

Chapter 3

September-October 1944

Gasoline and food are constant problems, primarily because General Patton's armored vehicles are moving so fast. Ammunition is also critical. Our First Army is advancing, as are other Allied armies to the south. We are a little north of Patton's Third Army. We must keep up with him to form a front.

Flexible underground pipelines, six inches in diameter, channel fuel from England to the landing beaches in France, where American pipes are filled. Our plastic pipe, also about six inches in diameter, is mounted on wooden crosses to keep it off the ground. The crosses are two pieces of wood, about a-foot-and-a-half long, nailed together. The upper part of the cross holds the pipe. There are pumping stations for uphill stretches. Jeeps ride the pipeline to see that it is working properly. I talk with one of the drivers.

“Every so often we see where someone has drilled a hole in the pipe and used a wooden plug to seal it. They do this at night when we can’t see them. Damn these Frogs. Here we are trying to liberate them, and they steal our gas,” he says caustically.

The “Red Ball Highway” is plainly marked with a red circle on cardboard (often a paper plate) tacked up to show the way in this country where so many bridges have been destroyed. I see the Red Ball trucks hauling gasoline and oil in drums, along with cases of food, clothing, and other supplies. Each truck pulls a trailer loaded with ammunition boxes. They go so fast they knock the corners off buildings on tight turns. They say they operate 20 hours a day.

We have time again to interview French civilians, mostly to see what the Germans have done to them. I am increasingly angry upon discovery of their brutal treatment of civilians. The worst is their behavior toward Jews. Entire families have been taken away by trucks, usually during the night, to escape our air patrols.

A French priest, Father Joseph, says, “Some of the parents tried to separate themselves from their children by changing their names to sound Christian. The Catholics have been the most helpful in taking in Jewish children and hiding them, at least until they are established as Christians.”

“How did they explain so many children?” I ask.

“It is not unusual for a Christian family to have a good number of children,” says the priest. “The Nazis knew that a male parent might be elsewhere—serving in the armed forces, the SS, or the Nazi party. They didn’t bother to search Catholic or other religious homes. Catholic convents and seminaries of other faiths have been particularly helpful in caring for Jewish children.”

“Those children are really lucky, and those who have cared for them are really compassionate,” I say.

“Yes. In some cases, the children were close to their parents, especially the mothers. When the SS drove the parents away, the children waved and even tried to run to the trucks. The parents looked down, appearing not to recognize them, for fear the SS might find them out. The parents knew they were going to concentration camps. Their common fear was that they would never see their children again,” he finishes.

Our outfit is ordered to pull stakes and move out. After five hours in trucks traveling east, we come to a parklike setting, by far our best campsite yet. Lieutenant Williams, special service officer, receives a hand-carried invitation to a victory celebration in Arronville, a short distance from our camp.

The Arronville festivities start with a fiery talk by the mayor, followed by the solemn denuding of the scalps of three “Nazi lovers.” Their public humiliation has been delayed for this occasion. The three women collaborators, heads bowed, are tied to chairs on a raised wooden platform in the middle of the town square. We stand at the fringe of the crowd, not knowing what to expect.

The women’s shoulder-length hair is quickly removed, with flourishes by the barber. A ring of French onlookers says nothing. We can hear every snip of the scissors. When the barber finishes his work, a man with a maquis armband steps forward and with an indelible pencil marks a swastika on the forehead of each woman.

The treatment complete, the women are led away by a man (dressed in an ancient French army uniform) beating a loud roll on his

snare drum. A few people shout hateful remarks at them. I feel loathing for the women, too. Later, I visit the barnyard where 18 such women are kept. Their bare heads seem too small for their bodies. The swastikas on their foreheads add an evil look to their drab, worried faces. They walk in a circle, led by a man, apparently for exercise. I ask a Frenchman what will happen to them, but he doesn't answer.

“Where are the male collaborators?” I ask.

“The men don't need protective custody. Instead, they must report to the *mairie* (city hall) at a certain hour each day. If they fail, the maquis hunt them down as fugitives. The collaborators who fail to report are soon dead.”

It is easy to tell we are crossing into Belgium. In the border town are mobs of noisy well-wishers, cheering us on. Almost everything is covered with the black, yellow, and red flags of the pre-Hitler kingdom.

At first, nothing seems different from France but the flags. As we move in farther, we see that the buildings and houses are of brick rather than concrete or stucco, and they are more trim and clean than in France. The sidewalks and streets in Namur are washed every morning. People dress a little better than in France.

Belgium seems the most densely populated place in Europe. You hardly leave one town when you are in the next. Some automobiles are on the streets, most of them adapted to use charcoal burners mounted at the rear. Methane gas, produced by the burners, serves as fuel for the engines. This is the first place I see dogs pulling carts. In Liege, I find excellent bottled beer—and ice cream.

After we've set up camp, a Belgian priest visits. We share my mess kit at lunch. He sits on a pail, eats C ration, and tells this story:

“Belgium got off on the right foot when King Leopold capitulated early, and since then the organized Resistance has been slight,” he says. “Most people have been able to keep cars, bicycles, and radios. Enemy programs are forbidden.”

“So the Nazis have compassion?”

“Rarely.” The priest is outspoken on the inhuman treatment of Jews. “I have seen old men and women beaten by German soldiers on the street for failing to wear a six-pointed star or for talking to a Christian. I have seen small children kicked viciously for no reason.”

“All able-bodied Jews have been taken to Poland, apparently for slave labor or death,” recalls the priest. “Those who remained in Belgium have had a hard time getting food. They couldn’t personally go into a Christian store and often had their ration cards confiscated for insignificant reasons. The Belgians in the Catholic Church, including nuns in convents, have helped these unfortunate people hide themselves. They have given them food and clothing. Some Belgians have been shot or imprisoned for doing this.”

The maid of another bivouac neighbor, an intelligent Jewish girl of 19, speaks English. “My sister and I were herded on the train marked for Poland at Mons with other Jews. When the train was going slowly through a switchyard on the edge of the city, both of us leaped off. A Nazi guard on the train fired a submachine gun at us, missing me but wounding my sister in the leg. She was in the hospital for about three months, then found shelter and has been hiding with this Belgian family, who treat her like a daughter. My parents, if alive, are in Poland,” she says.

Howard Triest, our 19-year-old water-tender, is also Jewish. He got away to America from Munich in 1937.

“I had a special pass to see my aunt in Brussels,” he says. “My aunt was hard to find because she has been hiding in seven different places for the last three years. With no address registered, it took me two days to trace her. She has lost 90 pounds and is quite ill. My parents, who fled to Marseilles, France, were ‘schnappen’ [snatched] there a year ago, and there is no news of them.”

We have learned firsthand of many incidents like these. A Jewish man tells me, “My pregnant wife was taken away over two years ago with no word from her since.”

But the Germans abandoned Belgium in a hurry, apparently in fair order. We have a light time of it for about a week, running into little fire on the ground and not much from the air.

Holland (Netherlands) is a different story. We’re on the back doorstep of Germany, where armament is always ready. The weather is bad for flying, so the Germans have a chance to man their forts and make more. German airdromes are closer. We Americans are getting more V-1 robot planes and V-2 rocket bombs—anytime day or night.

My favorite bivouac neighbor here is Jannis Bernardus de Hullu, a retired Dutch schoolmaster. He evacuated from Zeeland when the Germans flooded that part of northern Holland. A London University graduate, he is a keen observer and good host.

“Any collaborators here?” I ask.

“Holland has had more than its share,” he says. “They are mostly the riffraff who never made good or who had criminal records. The burgomaster [mayor] of a nearby town was ousted for corruption but recovered his job when the Nazis came. All collaborators were paid, given double rations, and could keep a radio.

“The collaborators reported their neighbors to the Gestapo. They selected the hostages and put some people on the slave labor lists. On the mere whim of one of those rats, a peaceful citizen might find himself in jail. Once he was in jail, it would take months for charges to be brought. Sometimes a citizen would be set free with no explanation of his arrest in the first place. If it came to trial, the burden was on him to prove his innocence.”

“How about the Underground?” I ask.

“The Underground, called the *Onderduiker* [under diver], was so secret that I never knew positively of any person who was in it. They operated at night, distributing propaganda.”

“How did they get food?”

“They took cattle, grain, and vegetables from wealthy farmers without their knowledge, leaving an itemized receipt. Dutch farmers have complete faith that their restored government will redeem these receipts,” he says. “Hundreds of these fighters have been shot because of their activities, but this never lessened their efforts.”

“How did the natives treat the Jews?” I ask.

“In this little village, one Jewish lady was concealed in a basement for two years and another behind a false wall in the barn. A British airman was harbored for seven months until he could be secretly evacuated.”

“They have taken extreme chances, haven’t they?”

“Punishment for such crimes has been death. Every time someone was caught at it, a bold obituary of the offender was printed in a box on the front page of the daily paper,” he says.

“Did you know about Reichminister Alfred Rosenberg? He was Hitler’s philosopher; he declared that Holland could be assimilated

because the people are Aryan—like those in the Scandinavian countries.” (My interest derives from an article in *Stars and Stripes*.)

“No, but the German soldiers have been disgustingly smooth and polite to the Dutch girls they liked. The soldiers gave them money and bought them silk dresses and leather shoes, otherwise unobtainable. Some of the stupid girls went for the slick uniforms, polite treatment, and pretty presents and soon found themselves unhappy mothers. The German army has given an allotment of ten gulden [three dollars] a week to each mother for her baby’s support.”

“What happened when the German soldiers left?” I ask.

“When the American troops arrived, the Germans took every car, horse and wagon, and bicycle they could get their hands on. They used the small country roads, speeding with cars and trucks in the daytime, using the horses only at night.”

“What kind of soldiers were they?”

“Many of the German soldiers were boys, 14 to 16 years old. Once in a while, the Dutch boys mocked them with the Hitler salute, lowering their raised arms quickly and saying, ‘Down with Hitler.’”

“Did the soldiers leave anything behind?”

“Everyone will read their propaganda sheet. It says that while the Allies have more weapons and a large army, the reason for withdrawal is that the Germans are fighting for time to get out a secret weapon,



Alfred Rosenberg

the atom bomb that will end the war. It says their master strategy is to let Americans into Germany, then slaughter you all at once.”

We wait to cross the last border from Holland into Germany—near Maastricht. Sometimes as I lie in our wet dugout at night, I think about a recent court-martial case I have defended: 1st Lt. James Lewis ran to the rear when the firepower of the massive artillery, both friendly and that of the enemy, became too much for him. General Gerhardt wanted the case to be an example for others who might have the same idea, primarily because the offender was an officer, supposedly leading his men into battle. Deserting a battle station is a capital offense calling for death or life imprisonment in the United States. Gerhardt appointed a court of senior commanders and, in the same order, named me the chief trial judge advocate for the defense.

I thought long and hard and concluded Lewis should not be subject to the M’Naghten rule (if the defendant knows the difference between right and wrong when he commits the offense, he is sane; otherwise, he is insane) used by most courts in the United States.

“What made you run to the rear?” I asked Lewis.

“I don’t know. I can’t remember.”

“Why can’t you remember?”

“My mind went blank. I didn’t know I was running to the rear until a major stopped me and asked why. Then I came to my senses and said, ‘I don’t know.’ I guess the heavy explosions made me lose my mind. He arrested me on the spot. So here I am in the stockade.”

“Are you sure that is it, that you lost your mind?”

“Yes, it was blank until the major stopped me, and then it took a while to gain my senses.”

After the questioning I was sure the M’Naghten rule should not apply. For expert testimony, I went to see our division’s so-called psychiatrist, David Weintraub, a pediatrician from Brooklyn. He referred me to Col. Henry Schultz, a psychiatrist at our corps headquarters to the rear, about five miles away.

Formerly a full-time prison psychiatrist, Schultz was tall, about 50 years old, rather thin, and patient. When I told him about Lewis, he listened carefully, then said, “I agree with you. This is a case of irresistible impulse, and the M’Naghten rule is not applicable. How could he tell the difference between right and wrong when he couldn’t think?”

Then the important question: “Will you testify?”

“I’ll be happy to. I’ve already testified in a similar case where the evidence of desertion was almost identical. The explosions are so great that a man’s resistance is easily overcome. Some soldiers have a greater threshold of resistance than others. Lewis obviously had a short threshold. He had an irresistible impulse to desert.”

Schultz testified along this line at the trial, with the military bearing of a full colonel and an assuring tone of voice. He stood up well through cross-examination and questions by the members of the court. On final argument, I made the point that everyone in the room was a member of a citizens’ army and that the war would soon be over. When all returned to their homes, the members of the court would not want it on their consciences that they had given the penalty of death or life imprisonment to an officer who lost his mind.

The court took two days to decide the case, finally coming in with the peculiar verdict that the defendant serve three years imprisonment in the United States. General Gerhardt was disappointed in his hope for an example. I was disappointed that Lewis was not acquitted.

Witness to Barbarism

(There are automatic appeals in such cases, one to the division and one to Eisenhower's staff judge advocate. Later I found out that the defendant received a dishonorable discharge with three years of probation in lieu of the three-years imprisonment.)



The author with a line of dragon's or tiger's teeth (top) made by the Germans to stop tanks, in the snow in front of an abandoned pillbox (right), and with fellow officers (above), all near the Siegfried Line.