lost) spy. Much of the Intelligence given to him about enemy dispositions is likely to be wrong though his life largely depends on it being right. But it is impossible to have good Intelligence about forward lines because they move so fast, especially in close terrains like those in Italy. So it is the F.O.O. who keeps the map up to the latest date. The danger for him is that being very mobile, with at most four men, he can easily get lost, and in enemy lines, which happened to me and mine more than once.

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We entered Naples on October 1 1943, namely three weeks after the Salerno landing. And these weeks cost us 12000 casualties, 5000 of them

American, nearly 7000 British. And we were here solely because Kesselring's new defence line was now ready for us.

But at last we had an official fleshpot where we could go for short leaves, even half a day. There were whores galore in Naples and the chance of a dance and Lilly Marlene being sung. The copper wire laid by Fifth Army engineers for new telephone systems at once disappeared. That hadn't happened under the Germans because their penalty for stealing copper wire had been death. There was a favourite apocryphal story that the kids of Naples, in this new lawless democracy, unscrewed the nuts and bolts of an allied ship until one night it sank elegantly out of sight.

I drove into Naples several times alone. I sat in a tiny restaurant tucked into a side street with the sun blazing through the entrance. I ordered chicken but was aware after a few bites that it was cat. Why did I order chicken after being told so often that it was always cat? The place became empty and I started to talk to the proprietess in my poor army Italian which always got the accents hopelessly wrong—we called the Rapido river the Rapeedo whereas

it is accented on the first syllable as in 'rapid'. We did the same with 'Taranto' and 'Brindisi', both of which carry their emphasis on the first syllable. And no doubt if we had ever wanted to talk about the Medici we would have made the same mistake (most Anglo-Saxons still do). But it was our rule and no Italian dared correct us.

The proprietess was a large young body with black curly hair and an easy sisterly manner. She asked me if I was lonely and I smiled, refusing this offer to bed down with her. I told myself that I didn't find her attractive but in fact I was afraid of a dose of clap. Also we were warned not to separate ourselves from our clothes, ever, not in Naples at this present half-starved time.

She and I sat with our elbows on the table gazing into the blinding light of the entrance and I found in myself a resolve that I would one day make this country my own (which I later did). I left her some cigarettes, which were considered gold.

A few days later I sat with five other officers in a barracks on the city's outskirts, the sea silver and flashing far below, the light failing.

The Battery commander said, We shall have to decide who is going up with this one. I held my breath, my heart beat faster, I gazed at the wall and held the leg of the table. The day had been one of those autumn days that lazily replay the earlier sweltering season and raise the Italian's voice and give him a special easy walk.

Not many days after that I sat once more in an officers' conference, this time in a room with a parquet floor and tall windows high above the deep still blue of Naples harbour, lightly ruffled with white-flecked waves, where our battle cruisers looked like clever intricate toys. The windows gave on to a balcony from which a grateful evening breeze wafted in, then spent itself until the next one, in an hallucinating rhythm I had never known a hint of in my former life.

No sounds came up to us, so removed were we from city and sea. The captain who had welcomed me at Salerno with a gruff but solicitous nod, Captain Maugham, said he thought I should go up in the next show, being the freshest among us. The major smiled at me and said he agreed it was time to break me in.

I smiled too but I was mortally afraid. Yet excitement went with it, even increased it. I was to stand out, perform, perhaps earn better smiles—more earnest ones. It is wonderful what human association does for us, being able to render sane and even orderly what our trembling limbs know to be otherwise.

2

Crater

Most of the 13th day of October 1943 I leaned against a warm haystack facing south. There were flat fields all round and a breeze intermittent like a series of broken sighs that breathed a message to me I couldn't decipher—whether warning or solace. I was alone, reading a novel about a man of twenty-one (just right) who was deeply in love, and how his love, after a long time of anguish, was requited. And since it was thoughtfully written, taking me back to a style of speech I would never

Feb 4, 2015

This seems to be a
complete manuscript 2004

but need to confirm at later

date

But surely it was too terrible a thing, this second war so few years after the first, to tumble into with so little awareness? I think we realised, with a certain sickening sense in the belly, that a terrible destiny beyond us was at work.

The body-count from that war was 50.000.000, military and civilian. In the first world war 8.000.000 died, 20.000.000 were wounded (it being mostly a military war).

We have no official body-count for the fifty years after the war because the world was divided into armed camps dedicated, both sides, to the invention of ever more lethal weapons with which if necessary to destroy each other. Is war then just an appetiser that, in the end, produces hunger for itself and finally fills millions of peace-loving heads with thoughts of explosion and quick-firing utensils at the hip as an engaging video game?

* * *

One morning the colonel of an SS regiment, a tall handsome man with white hair, invited me to his quarters for breakfast after I had made a standard welfare enquiry about his troops. I think I was something of a favourite for SS officers because I

stood tall and blond—prime Aryan material (they made no bones about this). The two of us waited, sitting on camp chairs, while his batman prepared the chicory.

He told me he was the pre-Nazi type of career soldier. Hitler's great mistake, he said, was to go to war with Britain. The two countries had clear interests in common.

I couldn't see this at all. What I saw, with cross eyes, was the colonel as a late apologist for a war he alone had caused. I saw him as a Jew-exterminator. It didn't occur to me that the subject of Hitler's extermination of the Jewish civilisation in Europe had never been treated by the allies as of the slightest relevance, despite the fact that the war gave full licence to Hitler's followers to complete the Final Solution. The official allied story was that the war would take care of that extermination programme, whereas it provided a six-year cover for it.

If I couldn't see what the colonel was talking about it was because of my own clichés, one of them being that this war had been against the nazis, whereas it gave them a six-year all night party.

The colonel said, I have an English wife. Even this statement I took to be an extra bid for my approval. Yet if anyone had called me a prig I would have been hurt. Somewhere inside me I knew I was, and I hated being so.

The barracks had four separate buildings and a vast quadrangle. In any other country it would have looked bleak but the festive Italian light (close as we were to Venice) turned it into a bustling township. SS battalions arrived from Austria continuously, in flight from the Red Army advance. They raced to get to a British camp also because the Yugoslavs wished to lay the same red hands on them. Officers often arrived in Mercedes Benz limos, dressed in shiny black raincoats.

Rumours went round the camp as quick as a breath. Everyone was to be sent to Canada. Everyone was to be released shortly because, after all, what country would want to maintain so many thousands of foreigners? Then suddenly everyone was to be taken to a prison island (Procida, Nauplion?) for no fewer than twelve years.

But no one looked afraid. In any case Germans have a remarkable composure in crisis. The only ones

to look afraid, mortally so, were the Hitler Youth. The poor children watched us cautiously with their heads down. Like us they had been taught that they were to fight demons, and unlike us believed it.

I was happy in that place. This was peace, however loud. I even dared to dream of when I would be back at Oxford with my head in a book (as if this camp were a foretaste). I slept in a high-ceilinged room with elegant tall windows and great bare walls. The nights were deliriously, excitingly hot and sleepless, with a bloodhound continually barking outside and lights flashing in at the windows and the starting up of engines as troops came in and others went out to God knows where. One had to remind oneself that this camp was a miracle—the Germans in it didn't want to kill you and you didn't want to kill them. It gave these crowded halls and corridors the feel of an excellently serviced congress full of delegates from hell with suddenly no agenda.

The very anomalies and absurdities, such as the pets and women of every nationality once attached to the German fighting force, and every language being spoken, and our ignorance of exactly who and how many our inmates were, and the soirées that came about in

remote parts of the building, were the prison's raison d'être quite as if the Italians had devised it as the last earthly festa.

One of my tasks was to search the officers as they came in, immediately they came in. I was constantly called out of my bed which, because the whole experience was deeply restful for me, I accepted happily as one would an on-going Family Do. I would have to dash along the corridor to stop a quarrel over food. Or there was trouble over a woman prisoner—this was routine. All of us officers were on constant call in an orgy of social engagements, and in the quiet moments we sat together turning over the watches and cameras and binoculars that resulted from our 'searches' (a euphemism from higher up which meant stripping the prisoner of all but very personal items like underpants and bootlaces). Since we treated this as a joke, and strangely the joke seemed to be shared by the enemy too, we never felt predatory or acquisitive about it. Besides, there was such a glut of these victory gifts. What is the point of seventeen wrist watches on your arm?

An open German car pulled into the prison after midnight and a thick-set officer with a truculent

gaze jumped down from the dashboard clearly intending to walk straight into the barracks and leave the vehicle where it stood. It contained three or four women. What about these women? I asked him. What about them? he said in English. Where are they supposed to stay, I asked, with you? as fellow prisoners? are they German? His answer was, Will I need women where I'm going? Then, half addressing the SS officers standing around, he translated what he'd said into German, which got a big laugh from the enemy.

The girls, as it always turned out, were mistresses and prostitutes, which filled us officers on the victorious side with a quiet green glow of retrospective envy, when we considered that we could have advanced up the Italian peninsula in constant concubinage. Yet those German armies had lived much more frugally than we had. They had used about half the supplies we used, from food to ammunition. They wasted infinitely less equipment (such as empty petrol cans). Endless resources make you throw half of them away.

During an otherwise calm night one of my men ran into the guardroom and asked me to come quick. We

nipped along the corridor and up some stairs and I heard a woman screaming. I pushed open a door into a long hall with pillars and there before me, perfectly at their ease, sat an SS officer and a middle-aged German woman. They had an oil lamp between them, on a small table—a Victorian picture called Contentment at the End of a Long Day. I eyed the oil lamp, realising that what those officers handed over was probably about equal to what they didn't. A woman was lying on a camp bed at the end of the hall, in half darkness. What's the matter with her? I asked. The officer shrugged. I asked the woman opposite him, You're German aren't you? She nodded and said, She is frightened. Why did she scream? I asked. She is Italian, she said, very excitable, she calls for her husband. I walked over to the Italian woman and told her to come with me. Then I asked the officer, Was it you who frightened her? And he shook his head with mock solemnity. The Italian woman was still shaking and sobbing. She said, I'm Italian and in my own country. She said her husband was a doctor. Where is he? I asked. In the south, she said. Why aren't you with him? I asked. I've come from Austria, she said. That was all the explanation you ever got from the

women—I'm here because I'm here. I took her to the guardroom and got her a bed. By the morning she had gone. She must have solicited a hitch from one of our drivers who no doubt struck a fleshly bargain with her.

Further north, close to the Tarvisio Pass into Austria, there was a huge concourse of various peoples—Caucasians, Domanov Cossacks, Hungarians who had served under the Germans, Chetnicks (who had fought the Germans within Yugoslavia), Croats, Slovenes, Cossacks under General Pannwitz and Yugoslavs who had fought for Germany under General von Seeler. Tito's agents were trying to take a lot of them prisoner. This had been agreed with the allies but the Yugoslavs were also trying to occupy southern Austria and the Venezia-Giulia area for keeps, which had definitely not been agreed.

The Yugoslavs seemed too truculent to become friends. They were on what I thought a moral high horse and deplored the way we treated our prisoners like guests. Their attitude to Germans, as to Italians, was that they were trash. I had to drive into Yugoslavia one day to talk over a welfare question and was indiscreet enough to take a German

soldier with me as interpreter. It nearly got me arrested inside the Yugoslav border. The officer who received me was so enraged he could only glare at me, and he refused to hear or address the German youth. For him the war was a moral struggle. And as it was supposed to be the same for me I realised he was right—for himself. As for myself, the morality junk had all washed away in blood.

I little thought that this man might have reasons other than moral ones. I doubt if I even knew that Yugoslavia had been occupied by the Germans since 1941. And how could my 22 years know that 10% of the population (which at that time was around 16.000.000) had been tortured or whipped or starved or strangled or knifed to death in atrocities?

The allied rule was that the peoples who 'faced' us were our prisoners, while those who 'faced' Yugoslav forces were theirs. So there was no doubt where most of these displaced peoples wished to face—camps like ours: hence the fact that so many poured down into Italy—flying from Soviet troops but also from the equal threat of imprisonment and worse from Tito's men.

All around the search-shed there were piles of German bank notes swirling in the breeze. They had suddenly been declared defunct and useless, so prisoners stood gazing wistfully at piles of notes which not a week before would have made them millionaires, and when no one was looking they made a vain hoard.

Every time I confronted a new batch of officers I made a set speech—an interpreter translated. I said, You must give up your fire-arms, ammunition, maps, compasses, military documents, binoculars, and obviously since there are so many of you I must rely on your honour as officers to hand these things over. They seemed to enjoy this appeal to what they felt was the Aryan in them, and naturally held certain things back.

These SS officers were mostly tall, healthy young men—the first I had yet seen of that imaginary German army cooked up by the British media as strapping, implacable and drilled to robot status, so different from that strangely inoffensive collection of clerks, academics and youths of every shape and size, more bewildered than determined, more lost than indoctrinated, that made up the armies against which

we actually fought. Gertrude Stein's experience of the German soldier in occupied France was exactly the same. She couldn't believe how unlike the invented 'Nazi troops' these boys were, and how like they were to the boys at home.

One day some officers came in bleeding and bandaged. They complained they had been stoned by our Jewish Brigade. They looked to me for redress. I told them, You're lucky not to be massacred for what you did to the Jews. It was astonishing to see their hurt righteous faces without the slightest grasp of what I was saying.

In the afternoon heat a crowd gathered in one of the smaller quadrangles. Two Russian women were screaming hysterically. I stood watching them from the back of the crowd. I recognised one of the SS women standing close to me and I called her over. What's going on? I asked. She said these women have just heard they're going to be sent back to Russia which means they'll be shot for having attached themselves to a German column. The Russian women were looking about them, sobbing, talking to everyone, and no one understood them. We all lost interest.

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A few weeks later we were driving in convoy through the winding mysterious Tarvisio Pass. For the second time I felt I was journeying back to a place I knew deeply without having set foot in it. During our halts the mountain hush closed about us. We came to Villach, then Klagenfurt, then Graz. We bathed in the Wörthersee and took photos.

It was the British 5th Corps under General Sir Charles Keightley that halted the Russians in Austria. That is, the two armies sat down cheek to cheek, with simulated bonhomie. Of course they knew that they would have to move back to their internationally agreed lines when the war was officially over. It was the least of allied problems. Southern Austria was milling with different nationalities. Thousands of German soldiers were waiting to be registered as prisoners of war, many of them sick (a whole group had been left unattended with gangrene). There were various Cossack formations, whole corps of Hungarian soldiers as well as non-communist Yugoslavs under German command (like the Slovenes in the Russky Corps) and a whole Bulgarian army. And they were mostly going in different directions.

At last we were among people who had nice lamp shades and carpets and knew about tea and were blond (apart, as in our own case, from the dark ones). We felt acknowledged and even, almost, repatriated.

I sat in my room in a little village near Klagenfurt and read newly arrived books from England behind curtains in the evening, on a silent lane.

My first duty in this strange allied peace was to help exercise the Cossack horses that had come to us as a special gift from the Soviet government. Why and how we had become candidates for this gift we didn't know but we hauled up sacks of corn for our welcome guests, we watered them and sheltered them and with beautiful tackle (another gift) and divinely comfortable saddles (yet another) we mounted them. Those who like me had never ridden before learned in a matter of minutes under the eye of a reticent young major who indicated how to mount, how to sit, how to hold the feet in stirrups, how to canter, trot and gallop, how to brush down, how to remove tackle and saddle and muck out the stables, all by means of a series of differently modulated grunts. We learned how to measure the right degree of tightness in the girth by putting a wary hand underneath, how to heave

ourselves onto the horse's back in one clean jump, hands gripping the saddle and one leg over. We enjoyed the way our horses moved round impatiently before we even had both feet in the stirrups. And the man who grunted his horse wisdom at us had a whole regiment of officers to instruct.

The Cossack horses were small and swift and once in the gallop all but impossible to rein in, having been taught to do this in service of the blind headlong Cossack attack. I galloped alone through the woods. One day my mare, who had a distressful habit of twisting her haunches when at speed (this also taught) sent me flying off with my left foot still in the stirrup and dragged me along for quite fifty yards with the back of my head bumping on the gravel path. My riding major simply grunted, These horses are made for grass.

We soon realised how we had come by these gifts. One day we were put in charge of a long convoy consisting of Cossack families to be conveyed back to the Red Army at Judenberg.

It seemed to us outrageous that these simple people should be returned to a regime which we all knew would kill the lot of them. We were up in arms

about it, senior as well as junior officers. Even the war minister P.J.Grigg, as we now know, complained to the foreign secretary Anthony Eden. Churchill, always careful about matters of common humanity, suggested to Eden that we should stall on the hand-over, in the diplomatic manner. But Eden wouldn't have it. An official war diary of the period (that of the 3rd Battalion Welsh Guards) called the whole thing 'an act of unparalleled duplicity'.

These Cossacks could be brutal. In the Venezia-Giulia area a group of them had kicked a priest to death. But they weren't being sent back for brutality any more than for being simple kindly folk, which they also were.

The lie that won us over was that everything had been settled with the Soviet authorities. These men and women and children were being conveyed to Judenberg in order to be rehabilitated as Russians. Stalin's people had assured us that this was a serious promise because farmers were so badly needed in the Soviets now. And we swallowed it. And it may have been true. Or not. Even certainly not.

The Cossacks seemed happy in our convoy of trucks, waving to us from the back, holding their

children up to wave to us. They had been fed with a lie too, a different one. While for us they were giving themselves up happily to the Red Army, they had been told that under no circumstances would they be given up to the Red Army.

After travelling some miles we began to slow up. The Cossacks craned round the side of the trucks, curious to see where they were going to be housed. And what told us the truth about their fate was their sudden confusion, their eyes wide open with fear, their last-minute searching round for avenues of escape, as they recognised this Red Army road-block that was virtually the Soviet frontier.

They began chattering wildly among themselves, turning round to look at us, unable to believe it. Yet they seemed to understand that we soldiers weren't responsible. They began beckoning to us, not to save themselves but to give us their possessions, they were holding out their trinkets and gaudy shawls for us to take, their arms laden, but of course we only mimed back to them, No, you're going to be all right—divided as we were now between the truth and the low-down lie.

And then, as their trucks moved and ours stood still we sat back and in common with those Cossacks mourned. This time it was too late for mutinous attitudes. But our feelings about it were shared all the way up the military command. Only this time there was no answer. The job had been done.

Our days were now a round of idleness. I spent much time driving my jeep here and there unnecessarily. We had no administrative duties because the Austrians ran their own lives. I went to the opera in Graz, had fun going round afterwards to the dressing rooms and talking with the girls.

One day in Klagenfurt I saw a young man walking along in a British uniform which clearly didn't fit him, and which didn't bear any insignia. I drew up beside him and asked him sternly, What are you doing in that uniform? He blanched and stared at me and at first couldn't get his words out. It transpired he had just been released from a concentration camp, he was Jewish and this was what they had given him to wear. He was all but trembling, staring at me to see what new nemesis this was. And now I had the task of retracing my steps with placatory smiles and useless words that he couldn't understand, and for the life

of me I couldn't bring a smile back on his face, and my expecting a smile was another preposterous emotion in me. Finally after shaking him by the hand I drove away slowly and didn't want to drive, only sit there and put my head down on the steering wheel and wonder what the devil, what the devil? where has all this led me?