

Experiences With the European Underground : Part I

The following narrative relates in part the World War II experiences of Henry V. Schultz, currently a research analyst in the Investigations Branch, Security Division, Office of Naval Intelligence. During the war Mr. Schultz was copilot of a B-24 attached to the 93d Bombardment Group and was shot down on his eighth air mission in the vicinity of Hanover, Germany. Although much has been written on the aid given to Allied airmen by the Resistance since the classification was removed several years ago, stories such as Mr. Schultz's have a perennial interest and current application.

I

It must be very unpleasant to belong to the Soviet Army these days, especially those divisions stationed in the occupied satellite countries. It must be a very futile and frustrating experience. You crush a rebellion in East Germany, and soon the people are rioting in Poznan. You show the Polish people who is boss, and the Hungarians rise up in one of the greatest and bravest revolutions in history. You loot and pillage the countryside and break up a beautiful city so that it will never be the same again. You kill the people by the thousands and carry their young men into slavery by the ten thousands. The more you kill, the more determined become the people to resist. As an evangelizing force you do not carry any weight at all.

Recently the Soviets have been showing their muscles again. In their last message on disarmament they are saying that they could have overrun all Europe if they had wanted to at the end of World War II. They say they can do it still, without rockets or atomic weapons at that, just by the all conquering power of the mighty Red Army.

Apparently the lesson of Hungary still is not clear to them. The children carrying rifles, the old men with their walking sticks facing the tanks, the workers whom

neither the Red Army nor the secret police, nor the deportations, nor starvation, nor the cold winter setting in can budge from their demands, the students and the peasants still fighting in the hills, and even yet it isn't clear to the Russians that all this must be more than a case of historical deviation, that it comes from a force residing in the spirit of man. You can overpower a people, but you cannot put anything into its soul that was not there before you began, except a firmer resolution to resist you and all your kind.

I think I know what it will be like in Hungary when order has been at last reimposed by force. On the surface and in public everything will be quiet and submissive. But a soldier of the Red Army will never dare walk alone down the river bank at night. The factories will run again and most of the laws will be obeyed. But the authorities in the government will never feel secure. The people will let them know that they are loathed, and they will live surrounded by their police and bodyguards. They will beg the Red Army to remain, for they will never dare to let it go. And the Resistance, which before 23 October was inert, leaderless, and without conscious purpose, will now be bright and strong and active in all the cities, and in all quarters of the cities,

in the schools and factories and villages, everywhere in Hungary.

That is the way it was in Western Europe, Holland, Belgium, and France, during the Nazi occupation in World War II.

2

I take up this narrative on the ninth day after our escape from the guards in the railway yard outside Hanover, Germany. All this time Buster and I had been walking to the west, traveling only at night, keeping our direction by the stars when it was clear and by guesswork when it rained. It rained for 3 days and nights without stopping, so that by the ninth day we had no idea where we were; we could only hope that we had not been circling back to Hanover and that we might be somewhere near the Dutch frontier. We were close to exhaustion. We had been marching 12 to 13 hours a night through the woods and fields, coming down to the roads only on rainy nights. Temperatures had been close to freezing and we had not dared to light a fire. We had had nothing to eat but three or four frozen potatoes and sugar beets that we had kicked up one night in the fields. Our throats were raw and painful from the lack of food and from too much smoking.

The time had come when we needed help if we were to go on. It was a hard decision to make and we debated it all through the eighth day and the following night. Every time we agreed on a course of action the risks would come to mind and we would soon talk ourselves out of it. The one point which was obvious was that we could not last much longer without food. Finally we decided to take a chance and approach the first person we met who was alone and looked amiable. We talked a long time about the type to look for and agreed that it ought to be an old man, an old woman, or a boy. We would be as cautious as usual, except that now we would have to move by daylight. But we would keep in the edge of the woods so that we could still run and hide when necessary.

On this ninth day, therefore, we were traveling in daylight for the first time.

Now and then we saw people in the fields and on the roads, but they were all in groups. About three in the afternoon we saw this 16-year-old boy digging in the field. He was only a few yards from the edge of the woods and there was no one else in sight. We watched him for some time, and we took a long look at the house and barn at the bottom of the field. We had to be sure nobody was stirring down there. Finally we each picked up a rock and came out of the woods toward the boy, ready to crown him if he yelled or ran. I knew we must look frightening so I waved my hand and tried to smile. My throat was so dry I could hardly form the words and when my voice did come out it was not much above a whisper. "We are American fliers," I said, "we have been shot down, can you please get us something to eat?" The boy stared at us for a moment and then launched a series of questions. At the first sound of his voice I was tempted to heave my rock, but I hesitated because the boy's looks were friendly. Finally he started toward the barn and beckoned us to follow him. We decided to take the chance but to keep at some distance. The boy went into the barn and came out with a bottle of milk. We drank it and I asked him again if he could get us something to eat. The boy looked doubtful. Several times his eyes went to the left side of my flight jacket where the name of Schultz was imprinted in gold letters. I wondered whether that was good or bad.

The boy waved us back toward the woods and indicated that we were to wait for him there. So we went back and found a place where we could overlook the field from beneath the boughs of a tree. Of course we were worried about the possibility of a trap. The boy could be rounding up the constabulary while we quietly waited for them to pick us up. Several times we were on the point of shoving off, but we were so worn out and weak from the lack of food that we could not make the decision.

It began to rain again. We looked for a clump of evergreens but there were only

hard wood trees bare of leaves. We made a shelter out of some sticks and reed grass which served to keep about half the rain off our backs.

About 8 o'clock we heard the noise of a party moving through the woods. We jumped up and moved back 25 or 30 feet where we could watch the party coming up. Although it was dark and still raining we could just make out the pale faces of three people. They stopped by our shelter and talked together in low voices. The boy must have had keen eyesight for he spotted us hiding among the trees and all three came toward us. One of the men spoke in awkward English. "Hello, American fliers. You can come out now. We have brought you some clothes, something to eat."

We asked if we were near the border of Holland and the answer made us grin. "You are in Holland now, near the town of Amersfoort."

The one who spoke English was a schoolteacher from the town, a young man not over 25. The other was a man in his late forties. Each had an armful of civilian clothes.

"I suggest you change clothes now. Your flying clothes will attract too much attention. The Germans have their patrols on all the roads these days."

So we got into the Dutch clothes. We decided to keep our green wool shirts, however, as the weather was so cold, and it was well that we did. I was tempted to keep my flying jacket too, rolled up and under my arm, but thought better of it and gave it to the boy, telling him to put it under the rafters in an attic until the war was over.

My GI wristwatch with the gray canvas strap was also revealing so I handed that to the schoolteacher. "I'd like to give you this. But keep it hid until after the war, it is government issue and the Germans would recognize it."

All five of us now crawled under the shelter and squatted there. B.K. and I ate the food that the Dutchmen had brought,

bread and cheese and milk with something like wine in it, while the rain came down on us through the straw.

"Can you help us get away?"

"I don't know. I'll try to contact somebody. I don't know how to do it just yet. It will take time."

They left us there but early in the morning the boy and the schoolteacher came back with more food and tobacco and cigarette papers. Our throats and mouths were still inflamed but we lit up anyway. We spent the day lying on the ground, watching the German planes flying low overhead, many of them black-painted night fighters. We said to ourselves that they kept so low because they were afraid to go upstairs. Twice we saw the contrails of large flights of Allied bombers high in the sky, heading eastward.

After dark the schoolteacher and the boy came back with more food and led us along the edge of the woods and across a field to a barn. The schoolteacher whispered: "I have permission for you to sleep here tonight. I'll come back just before daybreak and take you back to your hiding place."

We went in and he locked the door behind us. The barn floor was covered with straw. We raked a pile of it together and lay down to sleep, grateful for the unaccustomed warmth. We did not sleep long for the place was infested with rats and as we dozed off they began racing around the barn and holding jumping matches over our bodies, often landing on us, until we were almost out of our minds. So we pried open a window and crawled out of there. On our way across the field we found a raised haystack, the kind that is made of poles supporting a platform 10 or 12 feet above the ground. There was a ladder leading to the platform. We climbed up and spent the night in the hay.

In the morning the young Dutchman led us back to the woods and we lay down again to smoke and watch the German planes. This was the third day we had spent in our hideout. After nightfall he

was back with a tall slender man by the name of Gehelius Ottens. Mr. Ottens spoke no English but he was plainly sympathetic. He gave us each a package of Camels and explained through the translator that he had been saving them since before the war. The Germans had swept over Holland in the early winter of 1940 and this was now February 1944, so they could hardly have been as fresh as they once had been. But we were not particular by that time and we became well acquainted with the rest of his hoard during the next 3 weeks.

3

Gehelius Ottens lived near the edge of town in a small brick rowhouse, immaculately kept by the women of the family, his wife and a husky niece from the country. He had five small children that we never saw--Ottens did not want to take a chance on their innocently letting something slip. So we kept hid in our room until they were off to school for the day and locked ourselves up again in the afternoon until they had been put to bed. Then Ottens would come for us and we would all sit down to supper together, usually boiled potatoes and cabbage.

Gehelius Ottens was an official of the Municipal Police of Amersfoort. The Gestapo organization shared his offices and of course he was taking a terrible chance in sheltering us so long. Often he was late getting home from work, and we learned that he had been out in the country on his bicycle foraging among his friends and relatives for extra cabbage and potatoes to feed his fliers. Once in a while there was a scrap of meat; the German authorities allowed each family a quarter pound of horsemeat per family per week. Whatever the Ottens had they shared equally and cheerfully with us. Once the niece brought home a few eggs from the country, and that night we each had a boiled egg for dinner along with the potatoes and cabbage. Hungry as we were we felt some penitence about eating it, since by this time we had succeeded in smoking

Ottens out of his cigarettes. The supply that would have lasted him through the war, reserved for birthdays and other great occasions, we had gone through in 2 weeks, smoking day and night continuously without thought of rationing. Now we told each other that we should have given some consideration to not depleting his reserve, which was also our own. That night after the egg Ottens had another surprise for us. As we sat down to chess he ceremoniously opened a package and drew from it a can of tobacco and a cigarette rolling machine. This was the kind of man he was.

During the evening, neighbors often rapped at the Ottens' door. After a preliminary peek through the curtain Ottens or his niece would answer, first closing the door to the living room behind them. Once a Gestapo agent came to work out with Ottens a piece of uncompleted business. Another time Ottens came back from the door rather less calm than usual. He had just had a tip from his office. A house to house search was on in their block and he would have to hide us. He took us to the kitchen where a highly agitated young Dutchman was already waiting, rolled back the linoleum, and disclosed a small trapdoor. One by one the young Dutchman, B.K., and I got in feet first and shoved ourselves underneath the floor. There was only room for us to lie flat on our backs, face up, beneath the joists. There was not room enough to turn over. We lay there for 5 hours, with a bad case of claustrophobia. Thank God there were no rats.

At 3 o'clock in the morning Ottens let us out. The Gestapo had not come. They had searched the houses on both sides but had passed by Ottens' house, only knocking at the door and saying: "Good evening, mynheer Ottens. All in order here of course."

Ottens held long conversations with us with the help of a Dutch-English dictionary. During the 3 weeks we lived with him we picked up a few words of Dutch, but he made considerable progress with the Eng-

lish tongue. Every evening as we sat down to supper we would ask: "Have you found a way to get us out of here?" and he would reply: "Not yet. The way is not yet good." However, he was making preparations. He bought us pullover shirts, European style, that we could wear over our green wool shirts, string ties, black shoes with ersatz soles and heels, and narrow snap brim hats. How he did it on his small salary we never knew. He was not happy with the fit of our civilian suits, in fact my trousers lapped around me twice, so he went back to the stores and bought us each a gabardine topcoat. It was a tremendous contribution from a man who had a wife and five small children to support.

Then one day Ottens informed us that the way was good and we followed him down to the railway station. It made us nervous to be brushing past the public once again, particularly as we got well into town and began meeting Germans in uniform. We kept our heads down and eyes on the pavement because we did not want to meet their eyes. But when we had safely passed a number of soldiers without being stopped we began to feel more secure and were able to pretend a certain nonchalance. We stayed well behind Ottens, sometimes on the sidewalk, sometimes on the street, and finally we came to the station and saw Ottens tip his cap to a sandy-haired girl. She was pretty and smartly dressed and she could not have been more than 18 years of age.

We followed the girl through the station and into a little shuttle train. Ottens had previously provided us with railroad tickets. We assumed that we were being guided through to the sea coast but after a short ride of half an hour the girl got off the train at a small suburban stop and of course we followed her. A boy in his middle teens was waiting for her on the platform. They drew two bicycles from the station rack and pedaled off down the road. When the other passengers who had descended from the train at this station had disappeared there were two bicycles

left. B.K. and I assumed they were for us and we followed the girl and boy down the road.

4

The road led from the station through an open, partly wooded countryside. There were a lot of German planes taking off and landing on a field 3 or 4 miles ahead of us. After a while we came up to this field and began passing a tall, closely set hedge that hid it from the road. On the other side of the road, our left side, were large, handsome houses set far apart on beautifully groomed lawns and well back from the road. The girl and the boy now turned into the drive of one of these houses, a large, two-story, exotic looking house of wood and glass, mostly glass, across which heavy drapes and curtains had been drawn. It was completely unlike any other house on the road, and I knew by looking at it that it must be the house of somebody who had lived in the Dutch East Indies.

We pedaled up to the door where the girl and boy had dismounted and were waiting for us. The boy took our bikes. The girl opened a door and waited for us just inside the hall. She smiled as we entered and she closed the door behind us. "You are welcome here," she said in English. "My name is Yohe Falmer-Ulines and this is the house of my parents. You will rest here a few days until I can make further arrangements. My parents will be very glad to see you."

We asked her if she wasn't taking a terrible risk, bringing us to her home, with a German airfield just across the road. She laughed. "You're taking the same chances."

The girl's parents were waiting for us. Their welcome was quiet and easy as though we had come with letters and this had been times of peace. For dinner we had roast chicken, potatoes, and cabbage. The father explained about the chickens. When the war broke out he had cut a hole through his basement wall and excavated a space beneath the lawn, shoring it up with timber. There he had been raising

chickens ever since. The present race of chickens was blind from living in the darkness, and not so plump as peacetime chickens would have been. Grain was scarce and he fed them mainly on scraps from the table.

After dinner he showed us the chicken hutch. That's where we would hide, he said, if the Germans came. It was the only house in the neighborhood of the airfield that the Germans had not taken over long ago. "About once a month some ranking officer comes to town and decides he would like to live here. But when he sees we have no furnaces, no central heating, nothing but the fireplaces, and all the drafts leaking through the windows, he decides to install himself elsewhere."

The house was a close replica of one in Java that the family had lived in when he had been in business there, and had been built this way for sentimental reasons. The house in Java had been open on all sides to the breezes, so all the glass in this house was hung on hinges and, when summer came to Holland, could be swung wide open to remind them of the tropics. "And because we followed our desires in this matter," said the father, "we still have our house to live in, while our neighbors have all been moved out long ago."

After spending most of the winter in a Quonset in England with only a scuttle of coal a day to keep us warm, followed by 9 freezing days in the woods without fire, we found the Java house very comfortable; in fact the temperature seemed just right. Mainly we spent our time watching the German airplanes on the field, reading the boy's magazines, and talking to the boy and girl. The girl provided us with an atlas and a pair of dividers and we could trace our journey to this point. We saw that the straight line distance from Hanover, where we had made our escape, to the Dutch border was 130 miles, and from the border to Amersfoort another 75 miles; so we had come a total of 205 miles on foot in 9 days. Amersfoort to the airfield was only 20 miles more and

this short distance we had come in 3 weeks. We were impatient to get on the road again but, as the girl said, we should not move "until the way is good."

Yohe was out of the house a lot. The boy told us that she had been a student at the University of Amsterdam when the Germans first came to Holland. She came home immediately and was soon in the Resistance. "She is always busy," said the boy. "Of course I don't know what she is doing, but she is in the war. You can be sure of that." At this time, as I said before, she was only 18 years of age, and with her fair Dutch complexion she looked even younger. The boy was about 14. He was not a member of the family but the son of friends, and the Falmer-Ulines were hiding him to save him from the German labor draft.

One night Yohe brought in six or eight of her friends, boys and girls of about her own age, all members of her Resistance group. B.K. and I were on display. The friends asked us the usual questions and the girl translated. The mother poured tea and the father served a round of geneva. Later Yohe put on some records and we all danced. My clothes came in for a lot of attention, particularly the big trousers which I had overlapped in front to take up the slack. "Now that we know each other better, Henri," said the father, "you will perhaps not take offense if I say that it has been my intention from the first to find you some more presentable costume."

In this house we spent 6 days and 7 nights. At dinner on the sixth day the girl suddenly said: "Everything is now prepared. You will leave tomorrow. I will go with you and pass you on to the next contact." Next day we got back on our bicycles and rode for about an hour to a small railroad station. We left our bicycles in the rack outside, and when the train came along we all three climbed aboard. The girl sat alone by a window. We sat right behind her but did not speak with her during the ride. The train went south and southeast, rolling at between 20

and 30 miles an hour, and it made many stops. We were aboard almost 3 hours. Then Yohe got up and we followed her out of the train into another small way station which she said was outside the town of Eindhoven. There was a man waiting near the bicycle rack. When the other passengers had disappeared, the girl spoke with this man and then beckoned to us. "I'm going to leave you now," she said, "but this man will take you on. Goodby. I hope to see you after the war." And off she went alone down the road into Eindhoven, looking so wonderfully responsible and confident for her 18 years.

(I got in touch with this family after the war to learn what had happened to them. Not long after our departure the Germans broke up the Resistance net in this area and sent Yohe off to Germany. Somehow she survived the ordeal of interrogation and imprisonment although her health was badly broken. The father and mother were interrogated and sent to live in barracks, and the house was taken over by the Germans. The boy managed to escape and joined what was left of the Resistance.)

Our new guide provided us with bicycles and we rode 10 or 12 miles through an almost continuous belt of forest where the Germans had woodcutting operations going on. Their labor was a large supply of Russian POW's, whose wood and paper barracks we could see some distance back among the trees. Many of the men waved and called to us as we passed by.

The light was failing when we left the highway and pedaled up a farm road through bare fields to a squarely built house of stone. We entered through a side door and half a dozen voices at once shouted at us. We saw a long table at which six or eight men were sitting and waiting to be served. There were other people in the room lined up against the walls, a lot of people. They were obviously expecting us, and I got the impression that they had all come here just to see us and to let us know that they were enthusiastically on our side. As we sat down, the questioning began. Where were

we from? What were our ranks? Who would win the war? When would we start the second front? and so on, shouting at us from all corners of the room. The food was good farm food followed by many rounds of homemade beer, and by this time we no longer had to answer questions as the Dutchmen were all talking at once and raising their voices to be heard, and sometimes pointing toward B.K. and myself. I guessed they were talking about the progress of the war and arguing about how long the Germans could hold out.

Finally the man who seemed to be the head of this establishment signed to us to follow him and brought us to a room on the third floor. There was a single large bed in the room. B.K. and I offered to sleep crosswise on the bed so that all three of us could use it, but the guide insisted that he would make out on the floor with the help of a pillow. We went to sleep with the noise of the debate downstairs rising and falling like the surge of the breakers on a rocky ground.

Next morning early the farmer walked us across dark fields to the bank of a canal. The bank was steep and we went down carefully. A rowboat was waiting below and one of the men we had met the night before was at the oars. He took us across very slowly and quietly. Halfway across one of the oarlocks squeaked and he cursed it under his breath. Our new guide was waiting for us on the other bank. We were now in Belgium. The guide hurried us along, and when daylight came we were already some miles south of the border.

All that day we trended southward, following small country roads and lanes. Late in the afternoon we could see a grouping of church steeples and factory stacks some miles ahead. "Hasselt," said the guide, and several hours later led us to a house in the outskirts of the town. The door was opened by a wiry faced man in his shirtsleeves who spoke a few words to the guide and then stepped back into the hall. "Come in," he said

in heavily accented English, "my wife and I have been expecting you."

Our new host was an old soldier, a veteran of the first World War. After supper he brought out his scrapbook filled with records of World War I, copies of his orders, press clippings, etc. Pinned to the pages of this book were medals and ribbons enough to indicate a Caesar. That little man had won every combat decoration of the French and Belgian Armies. When World War II broke out he tried to get back in uniform, offered himself to the army in any capacity, but was told he was too old. So he had joined the Resistance and from the rough looking company that came to see him and a few chance remarks that he dropped it was obvious that he was more occupied with sabotage and harassment than with passing along Allied airmen.

In the 3 days we stayed with him he provided us with identity cards complete with photographs. My name was changed to Shulen and I was labeled a dressmaker by profession. He chose this to explain my uncalled hands. Fortunately I

never had to demonstrate my new profession.

On our first evening in his house the old soldier declared that we looked poorly and needed strength for the trip ahead. He promised us a dish of stewed rabbit before we left, since as he said beef and even horsemeat were never obtainable except on the black market. Next night we had our rabbit and were grateful. On the morning after that we overheard a neighbor lady raising a tremendous row in the kitchen. She was accusing the old soldier of stealing her beautiful yellow cat, for the cat had disappeared that had never left home before, and it was known the old man was capable of stealing anything; the whole world knew he had stolen a chicken of Madame his neighbor on the other side and now he had stolen her fine cat. When the woman had gone we accused him of having fed us the cat in our rabbit stew. At first he denied it. Later he grinned and said: "After all you mus' keep up your stren'th; soldier mus' eat," and that was all we could get out of him.