

Chapter 1. The last days of a beautiful world.

Poznań, the beloved city – family home – the spirit of the time and Polish background – economics roots of WW II – the German debts – how the war armaments were financed and the famous con man – Agape, Satan! (the tempting of Poland) – the beauty of a world on the brink of extinction which irrevocably shall exist only a few days more.

26th August 1939. On Saturday Angus' father came back from work about one o'clock. After a quick meal, Angus and his parents walked to the Western Terminal. It was close by, about five minutes if one took the park lane through the International Fairgrounds, which were always open, except for the several weeks a year when the International Fairs were functioning. During those weeks, the walk would take a bit longer, down the quiet Sniadeckich Street, next turning left to the main Marechal Foch Street with its heavy traffic, all in all about ten minutes. Both ways one hardly ever emerged from the shade of the trees, nothing unusual, as Poznań overflowed with greenery during these years. You could walk from one part of the town to another never coming out from below the trees. Rows of trees ran down each side of the street; only occasional streets had a single row. The green trams harmonized with graceful views of the garden-city.

Some of the tramlines (especially on the outskirts of town) ran in separate alleys of trees detached from the street. That's why Angus liked to travel in an open wagon to Gołecin and back. That is if he could stand the extravagance of 20 groshes (about 4 contemporary cents) for tickets, a serious amount for a boy, equivalent to four small ice-creams. However, as an occasional treat this pleasant if expensive luxury was well worth it. Most of the seats remained empty, except during the rush hours. Yet in fine weather standing on the open balconies in the front or rear of the carriage, the leafs and twigs flying by, brushing against the wagon, against an eventually extended hand, could be even more amusing.

Still, the everyday means of travel was his feet. There were few automobiles in those times. Angus might sometimes look down the window from the third floor of his building on hearing a horse carriage, but always ran to the window with much more interest when he heard an engine noise. For instance, the horse carriages called "dorożki" outnumbered the taxis by at least four to one. At the carriage rental stand two hundred meters down the street one could face usually

between five-and-ten horse carriages, but only occasionally one taxi. To find a taxi it was necessary to go further, turn left to the railway terminal, or right to the other side of Wilson Park.

Now the family was walking to catch, well, not exactly a suburban train, rather a short distance train that after five stops in three quarters of an hour would drop them off at the Station Dopiewo west of town. This was one of the regular visits to the family; Angus' aunt and uncle lived on a small estate, or great farm, called Podłoziny.

Despite the short distance, they traveled second class (this train had only second and third-class), since Angus' father, an officer of the District Direction of Railways in Poznań, had a generous discount on ticket prices. Every year he also received for himself twelve, and for the family three, free long-distance return tickets. Because of this Angus traveled much during his vacations and was familiar with every part of Poland. At this season of the year he would normally never be in Poznań, but they had had to cut short the vacation to a month in the mountains, because of the alarming political plight. During all of August he had remained in the hometown, as often as possible making daytrips out to the nearby countryside. In fact, his parents left Angus with the family for several days between weekends, this being fine with him, as long as he had enough reserves of library books.

As usual, they found a whole compartment for themselves. Angus sat by the window beside his mother, the father opposite, and as always Angus made comments on all the railway signs and signals that his father had taught him to recognize. Angus was deeply proud of his father, idolizing him in every possible and impossible way for being a remarkable and splendid man. Perhaps he exaggerated, but there was surely something unusual in the fact that a plain peasants' son from a backward part of Poland (a little village called Barszczewo near the town of Białystok) could finish college. Especially, if earning all those years his own living through private tutoring. In fact he had only one talent – for mathematics, being sharp, bright and always the quickest. No more strong sides, but he made up for this by being a real workaholic and perfectionist.

After primary school his teacher, one of the dedicated Polish underground patriots from the "ground workers", a member of "Macierz Polska" (an organization concerned with improving education) insisted to his parents the child should go to the High School. And found sponsors to provide the first year's hefty fee. After much explaining and some pressure the parents agreed, but could not support their son materially. It was bad enough to lose a pair of hands needed on the farm.

Almost a miracle, but no fairy tale; the first years especially were odious – since for example the way to school was more than ten kilometers, nearly a two-hour walk, longer on the way home. Always too little sleep – and too little to eat. Good luck came as, being the best in math in his class and already a proven effective private tutor to his classmates, he was allowed to live in the Branicki Palace. He had several pupils there, first the officials' children and finally – this was his first taste of career – a son of the heirs, so his last year's of college learning were comfortable.

After his graduation, there was a bad outlook on further education in this part of Poland governed by Russia. Still, after some time he became a student of the Railway Institute in Petersburg, a technical university educating railway engineers. This was one of the few schools not discriminatory to the Poles or any other nationality, accepting students on the grounds of competitive examinations, with a strong preference for mathematics. Now came the bad part: he never finished the first year of study. Being a decent Pole, if rather naive, coming from the province and inexperienced in conspiracy, he was ejected for a suspicion of involvement in Polish student circles. Fortunately this ended with the so-called "wilczy bilet" (wolfish bill or ticket), meaning that he could never study again, at any university or school in Russia. A ban forever, no prison, as there was not any firm evidence, only suspicion.

This was the second and worst crisis (finishing his education). He lived half a year on nothing, at the bottom of Petersburg. He would not creep back to his parents, to the village with his tail down – and finally luck came back. He found his chance. A new, mixed Russian-French enterprise for mineral water exploitation was engaging personnel based on an open contest, for accountants mainly, and again he was the quickest, if only in plain arithmetic. No great ambitions anymore – but it was a good position that lasted through to WW I.

This work included much traveling – in fact all the time, so he got to know a big part both of European and Asian Russia. Especially the Caucasus and the nearby countries, such as the Down-Caucasus and Caspian seashores, also Southern Russia, much of the Ukraine and Central Asia, up to South Siberia. This was a dangerous and wild world with many a risk, still the pay was good and he was able to help his family and save a good deal.

The savings vanished during the Revolution; the only advantage was the money he paid (called greasing the palm) to miss become pressed into the alien, Russian army. But Angus' father could tell many colorful tales to his son, having experienced an interesting world and life

indeed. In fact there was more demand than supply in the tales market and Angus never had enough. Some of the stories he knew by heart, as for example the one about the storm on the Caspian Sea near the Black Rocks (the approach to Baku). Or about the apple forests (wild pear trees too) on the Down-Caucasus, where though the autumn thousands and thousands of bears come down from the mountains to eat the fruit, breaking the branches and sometimes whole trees. The whole forest in the paws of an army of bears, no one dared to enter. Or about the Russian tramps called "boska," men who owned nothing, cared for nothing, if only never to do any wrong to human or beast, good men, maybe some of them holy – like the Hindu or Buddhist saints. So even the worst bandits or the wildest tribes never molested them. In fact, these so-called wild tribes being at the same time dedicated freedom fighters, still fought the Tsarist regime and the Russian army. Alas they fought between themselves too much for their own good, could not effectively oppose the Tsar's army (but despite everything, they still respected the "boska"). Stories about their villages in the mountains, every one a stronghold or a real fortress, not a chance to take them without artillery. About the war road between Władykaukaz and Grozny, built by thousands of prisoners and "sołdats" not only on the rocks, but on their own corpses (many Polish included). In those years, in Caucasus Mountains one could get permission to travel only in convoy with a military escort.

As the never-ending demand for telling tales became too much for the father, he tried to seek relief and ease in reading aloud adventure books to the boy and thus Angus came into a habit of nonstop reading. The worst of all this was, the Railway Direction in Poznań had a great library and this became like an unlimited supply to a drug addict. So the case became helpless indeed – to the point of committing the ungodly sin of reading in school under the desk.

Father's tales always ended before the time of revolution. He refused to tell any further tales, saying it was too bad for the stomach and not only for a boy, but for grown men too. He wished very much to forget about it as much as he could. Only once in all the years, at the height of the German terror – he made a comment, the Germans could still learn something about cruelty and that he had seen worse deeds, yet still by some miracle lived. Maybe he said this only too keep the family spirit up.

Angus' parents met in the evacuation train in the country of trans-Don Kazaks in the deep southeast Ukraine. A train was already rather safer than before, but it was still a long, long time before they sighted

Kijów – where the Polish Committee cared for the refugees – and a few weeks later, finally they came to the Polish territory. This all takes only a few words to tell, but in reality it was months and months on the brink of, well, not a tomb, since there would be not any tomb, but extinction. It was one of the last evacuation trains that came over, before the all-out war with the Soviets began. Many trains never arrived and the people met on the way vanished into thin air. But this one had much luck and the refugees needed it indeed.

If some reader may have second thoughts about a small likelihood, too much luck, let this be clear: always some people have luck and some not. But only the people with luck can tell how they survived; the ones without luck, the dead cannot. Maybe the relations are one-sided, with years they become a little over-optimistic, it is natural and should be expected. The same applies for this book, so let it not be necessary to repeat this, again and again.

Back in Poland Angus' parents decided to marry and they settled first in the small town of Środa near Poznań, birthplace of the wife. At the critical time of war Angus' father volunteered for the army, but it was only a short interval, ending in the hospital, just after the Warsaw battle. Being not exactly a small, but by no means a large man, he was not strong enough for the artillery, which he chose perhaps believing to be useful as a speedy mathematician. But in down-to earth reality he served as a "mule," carrying ammunition, and the efforts of the battle caused him to develop a rupture.

It was after the war that he started work for the railways. In the reestablished Polish state there was a demand for personnel – and even the incomplete studies in the Railways Institute in Petersburg (to be generous; in fact he never finished the first year) was enough of a recommendation.

Again, the skill of speedy calculation did the rest; there was no challenge of computers. He achieved a comfortable niche in the District Direction of Polish Railways in Poznań and stabilized there, in fact as a right hand of the Head of the Department for railway buildings, where his talents were much in use.

As long as Angus could remember, his father was always the perfect specimen of an official with a pedantic regulated job and life. He would unfailingly get up before 6 am, do a fussy toilette and clean his clothes and boots (necessary or not, an everyday routine), only then sitting down to breakfast and heading off to work. He would start work half an hour before the required time of 8 am, rarely only twenty minutes early, finishing at 3 pm, but in fact a quarter after. He never

stayed longer. If there was some more work to be done, he occasionally took it home, or went back a second time to the Direction in the evening, but this rarely; he tended to be well ahead with his work. He was content with the position – if not a the top one – and several times did not accept a promotion – more so as it would be necessary to make a political declaration for the regime. He was a dedicated National Democrat, speaking critically of Piłsudski, his adherents and successors, but only in private. In the family, these views shared the mother – but the son, strongly influenced in school, considered this a blasphemy. Hard and sometimes aggressive words fell in discussions because in the family circle there was always a full liberty of speech. Angus' father would not take any active political move himself nor display his beliefs in public, but on the other hand he would never declare anything against his feelings. Sure, not for any promotion.

In fact he was avoiding politics. This was the best period of his life, he was content and had no further ambitions – if only in the long perspective to become an emeritus, pensioned off and live quietly and comfortably for the rest of his life. And banking on this future he had already taken a private and expensive insurance that should almost double his expected handsome retirement pay. In fact it was to become – as all other investments of the time – a total loss. The fine future never realized and the rest of his life had to be unhappy – like most of the Polish people during the war, and still worse after.

So far, the small family was comfortably off. Father's salary being over 300 Złoty and growing a little every year – that would be about 60 dollars at the contemporary exchange rate, but money had a different value in those days. In fact for 1 Złoty it was possible to buy what would today cost 20 or even 50 dollars. Half the pay would be enough for cozy living. The Złoty (the word means "golden") was worth something in the interwar period – being one of the most steady currencies in the world and surely in Europe. Almost as good as the Swiss franc – with the French franc being wobbly, even the British pound shaky by comparison. This was the cause of the paradox, the value of the Złoty held firm for a time, after the Polish state temporary stopped to exist after the fatal disaster of WW II. The Germans ruined and robbed the country's economy by printing money in an unlimited quantity. But the value of the Złoty held not only in Poland but in many other countries, especially the Balkans and the near east. The Polish Złoty people accepted for many years after, as a real currency – if naturally decreasing in value – solely on the strength of the former public confidence.

Perhaps if the Polish government had anticipated the slippery trick played by the so-called Allies, and the following war catastrophe, it would have found a way to prepare better. Maybe raising money for armaments at the cost of inflating their own currency and ruining the economy. These would have been desperate means, but justified, some possibility to tackle the impossible. The people would have lost fortunes, but they lost them anyway. And worse, many their lives too. Alas – people without an imagination, trusting the Allies to act honorably, ran the foreign affairs naively. Financial honesty, including a stable currency, they considered sacred – a deadly combination of mistakes.

For some time Angus' hobby was to keep the books on family expenses and he was flabbergasted to find out that they had in fact more money than they could spend living comfortably, if with no extravagances.

Years before his birth, the parents bought a partnership in a housing cooperative – something like a condominium in the USA – for the contemporary high price of 800 Złoty in gold. Angus could not understand this expression, assuming something extra dignified (this was only a legal term meaning that if the denomination of the currency were to change, the value would be automatically corrected according to the gold rate). Later, in 1925, the cooperative built new houses on Śniadeckich Street. The family took a five-room apartment on the ground floor, which was too big for two, later three people, so Mother decided for a time to rent one room, taking in a so-called paying guest. The location was good and there was demand for rooms because on that very street the University erected some faculties. Also, in the nearby Wilson Park the University developed an integral part to sport grounds (separated by a net fence). The back windows of the apartment actually overlooked the pavilion and the sports area. The payment for one room covered the rent for the whole apartment. On the other hand, it made necessary taking a female servant. So after a few years, the parents decided to take a smaller apartment on the third floor with three rooms (plus kitchen and bathroom), enough for the little family. Without paying guests and servants, Mother comfortably managed alone.

Now keeping the books – if only for fun – Angus tracked the two big constant expenses as almost equal. The rent for the flat was 63 Złoty, not too expensive – and payment for his school 60 Złoty. His parents had decided to send him to a private one, the best in town. Angus felt much distressed about such an enormous waste of money, all of this on him alone, downright unnecessary. He could go to the community school free. But the parents remained mulish, so with

desperation he decided to learn for the money's full worth. This decision he took with a heavy heart, in result he had to stop reading under the desk. Only in growing up does a man realize how hard and merciless the world is.

By a curious coincidence, the pigheaded parents proved right with time, there was a method in their madness. The Germans robbed all the family possessions, in fact twice leaving them barely with life. And next the Soviets with their underlings took what remained. The only good investment proved the money spent on education.

The third part of the current expenses was for life support. With about 60 Złoty, or 2 Złoty a day the family could eat well, in fact too well and too much. Poland, being an agricultural country, produced a steady surplus of food, and the food had to be cheap and first-class, if the farmer hoped to sell it at all. For example, for bread "pytlowy" (at these times people considered white bread the best), or milk from the leading creamery bought in a nearby shop they paid 20 groshes. At the farmers' market one could get these items several times cheaper (many farmers baked their own bread; eggs from 2 to 5 groshes each, or about 20 groshes a "mendel" (fifteen), and so on). It was not necessary to go to the market, for along the street casually came along wagons, carrying vegetables and goods, the men half singing, half shouting "Pyyyrki na fuunty, 5 kilo za 20 groszyyy!" (Potatoes, five kilos for 20 groshes.) Sometimes Mum yelled back from the window and Angus ran out and brought home whatever was necessary. On the Śniadeckich Street it would not do at all, to drop the basket on a string directly from the window, as was sometimes done on less exclusive streets. The only expensive goods were alcohol and sugar, but this because of the tax.

Capsule: Poland's economy and the effect of geographic location.

The most critical point for the Polish economy with overproduction of food, was to find a market for its agricultural products. Because of this problem farmers – big and small – remained poor, and so poor economic conditions spread throughout the country. This was a paradox, because on both sides of Poland there were markets with an unlimited demand for food – and many people actually starving. But both borders were deliberately closed, not because of protectionism, simply for political reasons.

In the east the Soviets protected the border as if it were a front during wartime. There was no question of commercial exchange; only high diplomatic negotiations resulted in a small-scale, state-controlled trade – which never allowed for any import of food. During the interwar period, not less than twenty million – more likely as many as forty or forty-five million people actually died of hunger. Yet even at the time of several great famine periods the Soviets continued the policy of a state-organized export of wheat and agricultural products, mostly to Western Europe. In part because of economy reasons – they badly needed hard currency for strategic projects – but the deciding cause was propaganda.

With the Soviet Union being a paradise of the working-class, there could be never any hunger or famine. The well nourished people had to have better living standards than in capitalistic countries, and those who dared to be hungry, deserved to be shot – in the thousands. So it happened during the worst famine in the Ukraine. The officials would never allow in any food, not for any price nor for nothing, any help proposed by charitable organizations from Poland they met as the worst heresy, suspected enemy diversion. Surely, a fraudulent ideological purpose!

It was the great Soviet Union which could help people in other countries living in most miserable conditions, poverty and oppression, hating the capitalists as the only ones who could buy the most extravagant food. Naturally, if the bad plutocrats should prefer food to the blood of the working people, they drank in gold cups as basic refreshment.

Now, all of this was unknown to Angus, to his parents and to a massive part of Poland's inhabitants, finally to an overwhelming majority of the world population. If it were made public, very few would believe it and perhaps even now some people take it for an exaggeration. Undeniably a raving madness, hard to understand through sound reason. But one should recollect that not many years ago the Communist regimes officially announced the Colorado bug came over to play havoc with potatoes in the socialist countries directly thanks to clandestine operations of the United States. They accused US public agencies for exporting the pest en masse in submarines, planes and whatever to let them out on the fields in neighboring countries. Absurd? Yet the people of the Soviet Union had to make official protests which after official announcements they sent by diplomatic channels to the US Government. Also anyone daring to openly express doubt would at best serve a term in prison. Common sense does not apply under duress of absolute dictatorship, where only the yes-men have a chance for survival.

It is a proved fact, in the Ukraine, large areas of the country, isolated and controlled by the Army held effectively in hunger specialized forces of the GPU, organized in military fashion in great units. They cut any communications, stopping the refugees by massive executions. People must stay and die at home, outlawed to run and seek aid in great towns. Many millions died, the exact number of starved and shot is unknown, but we believe now, that in the most fertile land, the black earth belt of the Ukraine, between ten and twenty million people lost their lives. Some of the survivors left memoirs, and it is now a well-known fact that if cannibalism was not exactly a common practice, it happened occasionally and not rarely. In short, it was hell beyond any imagination.

There was some smuggling over the Polish-Soviet border, since no border despite all efforts is fully hermetically sealed. For example there was a cocaine and firestones trail from Germany to Russia and one for gold and precious objects in the opposite direction; also short distance smuggling of other goods such as alcohol.

An interesting book about this subject, written firsthand, direct from the horse's mouth, is by Sergiusz Piasecki, serving a long-term in a hard prison at St Cross in Poland. There are some, unpublished memoirs of the so-called "Robin Hood from Polesie," Carton de Wiart. They could make a great impact in English-speaking countries after the British Intelligence allows them out from ice. sure, Sir Adrian, resident of British Intelligence in Poland, never mixed with smuggling, but did mix with smugglers, using them as couriers. The author doesn't know though how much about these memoirs is true. It may be only a legend.

Anyway, the point is that a smuggler caught in the Soviet Union with drugs would expect a trial and punishment, for example many years in a concentration camp. But if carrying food, he would be never brought to justice at all, only executed and buried on the spot. He would be considered a provocateur, a class enemy, and the first duty of the GPU would be to stop him from spreading lies, "false rumors" that in capitalist countries there is ample food. That being so, no one with a sound mind on either side of the border would take odds at such a risk.

On the opposite, west side of the country, the border with Germany never became fully closed, but the circumstances complicated and changed several times. The Germans never starved, well, perhaps only occasionally run hungry for a time – but did eat poorly. During the last century and even earlier, the industrialized Germany was a natural market for agricultural products from Polish farmers, especially from the

part of Poland held and incorporated by the Germans. They also imported some food from the part of Poland held by Russia. Now the market was still there and bigger than ever, the people in need of vast quantities of food. But first the border paralyzed the extreme protectionism and a few years later this developed into a so-called economic war, or a customs and tariff war. The German government did its best (or worst) to cut the import of food from Poland – more so, to cut any transit of Polish food exported to other countries in Western Europe by extreme railway tariffs.

This made a hard economic impact on the Polish economy indeed, with Poland being the weaker and smaller partner. It was a two-ended whip; the much stronger German economy suffered less – but the real victims become the ordinary German people.

* * *

Angus' mother, born in Greatpoland, the province held by Germany before the year 1918, had many friends. Some were former schoolmates, Polish but now living in Berlin and other parts of Germany, some even befriended Germans. In Poznań she cultivated a friendship with a Miss Balcer of German nationality, who married a Polish citizen and so became a Polish citizen herself. The woman lived in the same house, door-to-door opposite and they became bosom buddies, every day one of them would visit the other or the order reversed.

Miss Balcer, a noticeably simpatico woman, was never able learn the Polish language properly and fluently, so she was happy to find the opportunity to speak in German. So they did to heart's content, half of the day or perhaps more gossiping rapidly about life and everything else. Angus as a baby called her – in fact since she was Mother's best friend, she became his godmother – Miss "Nein, nein – ja, ja" because these were the only words he could understand. Mother pleased with this idly chatter, kept on saying, "This has an extra advantage," as she was able to keep her German up in best shape. From year to year she forgot more of her French, most of her Russian, but her German remained excellent. Nobody could tell the difference from a native "Berlinerin."

Now the point is that Miss Balcer often visited Berlin, having family in the city and born there, and Angus' mother occasionally accompanied her. They always took a suitcase or two full of supplies, as much as allowed for the personal use of a traveler – so they were always dear guests. After the one, or the other, or both returned from the trip, there were

always more hours of talk (Angus could understand nothing of it), with the final conclusion of his mother being:

"Berlin is a beautiful and a splendid town. The people are pleasant and friendly, the city provides good entertainment and a wonderful time, educating too – but a plain life in Poland is much better. If the Poles had to eat as bad – in fact disgusting – as the people in Berlin do, there would be riots. No kidding, there is an old proverb "Polak jak głodny to zły" (a Pole hungry is a Pole angry)."

These visits stopped about the time that Angus started attend the school – or rather after Hitler came to power and started to set up his "Thousand-year Reich." The two women could guess, feel the unspoken words – that friends would be friends, now and forever, but that it would be better temporarily to stop these visits. It was only common sense because there was much talk about visitors from Poland now and their hosts might find such visits a little embarrassing. It makes someone suspicious, never mind who this mysterious someone is – anyway this all would blow over in short time, in a few months all would be as before.

However it was not, and after a time even Miss Balcer stopped visiting her parents and family. This was more than Angus' mother could understand.

"Crazy nonsense – this is what they call "the German discipline." sure the people there are exaggerating. Or they are too timid, easily influenced – and in result trained like in circus. This would never do in Poland. What business, what right, might anyone have to tell me, whom can I accept – or not – in my home?"

Yet in the years of war to come, she saw by her own eyes that which she could not believe, exactly the worst to be true. Now her comments changed:

"What have they have done – to the people, to the lands? I cannot understand how all this could be possible. We were blind indeed. Nobody realized this. People should study this in detail, a lesson and warning for the future."

Hitler stopped the commercial war against Poland, because anyway it proved ineffective. It inflicted losses for both sides; sure more drastic for the weaker Polish economy – but this would never effect any changes in the politics. Rather, according to the nature of Poles it worked in the opposite direction.

But probably more important was the spectacular effect of an immediate increase in the common people's living status (especially in the large towns, first Berlin and the industrial centers of Silesia). Naturally the Nazi party took credit for this result, with no other explanation than the merit of a better administration. Before the Nazis took over, other parties could have achieved the same result at a moment's notice, cashing in on the gain in popularity – yet they did not. Hitler wanted success in any form, small or big, as long as it came quickly. And he got it.

The Polish side, happy that this long nonsense had finally stopped, was slow to realize that this was hardly a change for the better, since all commerce, money transfer and management were now functioning in a different way. The fundamental difference was the German Mark was no longer a hard currency, with all the following implications. It was not free trade anymore, with all the business conducted in contingents, quotas, rations; the German side put it all under Government planning. One may think of this as a method similar to that used by the communists, but this was not the Bolshevik's invention, rather an old pattern from World War I adapted to the German war-time economics. The communist and the Nazi economics originated from the same roots.

Poland did not prepare for this tactic, since such a pattern had never existed here; it was always a simple market, naturally free. It made only a slight adaptation now – which however gave the upper hand to the German negotiators. In theory, the trade exchange should balance. In reality, the German imports accounted and paid for in Marks now – without possibility to exchange them into another foreign currency. Germans deliberately overcharged exports of industrial goods to Poland. In result these goods became too expensive and found customers with difficulty. So, Germany's imports were always greater than its exports, the balance growing and growing to the advantage of the Polish side. According to Poland's traditional theory of economics this should have been a good sign. But this was a balance in German Marks, which were useless at the international money market and therefore could be in use only in Germany.

In fact this overbalance meant that Poland never received a big part of German payment; in reality a make-believe payment, deceitful and illusory. The Polish farmers, never realizing this, became manipulated into financing a credit for some part of German armaments and war preparations; not only cheated, but finally "paid off" by bullets produced perhaps by their own money. In short it was a financial trap – Poland got

in a double catch. So how did the upper spheres of establishment, business and finance, fail to realize this? How could the eminent people react so stupidly? Now, there isn't any uniform answer. This was a new monetary strategy – turning the weakness of a currency into an asset. Germany was the first to invent this financial strategy, afterwards copied as a standard procedure by the communist countries, but with much less success. Or perhaps was only the first to use it on an international level – some did so before in a small and not too clean private business area.

Poland was not the only country that fell into that trap, recognizing the truth too late. In fact all the eastern and southern German neighbors, from Baltic to Balkan, as well as the Nazis' ally, the Fascist Italy stumbled in. Once having stepping into this vicious circle there was no easy way out. The only solution could be to cut one's losses and start the trade anew, and differently. But this would become rather unpalatable to a country with a fragile finance, and because of this the trap got deeper and deeper. Theoretically all these countries held a constantly growing, sound credit, while in fact holding a bad debt – while helping Germany to finance its budget and in the long run its war preparations.

Capsule: Economics roots of WW II

However this all is only a small joke, an insignificant hoax compared to the greatest confidence trick in human history played on the upper echelon of world finance, first of USA, but including the UK and other rich countries. The recognized mythical author of this sharp fraud was the so-called "financial wizard of Germany" Hjalmar Schacht. In fact, the giant swindle was a child of many fathers, Schacht being only the last one of them, if unquestionably the most ingenious and able (to everything). This man, who perfected the low craftsmanship of deception to artistic performance, probably was also the sole author of the earlier described, smaller tricks played on Germany's badly-off neighboring countries.

Now, many people have never heard the history of Germany debts. Others reverse and demonize the story, implicating the bad capitalists – still others prefer to call them the Jewish plutocracy – as having deliberately supplied Hitler with unlimited funds to start the Second World War. And then stood back behind the skyrocketing war gains, harvesting money from human horror, blood and misery. This is a most stupid nonsense indeed, obviously based on illiteracy. No other comment possible from people who lived the times and saw the contemporary facts.

This story became possible because the actual dupes, suckers, mugs – consisting of the cream of financial society, the top echelon of bankers and banks – not one country, but of the world – did their best to obscure the picture. Erase the memory of their folly and lunacy. Humiliated by these remembrances, they tried to rub them out, to cut dead and bury any discussions, good and proper. This created the false rumors. Suppressing the truth usually causes misleading fakes.

Yet the problem is simple and human. It is the well-known problem of bad debts and bad credits. A common debt is a headache for the debtor, but if high enough, it could also be a headache for the creditor, nervous for his money. And if extreme high, beyond the limit of responsibility, a creditor's headache only, while for the debtor a possible source of fun at best, but at worst it may become a malignant weapon for blackmail.

It is a common knowledge, that Germany emerged from WW I weak and ruined. In addition there were several years of internal chaos – and the question of war reparations. In short, a case not unlike that of France after 1871, but France managed all her debts honestly. Other countries had experienced the same inconvenience before. Mentioning only one curiosity – the premier among the most respectable financial institutions of the pre-WW period, the Bank of England founded not, as might be imagined, for managing some famous treasures. On the contrary, it was to manage the extraordinarily high debts, after the wars with France.

Not only losers, also the victorious countries came out from WW I financially in bad shape, with giant debts – the cost of the war vast indeed.

However, for the author, the most convincing of all examples is the case of Poland, much worse off; there can be not any comparison to Germany. First, Poland became not only ruined, but devastated. The front during WW I rolled repeatedly over three quarters of Polish territory, rubbing some parts from the earth's surface. Immediately after the First World War followed a deadly war with the Soviets, beyond any civilized norms. This war ended with a victory, but at what a cost. Again the front rolled over the greater part of Poland and back, causing fierce devastations. All this happened in a country only just coming back into existence, without organized finances, no reserves at all. No wonder it shattered the Polish currency for several years. Especially considering that at the same time Poland was also fighting with Germany, who may have been weak after WW I, but was still a formidable enemy, greater and stronger than Poland. At the start was a rising in Greater Poland, the

only successful one ever, next three unsuccessful but bloody uprisings in Silesia.

Yet Poland met her debts accurately. If the question arises, what debts might this republic have from its first moments of existence, it is necessary to explain, the emerging State inherited the burden of old debts. It concerned money that neither the country nor the people ever received, debts of the enemy, of former occupants. These debts, accounted in proportion to the territories recovered now by Poland, were obviously an unjust and unfair conception, yet Poland winning its independence after 125 years had to accept any conditions.

Considering this, no wonder that after seventy years more, the Polish people were not eager to repeat this experience, hold the responsibility for debts made by a puppet regime, after WW II pressed with armed force on Poland by Soviets. Such a government was illegal from the start. This all allowed, even collaborated in by the former war allies, breaking the signed treaties and guaranties – in fact a dishonorable treason. By analogy, it was as if some Honest John made an agreement of mutual help with his neighbors, fulfilling his part of bargain in full at a bandit attack. Even more, helping to defend his allies' homes received serious wounds and losses. But instead of a thank you, the friends throw him to the wolves, let the gangsters take his home and his property and with words of sympathy turned sides, backing the gangsters. Culminating this story is, when after some time the gangsters had to leave his house, then the so-called friends demanded from him back the money lent to the gangsters. The crest of it all being, they did so on the mortgage of the home and property of the Honest John. Certainly, after such an action of bad faith, they would have no leg to stand on in any court, neither legally nor morally.

If nevertheless Poland agreed to pay half of the sum, this was more than anyone could expect, considering the debts illegal, wrongful and nonexistent. The good – well, the best reputation may be important – but in this case this was too much – too much and too expensive. The opinion about such a debtor may be: honest, obtuse and stupid. Now, such a reputation is sometimes not the best asset, because with such a perfect sucker, there would be no end of fraudulent demands.

For example, there was the question of Polish gold deposited during WW II. This affair, referred to by the communist press, may be not quite reliable. The communist press published that, before returning the Polish gold, deposited during the war – Great Britain demanded full payment

for weapons and materials delivered to the Polish Armed Forces. The troops took part in the defense of England, invited there by Churchill after surrender of France – and next fought arm in arm with the British, judged by them capable and satisfactory. What makes this spicy is the fact, that most of those demands they made for equipment received by the British on the strength of the "lend and lease" agreement from the USA, without any payment. The sole purpose was to fight the common enemy, the Nazi. It was reported that because of bad press and world opinion – calling this not only unfair but indecent – the British backed off from their early demands. Some shadowy horse deal followed. This is a story from the communist press, because at the time only such news were in Poland available. It may be distorted by contemporary propaganda, the truth twisted. Relata referro.

Yet Poland covered her debts. Germany never paid theirs, but instead used them to suck in more money. These are the basic facts about German debt, as much of the story as known by the Polish people. The essence of the matter is, Germany firmly determined never to meet these duties. And – incredible dictu – with a weak starting position, despite all possible complications, succeeded in this finally. But it was a direct way to WW II.

This primitive program – newer pay a cent – was most popular, a medicine for all sickness. The common people could swallow the fall of the empire "in Siegeskrantz," where they ate "Kartoffeln with Heringschwantz" (after a popular song). Well, accept some loss of territory (where anyway other nationalities were in the majority), resign from supremacy over Europe, all this caused never much concern to the plain people. But the war debts, they believed, were bad and the cause of all bad. Although the money flew not from, but to Germany, this became a common consensus and no party dared deny this slogan. The most persistent and noisy were the Nazis.

The logical extension of theme were two rather contradictory theorems: One, the World War I was not a war of aggression, but a defensive war. The second, the war would never have been lost, and Germany had every chance to fight on to victory, if not for treason and defeatism. The first of these theories is risky, considering that never in the whole war did any enemy soldier touch German soil – except for of territories nominally being a part of Germany but originally taken by force from Poland. In fact, still settled by the Polish population.

About the other – it is true that German soil remained intact and Germans conquered vast lands in every direction. However the country had spent all its military power and should actually have given in earlier, after the collapse of its last western offensive. After this, working against time, the balance of power quickly turned on the other side, Germany faced an all-out catastrophe. The German armies in the West stretched to the limit of human strength, had not a hope neither for defense nor for withdrawal. Few soldiers would cross the Rhine alive; their best chance would be a prisoner-of-war camp if their luck held. The Foch offensive had started already to roll the front, so they saved their souls in the nick of time by the bright, bold, professional, intelligent decision of the German generals. Chapeau bas! Whatever their faults and former mistakes might be, at least they proved the personal courage to take the responsibility, to save their men from the final horror and tragedy.

Surrendering on 9 November 1918, Germany had to accept immediately the military conditions, all others determined later. These military conditions were essentially to pull back German armies from the invaded countries, which became for the German Army a blessing in disguise.

The forces in the East may have been in a better position. Still for some units of Wehrmacht far off in southeast Russia it was already too late, they were unable to make their way back, literally thrown to the wolves. Angus' parents told him, on the evacuation train they had heard of some transports of German soldiers that vanished too, like the evacuation trains with refugees. In the official news this was explained as a result of the snow and the wolves, but maybe the antagonized population played some role.

What may happen, shows the example of Hitler, who believed all the German people should perish with him (by luck, he already lacked the power to carry this out). The agony lasted only a few months, a short time; those words may be inadequate for those concerned, but the meaning is relative, with the years of inferno for other nations.

After June 28, 1919 the tactic of German governments changed. Well, the early payments (in fact small, rather symbolic) did not wholly stop, but little by little ran down and lessened. This slow-down accompanied a massive propaganda, suggesting that given the poor state of the economy, ruined finances and many other grounds, despite best intents, continuing with the agreed payments was temporarily impossible. The same held for all other German debts.

Germany was not exactly flourishing after the lost war, but neither were the victorious countries and the first years were hard for everybody. The unexpectedly long and expensive war ruined both the defeated and the victors. Except of USA with its great reserves and a short time at war, every other country had an enormous burden of debts. But only Germany openly declared an inability to cope.

France acted after the precedent of 1870/71. France had then to pay an enormous contribution of 5 billions francs in gold – the contemporary franc being a high value hard currency, even after this catastrophe. Some years before the US had bought whole of Alaska for less than one percent of this sum. France paid in time – more so, before the agreed time. Nevertheless the Germans occupied a big part of the country, all around Paris, as guarantee of payments.

Acting in exactly in the same pattern, therefore, the French army now occupied the Saar, a tiny scrap of Germany but rich with coal, and declared the plan to take the payments in coal. But there was a difference: the former German occupation of France was a bloody business done with a firm military hand, with many executions and shootings of hostages. In the Saar there was a constant organized rioting, but any determined action from the army irritated the world opinion, including the French press. The French government, as in fact all democratic governments, was tender to public opinion.

Anyway, Germany found the top negotiators and politicians declaring the best will all the way, and probably believing in this. All should be forgotten and forgiven, a new era of Briand and Stresemann began.

If still Germany was unable to fulfill the financial duties – it was because it was necessary to increase the capacity of German industry, to rebuild, remodel, recover, renovate, repair, modernize and strengthen it in every way.

The initial flow of money, payments for debts and reparations, now reversed. It was essential to pump fresh money into German finance and industry – to make it work properly. Again, there was a historical analogy.

After 1871 the US leased much funds to France, the first massive American financial expansion – which turned out profitable with quick returns. But this time a remarkable phenomenon occurred: as the vast flood of money to Germany met with a smaller and smaller ooze of pay-

back, the German debts soared. Nevertheless this pattern functioned on and on as if self-propelled. Germany was still too poor to repay, but was always almost at the point of being able to. With a little more help, all would end well. With the debts already huge and growing fast, some nervousness crept in. The concerned countries called an international conference resulting with a plan for reconstruction of German debts – then another and another. All sanctioned by the great names of well-known, learned economists and every time with a large injection of more and more money.

During of the great crisis Germany had lost all financial credibility – nevertheless this arrangement continued to work. With the world credit seriously shattered it would be a bad moment to declare the German debts as a total loss. It could trigger the collapse of many great banks and financial corporations in a chain reaction.

Astonishing, this illogical anomaly persisted still after the world economy recovered and even after Hitler seized power in Germany. This was the personal merit of Schacht – who already before 1930 had earned his spurs as the most ingenious and sophisticated negotiator. Next he achieved the distinction of the man of the year during the crisis. And finally Hitler honored him by delegating all the power in the financial area. Now he really got his wings, became a super-master of deception, uniting high-flying performance with brilliant psychology, human knowledge and a real knack for personal contacts. With Hitler openly breaking the peace treaty and all financial agreements it seems almost plain magic – but in fact during the years the armaments program and war preparations started, Hitler never became hindered by lack of money. In his speech before the Reichstag on the first day of war, he boasted his ability to invest 90 billion Marks (about 40 billion dollars) into new armaments for the Army. If this was true, well, this with interest due and the interest on interest and so on, explains the enormous debt of Germany.

Sure the great transfusion of capital decreased after 1936, but not radically and the back-leakage of repayments stopped tight. The change of currency was a multipurpose project, but the most important target was making impossible, or rather worthless, any money transfer, any repayment. There were others advantages, like the commerce trap for the poor countries and an easy way to rip off his own people in Germany, but for sure the problem of the great debt had the priority.

Germany had already ample reserves of money at the start of war, but curiously there still functioned, if on a limited scale, some private crediting of selected German enterprises, concerns and corporations right into the war. This obvious paradox existed because nobody has a subjective interest in demanding or declaring official bankruptcy. It would be equivalent to showing a disastrous loss on accounts, followed by a hunt for scapegoats and rolling heads. Better to hold the bad debts in the books a little longer.

One may almost see a dignified elderly bank president remarking to his first vice: "I think, it will be better to put off this problem a little longer, yes it will be definitely better. I shall consider retirement next year and you have a good chance to come into my position, a sure-thing with my recommendation. We had handsome results this year and good prospects – but if this shit hits the fan now – we will all become dirty and in big trouble. And this is not our doing, we have inherited this problem – why hold the responsibility now. The best way will be to wait for the right moment and dispose of the corpse quietly. With so many billions lost, what's the difference of a few hundred millions more. So let us not rock the boat and make waves. There is a lot of stinking mud at the bottom."

This talk is imaginary – but the facts are not. German debts disappeared, put on ice for the duration. After the war, with no culprit existing, all vanished into thin air. With the costs of war at record height, the moment was well-taken. Never was there any devilish scheme or purpose, but the masters of the universe are human and may sometimes be cretins and imbeciles too. But who dares to remember? And that is why the memory of some important interlude of history disappears.

* * *

Neither Angus nor his parents nor other Polish people saw the universal picture. Small wonder, considering the people of influence and power of the world missed it too, knew only small fragments, many little restricted looks. The tiny piece of the picture Angus knew based on two sources: the newspapers and some books. The newspapers periodically noted international conferences, brilliant new plans and projects for further administration and settlement, or new ways of consolidation and rehabilitation of German debts.

A source of entertainment for the readers; obviously no solution was possible. It was only keeping up the appearances, window dressing so

transparent it was ridiculous. For example, if Angus could remember the figures right, contemporary with the Young plan it was about 34 billion dollars. Finally, as the question of payments was definitely put off (temporarily of course – people remarked, till the day of Saint Never), the final amount before WW II amounted to over 80 billion. Anyway, every newspaper presented different calculations, with a full interest it was up to 180 billion. If Angus did recall some figures, it was only because they were so extraordinary, like the distance from earth to sun. Obviously, "Das tausendjahrige Reich" (the thousand-year state, as the overoptimistic Nazi already called it) could never in thousand years pay it off, even if they decided to. The dollars had at these times another value, maybe twenty to fifty times higher than now. The plans were ridiculous, a source of amusing satire.

But they shouldn't have been, for if anyone determined not to pay his debts, the chosen alternative may be, try to kill the creditors. It has occurred many times in history, as with Philip the Beautiful and the Temple Knights, or a little earlier the Jews in Rhineland, not to mention the ancient Roman and Byzantine empires.

The other sources of information on the subject were some books by Bertrand Russell. Russell was fashionable in Poland at the time, as were Hemingway and Kisiielewski, and the family in Podłoziny bought such books. Angus thought it was because they didn't have a library as comfortably within reach as he – and he was in the habit of reading anything he could lay his hands on. He didn't like what he read in Russell's books – a part he could not understand, some other parts he found rather disgusting. A sort of slight adapted Uncle Tom credo: if the slave is very good and kisses the ass of his master, this may eventually soften his heart. The part he liked best were the theories he had never heard before, about hydroponics, agriculture and especially the future possibilities. This he tried to discuss with his uncle as an expert in agriculture, but Uncle disappointed him, calling it unprofessional and unrealistic, if perhaps important for pure science.

He did read Russell a second time a few years later, when the same book "Drogi do pokoju" (*Which Way to Peace?*) - was being discussed in the underground resistance press. This time he understood many more points but still finding some views strangely inaccurate. About Hitler Russell expressed a view, that perhaps at the time was soothing, if belittling the Nazi – Hitler presented as an immature, puerile trend, not to be taken seriously. Hitler's mentality he described as typical for a boy

of about fifteen. He, Russell, remembered at this age having just the same way of thinking. So, if only nobody would irritate, offend or annoy him, Hitler would in time mature and all might end well.

Telling ways of thinking – this was an example of a wishful one. Hitler made some bad blunders – and thank God for that. But he never was a drifter, a chance lingerer. He did enough thinking, years and years in a poorhouse. Events never just happened with him, it was all a part of a detailed and most rigid plan, clear and finished, refined – a single plain vision. If there was a grain of truth in Russell's estimation, Hitler was about as juvenile as are all the great criminals, gang leaders or bandit chiefs – and sometimes great conquerors too.

In the later years Hitler moved from success to success and quickly, like a rock falling down the shortest way, not a chance to stop him. From a bum in torn trousers he advanced to an influential outlaw ringleader, dangerous locally, but still in a limited area. Next he outdistanced his competitors in crime, becoming number one, advancing to politics, aspiring for supreme power.

As in the case of Stalin, one of the opposition groups unable to create a firm government adopted Hitler, considering him a nonentity, not a chance to make much trouble. Bad mistake, in the nick of time he seized full power and kept it permanently, demoting the democratic institutions, blocking the path he had used to arrive at the top. He held the whole Germany in an iron grip much stronger than that of "Kaiser Willie" or any other person in the history of this much disciplined nation.

The next step would be to rule over the world. He made his minute, elaborate timetable; if anything – too rigid, too unbending. Now finance was the most important of the deciding reasons. The debts? Not much fun, sure not a matter for laugh. But shortly, they shall lose all significance, with armed force he may take any finance he wanted.

As many great criminals, he started his career by making debts to the limit of possibility – before coming over to the phase of violent action. Already by 1935 Hitler required some expert, complex analyzes of economics and military perspective. About economics, the assets and reserves of Germany with luck and skill would be quite satisfactory for developing a war industry, armaments and war preparations to the year 1941. With some shortages, not too bad, one year more. And as for the military perspective, by 1940 Germany should be at the peak of rude strength. After the year 1940 the military potential would still increase

and Germany would still have the upper hand, but the share of relative power to that of Germany's opponents would go down. On the strength of these researches he decided to go to war in the spring or summer of 1939. Another, more subjective argument was health – Hitler assumed he would be physically fit and functioning well mentally till about the years 1942-3.

Anyway Germany had long since crossed the point of no return, neither appeasement nor any further political action, nor any development, nor any human force could hold off the war. At the time Angus and his parents traveled on the train, the clock was already ticking with about one hundred thirty hours to the detonation. In fact, the plan was already overdue and the first cracks had appeared, never mended. With all his successes Hitler was always a little too late. That is why he was unable to fix France in 1939, missed the bus to London in 1940, and could not reach Moscow before the frosts of 1941.

* * *

Capsule: Pattern of political affairs 1935-9 (from the time Angus started to read newspapers)

The stream of successes continued, after Hitler became the sole ruler of Germany. The financial side ran satisfactorily, thanks to the improvements of Schacht. And with the borrowed money still in reserve, already came an injection of fresh funds, robbed in the preliminary actions in Austria and Czechoslovakia (realized before the set time limit). Now only one short, decisive smash of the Western countries and the way would be free for the large fertile territory in the East, the future of strength of the Nordic breed. The legendary "Lebensraum" for at least a hundred million more of the Germans (next in line maybe the USA, best leave Japan for the future).

The bizarre detail is, he pictured his vision so frankly and openly in a book, nobody believed him any more. From a short distance Hitler was the most two-faced, untruthful, treacherous number one of all politicians, not a light achievement, considering only Stalin as competitor. Any secret service chief or a deceitful diplomat could take his correspondence course from Hitler. Even his inner circle was uncertain what the next move would be. Yet he could not resist the need to announce openly the great dream, his vanity could not resign from flowering his genius in the monster posterity he prepared.

Only a minor point, but necessary jus now, remained still unsolved.

This point was, Hitler never planned on invading Poland because he calculated to win its close cooperation in the first stage of the far-reaching diagram for conquering and ruling the world. It was not the hypocrisy of a predator approaching the prey – but a strategic play for amity with a future partner in crime, lackey and accomplice. He started this plan from the first moment after coming to power.

The old nightmare of German General Staff was the war on two fronts – and as experience shows, not without reason. The early scheme was to use Poland as a temporary shield against the Soviets during the campaign in the west. This was not any startling fresh thought, rather an old scheme born in Berlin about a hundred years earlier, as in the November rising (1830-1) the Poles fought Russia more efficiently than anybody expected. Around 1840 Germany put this scheme to study and development, but soon dropped it after the "Peoples' Spring" rising in 1848, when the Poles with no less enthusiasm fought Prussia. Again it revived as the so-called Beseler Plan in 1917, too late and with no success because the Poles had already thrown their hearts and hopes to the side of the western Allies. But it could have worked, if tried seriously in 1914, maybe in 1915 too. Hitler knew all this history and decided to repeat the strategy but properly. In fact Hitler never was an original, creative thinker; he eclectically used many pieces he found at different times and places to put together a new puzzle. The innovation in was the new combination of known fragments.

Immediately after seizing power, he stopped the long commercial "tariff war." Next, at the first possible moment, after Hindenburg's death and consolidating political power, he proposed and at once signed the no-aggression treaty. As a token of goodwill, he effectively stopped the nationalist press propaganda, demanding the "correction" of the border with Poland. This meant reincorporating into Germany the inner core Polish provinces, as Greatpoland, Silesia and the seacoast, occupied for a century and lost back to the recreated Poland in 1918. For several years he sent the signals, using his personal poisonous charm that so strongly influenced Daladier and Chamberlain. Several times he sent his closest associates to fix friendly relations with Poland. In fact to the point of offending his own hard-core nationalists, who denounced him as a traitor to the German interest; extraordinary was the rare clemency he showed then. The critics he ordered not to put into concentration camps but

only called "unnuetz Taugenichts" – suckers, well-meaning but unable to understand "des Fuehrer's" genius and terrible purpose.

After Munich Hitler decided, following all the play of benevolence for the audience of Poles, now the time had come to present his grand wonderful offer. He did it in the manner known elsewhere, like an unexpected piece of luck, winning first prize in an unannounced competition or marketing lottery. Poland received an official invitation to join the Anticommintern Pact, originated by Hitler and Mussolini, with full rights, privileges and advantages.

In essence this would lead to a switch of alliances, but initially seeming only a small, first step. For this small token Hitler was offering a magnificent royal reward in proportion to his own megalomania. He proposed an immediately acknowledgment the Polish-German border. A serious matter, considering that from the moment of signing the peace treaty, all German governments and all politics of influence had questioned this point, in fact only Hitler excluded. Now he offered a permanent acceptance of this problem tender to the hearts of Poles, clear stressing he was the only politician ready and able to do so. He declared publicly that being himself Austrian born, the "Prussian spirit" of hostility to Poland had never infected him. Quite to the contrary, like most Austrians he had always had sympathy for the Poles and had already proved this in his deeds. With this move he was taking on, at least temporarily, the odium of German public opinion, already all the militant nationalists denounced him.

That being so, it would be good if Poland would answer this offer with some kind gesture. For example, agree to a highway to East Prussia that would go not on, but rather over Polish territory, raised on pillars. Later Count Ciano suggested an alternate route, underground, by tunnels, not discomfiting Poland in any way. This would be a formidable technical work and would boost the economy of the whole region for years, with Germany paying and Poland sharing the profits. The second proposal was a new legal status for Gdańsk. Hitler proposed to continue all Polish exceptional rights, privileges and possessions and was ready to add more, suggesting that in exchange Gdańsk should change into a German town. In fact a purely formal gesture, since at this time Gdańsk already was unquestionably in German, more so, in Nazi hands. With Greiser, one of the future most prominent war criminals and Hitler adherents, as president.

All these suggestions were secondary matters for further negotiation, Hitler was open to further suggestions and changes if necessary, because these minor points were only window dressing to sweeten acceptance of the treaty by German opinion. Only the keystone was firm and important: the Antikomintern (Anticomintern) Pact. Poland had to associate with Germany, Italy and Japan.

If this was at first a cautious approach, nevertheless there appeared serious complications. Poland from the first moment of coming to existence again had been an ally of France and this was not a connection of convenience, but a long and deep, if one-sided, love. France, the country of freedom, second only to Poland only in developing a modern, representative democracy, became for the Poles a half-sister, well, at least the bosom friend of their own country.

In the years 1792 and especially 1794 the Polish campaigns saved the French revolution at a critical moment. From this time on, Polish soldiers, in exile after the many lost risings, always fought for the French and during the Polish risings the French always offered some words of sympathy, if nothing more. Never any disloyalty. At the end of the Napoleonic era, the Polish army commander Joseph Poniatowski committed suicide, both politically and personally, fighting to the last on the French side despite handsome offers proposed by the coalition. In fact he acted against the best interests of himself and his country. Yet legend idolized him as "the Prince without a single blame," an example of a true knight.

And only a few since, during the Over-Rhine-Land crisis, Poland by a special messenger confirmed to France her full loyalty, taking all the duties of an ally literally to the limit. Quite an excessive action, met by an intended indiscretion addressed by the French to the Germans.

But Hitler ignored this incident and continued his patience play. He was so sure of the final success, he staked all his plans on this card. Confident of his superb intellect to meet any challenge, to present at the right moment an alternative so splendid it would lift any opponent off his feet. So Hitler believed he found a solution to the critical problem – the war on two fronts – and would go a long way and back to close the bargain.

Hitler believed, his offer shall bait superb, appealing to the imagination of the Poles, a seduction of the emotions and dreams by promise of great expansion. Undeniably, the temptation done on a great scale and with magnificent vision, hard to resist. Hitler believed it a masterstroke – like the help he proposed to the Italians, to restore the "Imperium Romanum" with the Mediterranean functioning again as "Mare Nostrum". Undoubtedly, recreation of such by-gones was impossible, but dreams die hard and many in Poland still preserved the old sacred tradition. Why, Angus himself, reading historical fiction or biography, was galvanized by the splendor of past glory and planned imaginary campaigns to restore it. Indeed, the same applied on the west, where the historic border of Poland stretched a long way behind the Odra, so often he dreamed of recovering these terrains as well, fighting in his dreams the Germans. Could Hitler be aware that the historical appeal had two edges? In later years, Stalin used the other edge to lure the Polish people, with no better results. With this masterstroke Hitler was so firmly confident of final success, he could not believe it when Poland turned down the proposition. At first he took this only as a play for a better bargain, and signaled he was ready to negotiate more concessions.

He tried hard to explain, to sell his idea, several times sending as go-betweens his close associates to no better avail. Members of his inner circle, including the most powerful "number two" Hermann Goering, almost constantly visited Poland, officially and not, if one was leaving already another was coming or announcing the next call. This procession was so unusual, so striking and noticeable, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered it necessary to make a comment, using as justification a imaginary warming of German-Polish relations after solving the critical "Sudeten" crisis.

During the war, Angus heard comments of Polish citizens about the past, severely criticizing the former members of the Polish Government for "banqueting the German leaders, celebrating them, hunting with them, almost kissing their backsides. And who were these Germans? The Commander Chief of the "Luftwaffe," coming only to see by his own eyes, where and how many bombs to drop. The Over-chief of Gestapo with hundreds of Gestapo, Police and Army functionaries, eager to prepare murder and terror. The future General Governor, seeking the best treasures and museums to rob, Wawel in first place. All these vile monsters, instead of getting the best wines and food, should be arrested at first arrival, put in a prison and held there, till they confessed all."

Sure, so felt simple people. The Polish diplomats did not deserve this critique, they never did more than the bare minimum not to appear rude. Except for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for whom it was a professional duty, not one of the Polish top politicians, not to mention military leaders, returned the visit of the Germans. Hermann Goering, successfully hunting deer, wolf, even bison, still missed the game he was mainly after, the political animals. Nor did the men of second rank fare any better in seeking close connections with Polish officials; they found only a few inferior traitors, like Igo Sym. The foreign politics remained unchanged. The only difference was, Poland now did not lean out of line after her experience in the Over-Rhine crisis. Poland would act in accord to the alliance treaty with France, but could not engage the German army single-handedly.

Nevertheless, the Poles would never turn away from France and were not to be bribed with any pay-off. Finally Hitler understood he was losing time, the small gain after Munich already consumed, already behind the timetable now. Still a little time to spare but he would be a bad leader to take serious risk without a buffer. After almost half a year he decided to apply real pressure, make an offer not to be rejected and at the same time, work out an alternative plan, based not on exact calculations but on improvisation.

So Hitler did the first serious mistakes. One of them, maybe small, was psychological: The Polish people react almost involuntarily, instinctively against any pressure, always in reverse. Rather natural, considering they have had for generations to fight for their freedom.

The second error was worse. Hitler staked all his plans on one card, feeling assured he would be able to manipulate the Poles, to outsmart them, to make them his instrument. A tool which after victory would have to depend on him – or which he could break. Suddenly one step was missing – precisely the one taken for granted – and there had to be a last-minute change of plans with time ticking on.

Considering the results, the Polish diplomatic play was not too bad, delaying the war several months, more effective actually than the military campaign. All in all, Poland took Hitler all 1939, and if the Allies had done their duty, the war would have ended then and there.

During both the Austria and Czechoslovakia crises Poland remained quiet, because so did France, but ready to fight if France did. Perhaps the most controversial point was that after biting off the head from the

Czechoslovakia fish, Hitler threw some small bones to the Poles and they accepted them. Angus could not tell what the reaction was in other parts of Poland, but in Great Poland all the people were infuriated, all – his parents at home, his mates in school, the people in shops and in the street. All declared this as a shame and insolence. Some hotheads demanded Poland should fight on the side of Czechoslovakia then and there. But this was unrealistic.

Poland and Czechoslovakia never had an alliance or defense treaty and surely by no-fault of Poland, several times proposing more friendly contacts, but always cold-shouldered by the Czechs. Both countries had an alliance with France, yet it was as if the Czechs competed for the prestige of the number-one ally rather than acting as friends of friends. To put it short, they wanted no help from Poland; that being so, the initiative was up to France and it was the best opportunity ever to stop Hitler. The small but influential conspiracy of top generals headed by the former Chief of General Staff Ludwig Beck decided to arrest Hitler, if he should start a war with France and other allies, including Poland. Yet France did nothing.

Now, this is not the full truth. France in Munich took the side of Hitler against her ally and expressis verbis demanded the surrender of the Czechs. Poland had never a hand in this repulsive business. The scrap of terrain called Zaolzie (Transolza) had after the Munich pact come under German rule, inhabited by a Polish population. Considering all this, to leave it in Germany was as bad, or worse a choice. All this happened after Munich and absolutely did not make any difference in history (if only for the good of the local population, alas a short-lived).

Possibly, if Hitler had persistently continued his plan for winning Poland, injected still more propaganda, maybe corrupted some newspapers and so on, he could at least have found some adherents. Not many, for Polish people are naturally against absolutism, totalitarianism and generally any strong and despotic regime. Or maybe they always were natural rebels, devoted to anarchy.

Anyway Hitler could not wait any longer, he had set 1939 for arranging matters on the west, meaning cutting out the western democracies, at least France, which was impossible with the Polish Army as an enemy at his back. Berlin lay close to the Polish border and vulnerable; the Germans erected there the so called the Second (or Smaller) Siegfried Line of defenses. Now about the United Kingdom, he planned no real conflict and this was precisely the cause of the rush: to hurry before the

Expedition Corps should arrive and English blood flow. With France smashed and with England still unprepared for war, only just at the stage of armoring, England would be in an impossible position and there would be a hope the conflict would end at the verbal stage. Hitler was ready to offer "honorable and favorable peace" with guaranties for the British Empire. Also an offer of military help should any need arise; this would be an easy way to step in the British boots. In time all should anyway succeed to Germany, and England would become the first servant of the "Tausendjaeriges Reich." In fact he would take a similar line to that he proposed for Poland, only on a bigger scale. Both should be servants to the "Herrenfolk" (maybe a little better, as he considered the English a Germanic nation, if not pure).

After overpowering the western democracies and in a climate of triumph and enthusiasm, he would come back to the roots of his career, attacking in 1940 the Soviets. This would be the peak of his life, the time to find influential and rich adherents even in France and England. On the strength of anticommunist feelings and "saving Europe and the World, all European culture" and so on – he would leave it to the Ribbentrop to find acceptable slogans. It would be a time of reconciliation and settlement with former enemies. By deleting a similar, despotic totalitarian regime headed by Stalin, he could pretend to be better, a relatively minor calamity. The bested western communities would have to remain vassals of Great Germany, but maybe there would be a little appeasement too, at least to the VIPs ready to cooperate. Such a clear and splendid future, if only Poland would accept his will.

That's why Hitler got so mad at the Polish people. They acted honorably – maybe stupid, obtuse, but honest. But being the prime source of collapsing Hitler's timetable and the consequent bad turn of the war, they paid with several millions of dead. Hitler was convinced that if he could follow his timetable, victory would be his.

Overall Poland's decisions were correct – this was neither a slip nor gaffe, in this critical moment the course of Poland decided the immediate future of the whole world, as never before in history. However, Poland's diplomats ran a heavy mistake, not adequately securing the interest of their own country. For this mistake only, the responsibility rests on the head of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Beck.

Beck's family, descending from Saxony, divided on two lines, the Polish and the German, both rather modest, had one remarkable tradition: many people believed, they were the custodians of Saint Graal – Holy

Grail. (Yes, Hitler believed too in its mystic power and sought it a longtime.) Nobody could explain, how the line of guardians from Brittany came over to Saxony. After the legend, only one of the families at a time was aware of the mystery, and no one else knew who this was. The bearer could not die before telling the mystery to the chosen next, but died immediately after that – quite a story.

But the Polish minister Beck in reality behaved like a wandering knight lost in a world full of knaves, thieves and crooks, assuming the double-crossing cheaters to be gentlemen. He held his word and acted honorably, that's good, but he also took it for granted that his partners would do the same. If he had so acted in his private life only, it would have been only his private misery and pity. But for applying this particular code of honor in the practice of Foreign Affairs practice, Poland was the one to pay. First, with a huge hecatomb, a hell incomparable to that any other country. Next, after the theoretical or rather theoretical victory, forty-five years of further hell, a fate worse than that experienced by the losers, the Germans, or Hitler's former allies. Stalin continued war against Poland for several years and after the resistance collapsed, murdered even more of the Polish people and oppressed those yet alive in their country. The worst ended three years after his death, in 1956, but only after thirty-three more years could one mention in Poland such words as liberty and independence. The so-called victory gave the Polish population for two generations the worst calamity in history; the previous century of slavery was a Heaven by comparison.

Such were the results of taking seriously empty slogans about honor and honesty, by the country and her Minister of Foreign Affairs. A head politician should be cautious about practicing such terms. Better forget them – if not able, a person should never take this office. As an example of clever action and genius, let's look at the greatest person in the contemporary history of France.

General De Gaulle in an extreme difficult position behaved consistently, considering his allies bad cheaters, never trusting them an inch and invariably checking every detail. He not only counted the proverbial silver spoons, but literally his fingers after every handshake. The well-known comment of Roosevelt to Churchill said, De Gaulle spend much more time fighting his allies, than actually fighting the Germans. Even his return to France happened in deep secret from his allies, as supercargo on board of a French fighter (rather uncomfortable, it was a no-person plane and a tall general). I doubt it was only plain paranoia; maybe he

knew what to expect of the allies, because what he said to the pilot was: "With an unannounced flight, we shall have a better chance. There could be a plane by mistake shot down by a friendly air force and we better shall care for our planes, we do not have to many to lose." There is also a story that he remarked after Sikorski's death: "If one expects not be able to pay his debts, he may prefer to kill the creditor."

Whatever may be the judgment on these piquant words, the end effect was that France, starting from a weak position, fully restored to her former power.

Contrary to this example, Minister Beck never had any doubts about the trustworthiness of the Allies, never the smallest suspicion. The only problem he took care of was the guarantees to Poland and the mutual defense treaties should go with detailed military agreements. For example, what force should Poland apply if Hitler invades France and conversely, what should be the strength and timing of French offensive, if he attacks Poland first? Or, how would the British Air Force engage the German Luftwaffe. But he never took into account the Western countries might sign bad checks. That they had no intent to realize them ever and the deals they closed were worthless, dishonest from the start – not only about the war, but worse still, also the following peace.

* * *

16 March 1939. Coming into his class, Angus heard satirical limericks about Hacha (president of Czechoslovakia) and Hitler. It was the only subject of conversation among the students, from the beginners on, babies from the first-class. To be sure, only the senior classes, from the fifth on (Angus' class), counted; only they could understand the true importance of the events.

The previous day, Angus had been sitting in the balcony room, reading a book and at the same time listening to some children's story on the radio. At a certain moment the story stopped and the radio announced urgent news. Angus laid down the book and called his parents. Father came and listened intently; Mother was busy in the kitchen, but the two of them related to her the news. Germany, despite former declarations that Sudeten was "the definite end of any territorial expansion, from now it shall be an everlasting peace," had sent the Army to occupy all of Czechoslovakia and now they had arrived in the capital, Prague. The parents made no comments in his presence, but Angus nevertheless a

little later overheard as Mother told Father, she did not like this news, indeed not!

But on the next day, in school, all was clear. There would be a war, a sure-thing. It was not a lighthearted comment, nor a panic or shock, but a serious, dogged determination. Angus was later to meet the same mood, he recognized the spirit, after liquidating ghettos. Now we are at it, there is not any alternative, we are at the front of the queue and our time has come. But we shall fight to the death, we will get and take with us as many executors as we can. The point of no returns is past, but we resign never, we fight to the last.

This state of mind remained, despite ongoing German declarations of friendship and small bites thrown to Poland. Later came one good news between the bad, if not enough to counter it. A little silver lining in a dark cloud. Hitler decided also to throw some bites to Hungary, the so-called Transcarpatian Ukraine, and so Poland and Hungary, always friends, gained a mutual border.

* * *

Exactly one week later, the 22nd of March, Hitler's efforts to corrupt Poland into alliance came to a peak at the Klaipeda (Memel) Crisis. During a time of peace, the German Army and Marine expedition force took the city and harbor of Klaipeda, belonging to Lithuania. At the same time Hitler sent word to the Polish Government that Poland might take the whole remaining part of Lithuania, with Germany satisfied to keep only this one small piece. Hitler directly encouraged Poland to grip the opportunity, his purpose would be a down payment and decisive boost to push Poland to win back her historic borders. The expansion in the east, realized with German support and the prospect of military help. To put it plain, do this under Hitler's direction, and be quick about it.

As in many European countries, so in Poland the Nazi propaganda and ideology had some impact and found people impressed by Hitler's determination and success. This was a small bunch, smaller than for example the English fascists, almost null compared to other European countries. The most popular right-wing national party, called Endecja (for National Democracy), cut itself away from Nazi ideology. In the only area where there was a link, anti-Semitism, Endecja was officially against any unlawful violence. If there was encouragement to excesses, the answer was: "Yes, strike the Jews, but only on their purse." Or much worse (from the Nazi viewpoint): "Buy commodities in Polish stores, not

from Germans or Jews" (this was an appeal from the time of the Tariff war, but to be mentioned alongside the Jews angered the Nazis in the extreme).

Only from the ONR, the youth branch affiliated with Endecja, broke away three small factions with a fascist ideology, but none matching the Nazis. They preferred to refer to the Italian or even Spanish roots, because the Nazis were unpopular in Poland. More curious, from this same ground as a go-between arrived in Warsaw Count Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, a colorful person, much more sympathetic than the German ministers. But even he could not sell the idea of the Anticomintern Pact to the Poles.

In fact, the fractions that responded to the Fascist ideas, never amounted to a full tenth of one percent of the population (up to thirty thousand in all, members and supporters). Not nothing, but almost. However, these small fractions, like true Fascists, were only too noisy. Yet their efforts to demonstrate made scant impact on the public opinion.

Over the next two days, the 23rd and 24th of March, small gangs of them manifested loudly, especially with fire flares after dark, in true fascist fashion. "Leader, guide us!" And "To Kowno! To Kowno!" – (it was Lithuania's capital). These calls if addressed to marshal Rydz-Smigly, were almost a direct copy of the appeals to the "Fuehrer."

Nazi agents inspired these events, but kept their distance. The participants were rash and hot youngsters acting in good faith, eager to restore the great traditions of glory and power. An overwhelming majority later took part in an active fight with the occupants or in the resistance, many died, only a few turned to collaborators or traitors.

* * *

The end of March brought a definite end of Hitler's friendship. The Klaipeda case was the last essay to turn public opinion and government policy, to induce Poland to Hitler's side, but ended trivially, not a hope of success. Hitler had enough of waiting, probably offended because with his predictions turned so worthless he felt belittled in the eyes of his minions. The case with Mussolini, was: "Il Duce ha semper ragione" but Hitler was much more tender, in his circle he was an unquestionable prophet; he could not allow such humiliation and disgrace.

If this temptation had succeeded and the Polish Army had joined Germany in overtaking Lithuania, Poland would have been guilty of unlawful robbery and so judged by world opinion, with the support of only Germany. This would have led directly to close collaboration with Hitler, with Poland becoming his ally. That is the only logical explanation for the mysterious Klaipeda incident, since Lithuania was in all but name under German protectorate from the time of a secret deal with the German General Staff just before the cease-fire in 1918. Klaipeda may have had a German majority, but also offered them exceptional privileges. It makes no sense whatever to bite one's little friend, taking a pound of his flesh, at the cost of deeply wounding him. Economically the German population lost much of its good business. A wealthy city turned into a provincial town. Germany invested heavily in Klaipeda and it brought great returns. This was all destroyed in one moment. In biting off this pound of flesh there would not have been one grain of sense, unless there were grave political expectations behind the move. And the only possible explanation would be to lure Poland with the phantom of rebuilding its former eminence in the east.

Hitler may have been an expert in manipulating the people, but this time he made a bad mistake. After this incident he changed his attitude toward the Poles. From April 24th they stopped to be his dear friends. If they did not have enough intelligence to see, which side the bread was buttered, it would become necessary to teach them a lesson. Hitler decided to apply pressure. And with the exact opposite result, like pulling an ass by the tail.

The Polish diplomacy was in a desperate mess. There was never any question that accepting Hitler's proposal was impossible; but how to communicate this? Poland had her back against the wall and had to give an answer, with the prospect of rape if not willing to accept this marriage. There was no way to win a war with Germany solo. Only Angus and boys of his age could dream of such a possibility.

Poland was an ally of France, yet the value of this alliance had recently dropped dramatically. Czechoslovakia had just such an alliance, but had already stopped to exist, left without any help from her friend. The ally threw her to the wolf, taking the side of the aggressor; an obvious treason. There was a strong possibility that this could happen again.

What is more, Poland had her own negative experience. In the Over-Rhine-Land crisis, Poland sent a special envoy to France to confirm that if France after so clear a breach of the Versailles Treaty were to enter

the war, Poland would automatically be in. It was a too hasty action. France did nothing more than send a diplomatic note. (Informally there was a story, it was the solo merit of Edward VII, the British King. Probably there was more behind his abdication than the story of marriage with Mrs. Simpson.)

Anyway, the worst was, the French diplomats took pains to repeat the confidential news about the Polish position to the Germans, a breach of trust. But Hitler, beginning then his benevolence play to Poland, was eager to tell all about "dieses Schweinerei" (pigs shit) in private to the Poles. Next he proposed a no-aggression pact. This would be like a detailed copy of the pact closed some time since between Poland and the Soviets, with except all existing alliances. There was only one such alliance, with France, and there was no chance of a war between France and the Soviets, no probable clash of interest. But with Germany the possibility of collision existed, nevertheless Hitler accepted this exception. For him this pact was only the first step, to change public opinion and win the Polish people over to his plan; and this incident he considered as very lucky. (Anyway, none of these pacts kept. The totalitarian regimes never believe in "pacta sunt serwanda.")

Now, in such a risky position, the Polish Government did the only possible, delaying the answer, disputing and raising many minor points and questions, with the belief that France might come finally to her senses. It was important not to offend Hitler as long as possible with a direct no. Every month, week or even day counted. But there was not much choice, there must at last come a no. After fall of the Czech country, the people were so determined there would be a revolution if the government accepted Hitler's command, against citizen consensus. This scenario was so real, the government dared not tell its people about the German propositions, its own tries and the true political position. Turmoil would violate the delicate play to win more time.

In April the German press announced news about Hitler's demands, at first only concerning a free turnpike and the Gdańsk. But this time without mentioning the guarantee of the Polish border. The Polish public opinion reacted most unfavorably, the people believing that now at last the bad wolf was taking off his mask. But the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to present counter-propositions and possible compromises to lengthen the talk. Some were rather naïve, as accepting the honor of access to the Anticommintern Pact, but only after the term

of the no-aggression Pact with the Soviets expires (which would be in 1940).

"The chariot of State sails on a Volcano."

These famous words, containing a bunch of paradoxes based on putting together the most unlikely terms – describes best the stand of the country in the next day's. Yet, the government still presented itself to the people as stable, strong and the best there had been in years. Angus, now in the habit of reading books or papers with earphones on, in the armchair by the radio (cheap and popular – like a Model-T Ford, but satisfactory for local stations), could read and hear many times: "We are now between friendly or neutral neighbors, within well regulated bounds and borders. There is not one enemy around, for the first time in our contemporary history." And curiously enough, ordinary people felt safe, believing this. There was more interest for the European boxing championship in Rome, with the Polish team performing brilliantly, than for politics.

Some extravaganza happened, like a copycat action of Klaipeda, but Italian style in Albania, almost operetta. Albania was from WW I in something of a feudal relation to Italy and at the wedding of the Albanian king, the already mentioned Count Ciano arrived, as the best man. Now he suggested to the King Zogu, he should take a large sum of money and a long honeymoon journey, never returning to Albania. The King declined, and then his best man served him an ultimatum, followed in several days by the Italian Army and Marine landing. So the King of Italy and Emperor of Abyssinia became also a King of Albania, with Count Ciano as Vice.

Yet Poland remained cool. There was still some grounds for hope. For several years now, Poland closed the No-aggression Pacts both with the Germany and Soviets, which after Hitler's declarations were her deadly enemies. And during all these years Polish diplomacy had done its best to balance those deals, maybe with a small advantage to the Soviets. The assumption was, both sides would be cautious, because the first act of aggression would turn the balance to the disadvantage of the culprit, the other side in his own interest would give help to Poland. So in Plan B, if France did not care about this alliance, the alternative was an impasse, which might have lasted a longtime.

This was a logical assumption, but a bad mistake. Humans are not logical animals, if they were, all history would be different. On the other

hand, there was no one in the Europe, not a wise guy in the whole world, who at the time would have believed Stalin was all the time behind Hitler. Nobody bold enough to understand, it was Stalin who helped secretly Hitler to seize power in Germany, to destroy the strong Communist Party, and now was helping him to lash out the hell of WW II. The two monsters dreamed to win the war, to manipulate and next to kill one another. Very lucky too, because together they would have the strength necessary to prevail. If they agreed to share the earth, hell by comparison would be a much nicer place to live.

In the first days of May, after a long delay Beck announced in a Parliament speech the unavoidable NO. Following this, the Foreign Vice Commissar Vladimir Potiomkin personally assured Beck that in case of German aggression the Soviets would not leave Poland without help. Yes, the deceiving continued even in the first ten days of war, the Soviets answered they were examining right now the list of material help to Poland. The decision to send the Red Army to aid the Germans one week later came as a shock. Stalin did this not for any security reason, because at this early stage he could stop the fighting quickly – not to mention that Hitler could never start the war without his consent. Moreover, the Soviets were in a comfortable position behind Poland's back. With some help, informal and only material, the fighting might go on for years, like the struggle now ending in Spain. Also, the German Army never planned on such a sharp winter, went out unprepared. If some part of the Polish regular troops lasted to the winter, they would recover a good part, maybe the whole lost ground, only without crossing the German borders. "Die Alpenjaeger" would be enough to defend these.

This is not a joke, the author saw with own eyes how poorly the German soldiers were equipped for the exceptionally bad winter with deep snow and frost. There was almost no communication, all the technical equipment useless; they could sometimes succeed moving a car by laying an open fire under the motor. I do not know about the planes, but I did not see any for several months. Even the German infantry carbine could not shoot, because the oil turned to a solid. The soldiers were defenseless. It was much, much worse than in 1941.

At the first calamity General Ludwig Beck would arrest Hitler and put him in a mental asylum, the best place to plan many campaigns and victories. Next Beck could negotiate the peace, with Germany still in a

strong position, everybody would be happy. And this could be the end of a bad business.

If somebody thinks this is a fantasy, please remember that at the end of the Polish campaign the German Army had spent all its reserves and potential. It is a well-known fact that despite Hitler's commands and urging, the Army was unable to move against France in any of the time limits he had subsequently planned for 1939. The generals considered Hitler a dangerous man without patience, would do anything obeying him, if it would be possible. This was a very serious matter, he wanted at any cost to end the French campaign in this year. This would give the time needed to neutralize, or if this proved impossible, to invade England. If all happened according to his plan, the UK Government could continue the war from Canada, and the fleet defending America, as proposed FD Roosevelt the catastrophe of France ArmyEngland just in time prepared her defenses and successfully beat off the German attack. They used good the delay, caused by Poland sacrifice in 1939 (and so should France).

* * *

Only after the 15th of March did the Western democracies awoke in shock, with their hands in the urinal. At last it came to their consciousness that Hitler was not only after a few bites of one or two, small and rather poor countries in the East, but the fat and nourishing Western Europe. And even this only as an appetizer, to get more taste and strenght. The next step was to be the huge territory of Russia, principally the fertile black earth belt, where he would breed one and then two hundred million more Germans of the pure Nordic race. This should be enough to conquer the rest of the planet. This plan was not secret; Hitler described it in a book, if nobody read and took it seriously.

(But little was and even now is known about the method of breeding, in essence copying that used for animals. As producing the super-breeds should go with liquidating the inadequate, these details never left a narrow circle of close associates. We know only as much as they experimentally realized in concentration camps and SS organization, "Lebensborn". Also of the programs cutting out the unfit, the mental ill, let's say the ugly words, organized mass murder, genocide, holocaust. But this was only the beginning. All this was a logical effect of *Mein Kampf*, but the design existed only in the mind of Hitler, maybe Rosenberg and a few more proxies. It was only for the Prophet Hitler to decide when the right time had arrived. Better to end this digression

now, as people have a natural tendency to aping, for example they sometimes copy the strong-arm business and violence shown on TV, or described in the press. There is such a term, copycat murder; the crazy madness may spread on weak minds this way. And moreover this is only hindsight, not a contemporary view directly experienced, seen with own eyes, as are the following contents of this book.)

The shock affected mostly France. After WW I her safety guaranteed alliances, especially these with Czechoslovakia and Poland. France deliberately arranged these separately; every one concerning only two countries, so that she herself held all the aces. An alliance of three countries or a system of more would be more difficult to manage, if the voices divided. This way France could manipulate the partners as competitors. An overly clever conception sometimes brings miserable results. France with these two allies had a great advantage over Germany, demilitarized or even armed again, not much difference. Also Germany after the experience of WW I developed a psychological complex, never again a war on two fronts, a sound reasoning.

However, France took apart one of the alliances and threw her ally to the hungry wolf. This action did not in the least satisfy the predator, on the contrary it made him stronger, more dangerous and much better armed. With the Czech tanks, the number of "Panzerdivisions" doubled before the French campaign.

If now Hitler could win over Poland on his side, or at least temporarily neutralize this second ally, the fat French lamb might surrender without any try of, or after a short defense. Already in Munich and before, in the Rhine-Land, France had backed out, showing cowardice to the degree of losing face. This was exactly what Hitler needed, a decisive victory now in 1939, before his opponents could recover their senses and the ability to fight back. The essence involved speed; that would leave England defenseless, the best time to renegotiate a second Munich.

And what would have been the chances of the Soviets, if Hitler had attacked a year earlier, in 1940? Remember, most people believe now that only the one month of grace given by the Yugoslavia campaign, saved Moscow from falling. In addition, according to Hitler's conceptions for his next crime, he would have as accomplice the Polish Army, if not well armed, nevertheless the bravest of all of those which had yet fought the Germans. An army that with very few tanks and planes had in the 1939 campaign inflicted on the Germans more losses than all other campaigns put together, Norwegian, Belgian, Netherlands, French,

Balkan and African, right through to June of 1941. Also, an army well-acquainted with his neighbor, this terrain, the people and the cool winters. There is not much doubt; Hitler would have taken Moscow, as before Paris and probably London. The author prefers not to imagine, what might have happened to the world and its people under the hand of that monster. Better to believe his victory impossible, because it would have meant the end of humanity, a world not worth living in. But one is sure: the war would have been longer and the number of wrong deeds too terrible.

Capsule: The last game, a false bid, France shows a wrong color, causing Poland to lose all tricks.

Although in a desperate position, Poland determined never to change sides, helping Hitler. If the worst came to the worst, to fight alone, defend her own territory as long as possible in hope that something might change. And meanwhile be practical, delay as long as possible. "The well-informed circles, affiliated to the Government" adapted an analogy from the history of the Northern War (called also the Twelve Years War). The contemporary Great "Res Publica," contrary to its best interest, mixed in a conflict between Sweden and Russia. This war drew on and on, most of the time in Polish territory, ruined and devastated the country and was the beginning of the downfall. This could happen again. The war between Germany and the Soviets would probably be fought on Polish soil. The Poles correctly recognized the proposed great expansion to the former historical border as a baited hook. The Polish people remained uninterested, the Government acted practically, trying calm down the waves without rocking the boat. Police scattered the demonstrations of hot youths, there were some arrests, but only temporary, nobody should come to permanent harm. It was the first time Angus had heard in the house not only approval, but also a direct praise of the regime despite his parents critical opposition. The same words he heard everywhere in Poznań, a fortress of the right-wing Endecja. Nobody here liked Hitler indeed.

Anyway the Polish Government did its best not to offend Hitler, not to reject openly his unexpected offer. Poland announced a severe ultimatum with a twenty-four hour term, demanding normal diplomatic contacts with Lithuania (ruptured since 1921). Poland supported this announcement with military demonstrations, including movements of the Army, only on Polish territory a long way from the border. Lithuania accepted the terms and so ended the embarrassing incident.

Nevertheless the Polish Government sent Hitler its warm thanks for his help to Poland and amicable interest with best wishes. Surely, this polite mystification could not deceive him; in fact it was exactly now that his patience ended. He had already announced to his minions his imminent success in the dealing with Poland and felt belittled and ridiculed. From this moment his faked benevolence changed into a true hate.

But now came the hoped-for change. At last the Western allies realized that even more than Poland needed them, they too needed Poland – instantly, this very moment, without delay and at any price. It was the only chapter that now held up Hitler, before turning west. Only they wanted Poland not as a genuine ally, rather as a boy to take the beating, the first victim, a temporary shield, a body to take the first strike and stop the first bullets. In short, to keep Hitler busy long enough for them to prepare their own defenses.

If the French, hypnotized by their Maginot Line, didn't recognize it, the English Parliament reacted quickly: already on the 31st of March it voted the territorial guaranties to Poland and its ally Rumania.

Angus remembered how much this astonished the people, but their wonder mixed with complacency. The press did not publish the news about Hitler's proposals and the now-applied pressure, only marking the extraordinary number of visits of high rank German officials. But this the German press explained as amiable contacts, sympathy and appreciation for the steady and reasonable course of Poland during the Austrian and Czech crises.

Now, if that were true, Hitler should in the first place feel gratitude to the Czechs, because they too opposed not the Austria "Anschluss." The words were without merit, Poland did nothing, because it did not have any opportunity. The fate of Czechoslovakia decided the four powers. Poland could not prevent it alone by a suicidal action.

Hitler, in his own opinion, had become an expert of persuasion. Sure, he was able to manipulate people, but now, after the plan for Poland misfired, he felt angry and pressed for time. He wanted to break the resistance, teach them a lesson, who is stronger, but at first not to antagonize too much the possible helpers. With this in mind he first demanded rather moderately the same points, keeping up appearances for the sake of the German citizens. He was willing to make a pact granting forever the Polish-German border. Gdańsk was in his hand anyway, governed for four years by his lackeys Arthur Greiser and Albert

Forster. There was no way Poland could do anything about this. They even built there, in summer of 1939 their own concentration camp, in Stutthof. So it was only a formality, but among the common people the feeling was "no can do." If they were to accept, there would be further and further demands, a path leading straight downwards.

Hitler speedily came to the next point, the turnpike to East Prussia, which should now categorically have an exterritorial status, dividing Poland in two parts. Then he announced a nullifying of the no-aggression pacts, some legal curiosity, surely a direct threat.

All of this followed quickly, at intervals of a few days. The escalation of demands, the menace, the guaranties and the loud and distinct NO in the Foreign Minister Bek's speech in front of the parliament.

Bek could feel proud and happy, his country, after balancing half a year on the brink of a tomb, got the English offer just in nick of time. It was a purpose and target of all Polish Governments and Foreign Ministers, to come in as a third in the "alliance cordiale" between France and England. Or rather a dream, for whatever they did, they could not reach this step. (Bek had already met the former and next British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden in Geneva, cultivating this acquaintance. It would be too much to call this a friendship, but Bek became Eden's dedicated fan.)

Poland was restored thanks the victory of the Western democracies in WW I, but from these victors, USA distanced herself from Europe. Italy turned into a dictatorship allied to Germany, with England not interested, only France remained an ally, yet not fully dependable. Bek accepted the guaranties temporary, but wanted a normal defensive alliance. Not only did he consider England a much firmer partner, coming into such an exquisite, noble club was a dream come true. Now the unexpected luck somehow reduced his sound reasoning.

His speech made a great impact. All the time the Poles had instinctively suspected Hitler of the worst and his demands interpreted now as taking off the mask, showing his true wolfish jaws. At the same time, if they did not know the true situation, some suspected also their own government might secretly come to terms with Hitler. Beck didn't have much choice, if he had announced a turn towards Hitler's side (which he would never do), he anyway could not fulfill it, because the whole regime would collapse. There would be a revolt, like the Yugoslavian variant in 1941. But now even the hard-core opposition declared a full loyalty. There was a full consensus; the government for first time achieved a more than

comfortable, almost one hundred percent rating. All, well, at least ninety-nine percent of the people strongly backed this decision.

Not only the minister, the whole government preferred a defensive alliance to the one-sided guaranties, because the feeling was, this was somehow belittling Poland. The British understood this Mania Grandiose and agreed, in fact they would agree too more. They would also be loyal in the future, if they could, but they could not, and only for a short time they stopped Hitler.

If the Minister Beck had not been so overjoyed with the development and maybe with himself, if he had remained in his senses, he could have gained concrete help. But he was sure this was a zenith of his life and career and he wanted only properly finish all the formalities, which he did. He wasn't making further demands. Quite opposite, he was eager to offer from the Polish side anything possible in return. This is why the poor Poland initially helped the wealthy England. Take for example the Bofors AA-guns: with payments delayed, Poland could not produce enough of its own weapons for the war, yet supplied them to England. The Polish Fleet, including the three very modern destroyers, and many escorting ships, the latest submarines, really counted. (In next year, England got fifty outdated old destroyers from the USA for some bases, this caused a great storm in Parliament, calling it a sellout of Imperium. The government answered the escort ships were a question of survival). The Polish help they got gratis (free).

People kept repeating two sentences: First, that England never lost its last battle, second, that nobody came to grief, remaining with England through thick and thin. But these common truths were not true. Beck never calculated that both allies could deceive Poland. France never made any try to fulfill the military treaty, and left Poland to fight alone.

If that had been the end of it, if France had just left Poland alone, it would have been only half as bad. The worst calamity resulted from the interference with planning the Polish campaign.

The reaction of the Polish Army should depend on the German action. If Wehrmacht attacked Poland as first target, the best of bad eventualities should be to stand firm all the time and fight to the bitter end, to death if necessary. But the French demanded a deep initial retreat and to stand firm and fight only after the Germans had occupied a great part of Poland. This was impossible – it would demoralize the soldiers. The essential but sole advantage of the poorly armed Polish Army was the

patriotism and determination of the soldiers, their will to defend their country and families. And they were not bad at that.

This confirmed not only the example of Westerplatte, but also the warfare in those places where the plans could not change, for example a battle at the Polish coast. Cut off from the rest of the Army and outnumbered, the remaining troops did more anybody could expect, for several weeks retreating elastic, many times reversing the and taking the initiative. Finally, as they spent all possibilities and ammo, some, including the heroic Commander Colonel Dąbek, decided for suicide, many Germans executed or taken prisoners. The rest got through to the last stand on Peninsula Hel and as the last surrendered there in October.

Nevertheless the French General Staff insisted that France was the natural leader of the Allies in the early stage of the war. The English troops were to arrive later and it would take some time before the Expedition Corps would be ready. The French argued it was the only way for the Polish Army to survive to the days of the make-believe French great offensive in the first week, or at the latest by the tenth day of war. The Polish commanders in chief had to accept this deep retreat, but only after they had fought first battles by the border. It was a deadly combination, the Polish infantry had to retreat in front of a motorized German Army, to contest on their feet against the motors at night and fight in the day. And so they did in a superhuman, impossible task, to the far opposite corner of Poland. If they had fought on the first stands, person-to-person, the conditions would have been more equal.

But the purpose of the French General Staff was not to win the war, but only to lead the German Army as faraway as possible. General Maurice Gamelin wrote in a letter to General Georges on the twelfth day of war, "All goes well and could be still better, if the German Army in pursuit of the Polish Army, progresses towards the Balkans" (invading Rumania?). This was the same day on which he decided to resign from any offensive over the German border. The English Commander agreed, in presence of Chamberlain and Daladier. There would be not even an engagement of the "Luftwaffe," with the curious statement that such a move would make the German Command aware of French and English preparations for attack.

Preparations for what, if the allies just called off the general offensive?

In April 1940 the Chief of the German Army during the Polish campaign, General Brauchitsch, gave a press conference culminating with a

rhetorical question: "Where were the English generals at the time, when most of the German Army was fighting Poland? They missed the best opportunity. We were too fatigued to march and fight. We thank them, we are grateful, because they made possible our victory."

The British journals had angered him and that's why he mentioned only the English, and not the French with the supreme in command. Not only he, the best known German generals Jodl, Guderian, Westphal, van Lossberg also stated unanimously: "In September 1939 by its passive behavior, France relinquished its unique chance, without much risk or difficulty, to change the future of all Europe." Well, Jodl was an close coworker of Hitler and Chief of Planning Staff, he confessed before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg; Guderian developed the armored units, he should know best. Westphal repeated the opinion of the dead Rommel.

* * *

The British move to join Poland temporarily blocked the start of war. The plain Polish people remained cool and steady, a large part hoped still for peace. The combined allied force of France, England and Poland was formidable, much stronger than Germany or the whole Steel Pact. For example, Poland had only about twelve percent of the number of German tanks, but France had more, twice as many as the Germans. Poland had only about fifteen percent comparing to German planes, but France had nearly equal and England about as much. Population and territory were overwhelmingly on the side of the Allies, industrial production and potential also (even without the colonies).

In the opinion of most, Hitler had to back out, recognizing the chances – he wasn't mad. But if God had taken his reason, well we would beat him good and proper. Poland alone could not defeat Germany with her much stronger army, but against half of the number it should do enough. All professional soldiers expected a quick victory.

Angus and his classmates did not share this opinion; they believed the Polish Army able to beat any attack by any aggressor. The boys had already decided that if the war happened it would be a great opportunity to restore the historical border, not on the east, but on the west side. Just to the valley of Oder would be enough, one should not be too greedy, Berlin could remain in Germany. That being so, Angus and his friends felt sorry to miss such a remarkable fortune, but they also

believed there was no way Hitler could move. The only way to deal with such lunatics is to stay firm.

Now, in hindsight clearly the Allies had acted honorably according to the treaties, Hitler could not have fought for long. He would have ended in a mental asylum, and he probably would not have found many followers. But at worst, if he started war at all, General Ludwig van Beck would be able to act in time and the WW II would last between six days to six weeks, instead of six years.

But in fact the only difficulty Hitler experienced was to persuade his citizens to the war. The German people were against any war and a long manipulation was necessary to make them willing. The first easy successes reversed these feelings. And one more secret warmonger from the East backed him.

So the Nazi pressure became stronger. New demands, for Gdansk and a freeway through the so called "Polish Corridor", included now not an international status, but a full take over by Germany. Next they wished more, the whole province Pomorze (Pomerania) with the towns Bydgoszcz, Toruń and Grudziądz and a part of Greater Poland. Only Gdynia might remain by Poland, but now it was Poland, who had to build highway across the taken by Germans territory of the former "Polish Corridor" to the sea. Polish newspapers announced this as ridiculous. But the most sinister was a demand for special privileges to the German minority in Poland, exactly after the Sudeten pattern. The association with Munich was bad enough, even worse was there was none grounds for this demand. For years, up to 1933, the German minority had already had a privileged status, better than the native Poles, because of the Versailles Treaty guaranties. Afterwards, with Germany distancing herself further and further from the Treaty, the law became uniform and equal for all subjects, but the Germans remained in a better position because of their better economic status. Generally the Poles looked with envy on Germans, not the other way. Statistically, in the west of Poland Germans accounted for five to ten percent of the population, but held twenty to thirty percent of industry and agricultural area. And they were very well organized.

The Poles were not angels; they sometimes oppressed the minorities, a bad business. But such was never the case for the minorities with a strong position. There may have been oppression of the Ukrainians and White-Ruthenians, but never the Germans and rarely the Jews. Many Poles declared they would be happy if they could live in such conditions.

Next started the acts of terror. Angus and the Polish people were not fully aware of these events, because the Polish Government and the newspapers did as much as possible not to excite the population. They suppressed a good deal of information to calm emotions. Usually the alarming news published only by the local press, sporadically and briefly. In fact Angus only dimly remembered some marginal items about the V Column activity; he never had any personal experience and didn't see anything with his own eyes. Only afterwards in November 1939 did he read the full German propaganda report "Documente zur Forgeschichte des Krieges by Auswaertiges Amt," signed by von Ribbentrop. From this source he came to know the amount and frequency of the terror was many times greater than anybody had imagined. The report mentions hundreds of incidents, twenty-one in the last night of peace, followed by fourteen more, three of them serious, including the best known in Gliwice.

Till this day a good number of other bloody events remained not fully examined and after all the time and turmoil of war it would be impossible now. Nevertheless the examples examined by the IMT prove that in this case there were special high ranking German officials, state structures and instruments, dispatched to this criminal business and responsible directly to Hitler and his close associates. Natural assumption suggests they are the culprits of all the atrocities, even if a great part missed investigation.

Anyway, it was to interest of Poland and the Allies to preserve the peace, every single day was important, if only for of preparing themselves for the war. But Hitler wanted to start as early as he could and in haste to realize his timetable. Thank God, in the end he was too late.

Looking backwards, it is now public knowledge that some part of the pattern of "wheels within wheels" was the doing of the SS Foreign Intelligence Department (independent of Abwehr). The German people resident in Poland organized until roughly 1933 into "Deutsche Vereinigung," hostile to Poland but committing to respect the law and present the German interests by parliamentary methods through their representatives in Sejm and Senate. This was a strong and wealthy organization, dominated by the nationals and conservatives. The coming to power in Germany Nazi started a new "Jungdeutsche Partei," competing with the "Vereinigung" and in fact brutalizing their members, after the SA pattern. In Poland they could never act so badly as in the Germans towns, where the streets many times were wet with blood.

Nevertheless gangs of the ferocious strong-men attacked the former organization and some leaders; there was a time of fighting. The Polish police proved ineffective and in fact inadequate, because the affected people remained uncooperative, they wanted no interference in the "German people's internal affairs." In time, the JDP took over most of the German electorate and the Vereinigung – to be exact, what remained of the party with some known leaders started to cooperate with the JDP. The Nazi, now in full power in Germany, tamed and directed them by brute force.

Next the NSDAP officially registered in Poland ("Landesgruppe NSDAP-Polen"), so did other Nazi organizations, with the Arbeitsfront, NS-Frauenschaft and even for a short time the SA, and this was only the tip of an iceberg. Still illegal remained Hitlerjugend, BDM and sure the agent network of SD, all controlled by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and directed by the Reichsfuehrer of the SS, Heinrich Himmler.

All these organizations and networks, realizing Hitler's program to win Poland to his side, acted at first friendly, kind and fully loyal to the actual Polish government. Every "Heil Hitler!" matched a "vivat" to the Piłsudski, after his death to the Rydz-Śmigły and to "Mr. President Mościcki." It was a pure love until the end of March, then within days, or let's say a few weeks, it changed to an animal hate.

In May 1939, at short notice, the easiest start would be to continue the action from the point it left off before. So the first wave of terror they directed against the German minority, living peacefully between Polish majority, especially the ones most amicable toward the Polish people, or dedicated to good relations. The implication was clear: the Poles were the culprits.

These gangs were already better trained than a couple months earlier, usually via courses in Germany, but some also in Poland, in training camps organized on great German estates. And reinforced with whole formations of SA and SS men from the other side of the border, who now learned in Poland to look and behave like Poles. Every day strong hooligans, posing as Poles, persecuted, beat-up and destroyed the property of these Germans, who wanted remain the loyal citizens of Poland. Immediately the Nazi organizations and network offered temporary help and future protection. At first there was not much killing, the typical modus operandi would be to set the buildings on fire at night, if someone tried to interfere, mob him down, perhaps maltreating some women and children. Actions that would make interesting news. Then

the mob would sing loud Polish national songs with many a witness present and vanish in the dark.

The SS and SD agents came armed, but they rarely used their guns. They had an odd preference for fire. They learned, drilled and exercised applying the match as a much effective weapon always ready at hand. The action in Poland they called "Brennende Grenze" – the border on fire. In the memoirs of Colonel Maczek (later General) of the Polish campaign, he describes the view most characteristic later in the war. Invariably in evenings and before sunrise it was the glimmer of many fires, showing how far the German Army had moved, the temporary line of the front. But in the spring of 1939 it had not reached its worst: there were no people in the fires. During the occupation, the horrible vision of burned down houses, or whole villages, with their dead, was like a fingerprint or an identify mark, showing: here came an SS expedition. Impressive indeed.

By a particular coincidence, Poles have a natural reluctance to fire. Angus, from an early child age remembered his mother instructions, never play with fire, with a serious warning, this may cause the bed of a boy getting wet in the night. Most terrible for a baby, but Poles considered always fire an ugly medium, maybe because they lived for centuries in wooden houses.

How about the later mother's comment? ("What have they have done – to the people, to the lands? We were blind indeed.... It should be studied in detail, as a lesson and warning for the future.") For sure, manipulating the people in Germany was a more complicated and difficult procedure, Hitler created and developed a high specialized art. There exist many special historical works and analyzes, much better than any rude explanations of a profane. But what happened in 1939 in Poland was simple. By social engineering the German minority was manipulated to active collaboration with the Nazis, against the Polish people. Some part of this minority had always remained unfriendly, wishing an impossible return of the Great Reich with the Emperor. Some had strong German sentiment, but saw the practicality of "live and let live" – sensitive to German interest but always within the bounds of law and order. Some sought a different niche, determined to peace, and a few of them became friendly, on the brink of polonization. Almost all now believed to the Nazi propaganda, showing a horrible enemy, the wild, undisciplined mass of Poles, hating them, ready to abuse and hurt them, burn or destroy their property. They had to stand together for

their own safety, the common interest. And they had a mighty Big Brother across the border, a Prophet who already like Moses had saved many endangered Germans, leading them to the motherland. Better still, he expanded Germany to them.

The actions handled now the experienced, trained criminals. Even if someone of the former minority leaders recognized the pattern from 1935/36 or perhaps some known culprits, he would hold his mouth shut. Afraid for his life, he would back the propaganda. The Poles were at first taken unaware, not only the common people, but also the police and the officials. There was some turmoil between the Germans, but nobody knew exactly what was the matter.

Very quickly followed the second step: the terror directed against Poles. The Polish press, except for a few great disasters, did not publish any of this. Angus read only about one: the explosion in Tarnow terminal, where two valises with explosives, left in the baggage room close to the waiting room, killed many people; more later died in hospital. The police found no culprit; but, probably intentionally, the men who left the luggage dressed in Oberland-style clothes, almost an uniform of Germans in the nearby Silesia. Enough to raise suspicion against the German minority.

The following terror reported only the local press, purposefully belittled. In Poznań, it seemed nothing special. The German press, on the other side, every day reported many alarming news items. But this being behind the border, these reports were only sporadically read by the Poles. Probably such news aimed at the German readers only, propaganda of hate, because many German people still loathed the war. Hitler was concerned; he wanted a strong backing and always knew how to go after it. World opinion, after two manipulated persecutions of Germans which started abruptly, as if by order in two countries (Czech and Austria) where before all lived normally, looked slightly askance. Rather odd, exactly as the Nazis finished the armament programs and built a strong army, different countries of Europe started to persecute the Germans.

Anyway Hitler cared only about what the German people believed and was an expert at deception, social engineering and manipulation. Finally, he got all he wanted. During his speech before the Reichstag announcing invading Poland in the early morning without any declaration of war, he had many times to stop because of applause and cries of enthusiasm. The same happened as he denied any provocations. As the purpose of

the war he declared: "Unsere Ziele... Ich bin entschlossen... drittens, dafuer zu sorgen, dass in Verhaeltnis Deutschland zu Polen eine Wendung eintritt, die ein friedliches Zusammenleben sicherstellt." Well, in short he declared, this should be a war for a peaceful coexistence.

Polish police concentrated on prevention, with minimal investigation of former crimes. Like the information ban, it was done on the advice of the Allies' ambassadors, to cool down, win more time. No matter how many caches and magazines with arms and explosives the police found and confiscated, or how many people illegally crossing the Polish border they detained. Angus read some report about a group that called attention to itself, persistently and loudly singing "Rota," a patriotic Polish song from the time before WW I and sung in the last uprising, but now rarely. Angus didn't even know the words and called to Mum, she had to tell him.

The terror against Polish people started in June and the passivity of the police resulted in several clashes between German and Polish people, especially in Silesia where the former Polish combatant organization decided to help in restoring order. This was at first banned and refused, but with time became more and more necessary, after the whole "Feldjaeger-Abteilungen" of the SA and similar gangs intruded in force for short raids over the border.

It was exactly what the Nazi intended, a start of hostility between the German minority and the Polish population, and with the over-the-border organized backing, there was no way to stop it. But it remained almost unnoticed, at least in Poznań and by Angus. He never dreamed about detective investigation, not interested unless it was the plot in a book. Maybe on vacation it would be just nice to find some cache full of weapons, but this dream was not in the category of a detective enterprise, rather an adventure.

The only astonishing truth, at which he never ended to wonder, was how despite the propaganda, forced brainwashing, pressure, browbeating, intimidation and economical duress, some Germans remained good and proper. Not only then, but also throughout the war and occupation remained loyal and friendly to Poles. Angus had in his class colleagues already polonized, but with German roots and names and proud of it. They never turned traitors, they took their place in the resistance, but this was natural, at least Angus expected so. Yet he also met some pure Germans who remained the whole time blameless (as he would express this, being a child). The first example he noticed was his godmother,

mentioned before. The poor soul, a true "Berlinerin" who never learned to speak Polish fluently and was deeply unhappy through the whole war and after, proved to be a magnificent lady. Both in the concentration camp and in poverty and danger afterwards, she accompanied her husband. Angus met her after the war and this was still an extremely bad time for her; although "eine Deutsche" she still had her eyes wet at least once a day. But she never complained, it was a miracle how she contained such strength of spirit in a weak body.

* * *

In June began the public common collection, but the treasure of the National Defense Fund remained unused. It was already too late for efficient use of the ready money collected in the citizen "Loan for Air Defense". Still, Angus offered all his savings; he had economized for some time to buy a bicycle and air gun.

One June afternoon the whole family went to the Communal Savings Union. Angus offered only about one hundred, his parents five grand, but for him it was a full hundred percent of his savings, for his parents only about sixty %. Mother granted also some gold jewelry. The bank was full, a long queue of people all coming for the same purpose and waiting for hours.

But processing money into arms takes time and there was not time enough. The time was too short even to count the money, to check and register the precious gifts. At the beginning of war, the central bank evacuated with the Polish gold and years after the war returned this, but not to the people, only to the Communist regime. Thank God for this, that a good deal of gold got already stolen, because the rest of it served to develop the machine of oppression and terror, after the war.

Instead of the last-minute domestic loan and public gifts for the National Defense Fund, which remained untouched, it would have been better to take a foreign loan or short-term credit. Maybe on the strength of the National Defense Fund treasure, but a few months earlier. This way the full potential of the industry could still have been brought to bear on to produce more arms. (And in fact Poland negotiated a loan with London for some miserable sum of several million of pounds, almost zero in proportion to the British armaments cost. At the same time Poland credited the United Kingdom for the AA Bofors guns, not paid in full at the start of war. Curiously enough, from the former two French loans, only an insignificant minor part ever materialised. It is a bad sign: if the

rich partners want financing from the much poorer one, there is a high chance they want him as a fall guy.)

Would it have made a difference? Yes, indeed! If Poland could not single-handedly win the Second World War, she came close to winning at least one battle, by Kutno. Just a few squadrons of hunter planes could have changed the balance at critical time, playing havoc with the German air transport to the cut-off tanks near Warsaw and the seriously endangered German 8 Field Army. To be sure, not a decisive victory, but one that may begin a better series of events in motion.

And one last remark: as known, Hitler boasted at the start of the war that he had the strongest army in the world, on armaments for which he spent almost forty billion dollars. France in years gone by had spent no less and armed not any worse. But Poland's army budget, growing from eighty to one hundred and sixty million dollars, including all personnel and fixed expenses, with utmost economizing, left almost nothing in reserve for technical modernization. The National Defense Budget – and the matching National Marine Budget – was a great idea; in the last two years it had supplied about one billion zloty, more than the whole army budget and considering the relatively small sum, remarkably efficient. If Poland was able to buy and produce modern weapons for only about one billion (but of dollars) more, her army would be able to match the "Wehrmacht" almost on equal terms. The soldiers and the plain people had a stronger motivation to defend their country. The author watched these events and shared the feeling. No way to forget this, it is an experience one remembers to the end of his life.

* * *

Despite the serious political tension and danger of war, Angus and his parents traveled as normal on vacation, this time to Biały Dunajec below Tatra mountains. They took rooms near the terminal. It was not too large a village, but almost all trains halted there, as did the direct to Poznań. In case of alarm the family could return within a few hours. And in little more than half an hour, they could reach Zakopane, in one hour the mountains. But Angus was not much of a mountaineer; he preferred the plains, second-best the local hills, especially after finding a place where the stream made a pool fit for bathing. The water cold, sharply chill, but it was always possible afterwards to catch the warm sunshine.

They did shorten the vacations this year to only one month instead of two. But Angus didn't lament, because the Railway Direction Library,

where he took books on the strength of his father's member card, got lots and lots of new books. With them he lived a good life, part in Poznań and part in Podłoziny, and now again he was on the way there, with his parents. He preferred adventure books, as most boys of his age do. But for some time he hunted for books about combat gases, all sorts, starting with the poison gases, the suffocating, sternites, teargases, liquid chemicals causing burns, eventual wounds, like Yperite and Lewisite. He hoped to become an expert and this way to perhaps be useful in the coming war, because of course at his age he could not aspire to join the army. Already years before, influenced by the Abyssinian conflict, the subject had fascinated him, but now he researched in dead earnest, sparing neither work nor energy.

At home he tortured his mother and especially his father, who in the Railway Direction had attended a course on antigas protection, with detailed quizzing, checking both parents' knowledge. No mistake, Angus had seized for himself the role of house teacher, a real test of patience for his parents. He also tried similarly torment the four of his cousins, but alas, the two boys being older and stronger knew a quick and efficient means of manual persuasion. One of the girls was also a mountain of energy and allowed no lectures; only the oldest had a dove's heart and never told him to get lost, nor decided to give a cuff to the boring "enfant terrible." Also, she was already a student of medicine and had attended some lectures, and so knew the subject from the inside.

* * *

When the train arrived at the station of Dopiewo, a two-horse carriage with a coachman was already waiting in front of the building. Angus immediately climbed onto the high bench in the front (commonly called a goat), seating himself near the coachman. This was his preferred place and he expected to get the reins and steer the pair of horses, a moment when he felt the full splendor of life. As in the well-known country song:

"Wszystkich dziś ciekawość budzi

kto jest najszczęśliwszym z ludzi,

a ja mówię, że nad pana,

jest szczęśliwszy los furmana..."

("All people are now curious

who may be the happiest man,
and I say, better than a lord's,
is the fate of a coachman...")

Next came a verse about a four-horse wagon; he had learned to drive only two horses, but this was of no importance – he felt as if he was on top of the world, never any happier. The little detail, four or two horses, made no real difference. Anyway, at his age this was not a bad beginning; growing up to the age and weight of the coach driver he might be able to manage six, even eight horses.

At first, years ago, his mother had only reluctantly allowed him to sit on the high bench in front, all the way nagging at him: "Angus don't fall down – Angus, be careful – Angus, hold tight." Listening with due attention, he took more interest in the view, when over the excellently brushed, groomed auburn bottoms up came the tails, like small fountains and the well-fed horses, on the run, bubbled down yellow buns. How are they able to do this while galloping? He sure couldn't, if he tried!

With time, as he got bigger and stronger, mother stopped to fret about his safety and the coachman allowed him to lay his hands on the ends of the reins. Later he gave Angus the reins just for a few seconds, but these intervals got longer and longer, with good consulting, instruction, and occasional help. Within the last couple of years Angus had been allowed to hold the reins for the entire time. He managed quite well all by himself, except for rare moments, for example when something appeared that could terrify the horses, like an agricultural machine or the rare monster known as the automobile.

Angus didn't ride horses. His mother insisted that his legs were still too short to sit correctly and moreover, the young bones could become crooked. He accepted this temporarily, because he really preferred the ride on the coach and was not bad at this.

Alas, the journey was short, less than half an hour, but the return trip would follow. Also tomorrow would be Sunday, and the entire family was going to travel to the church in Konarzewo. On the approach to church he would have to give up the reins since there was no way a boy could be allowed to take a turn near the entrance, between other carriages and many pedestrians. Still, driving part-time is better than nothing, and again there would be the trip back. To get the reins in his hands was his fixed privilege; he would not stand to miss it. Or rather it would be a

serious test of patience for anyone in company of the enfant terrible, his mother included.

The day was warm and beautiful so he traveled without haste to enjoy the pleasure, till after twenty-five minutes they arrived in a huge rectangular yard. Three sides of it enveloped farm buildings. On the fourth was a fence of short wooden boards with a row of bushes behind and after them a long, low manor house.

It seemed low, because with age it had settled into the ground a bit. If entering through the porch, one found himself in the central corridor running along the short axis of the building. To the left were two rows of rooms, one of bedrooms, first one for the boys, second for the girls and the last one for the aunt and uncle. The second row had only two, but large, chambers – the dining room and the salon. To the right, opposite the dining room, the uncle's study, library and the office and opposite the bedrooms a large kitchen and behind it a short second corridor, vertical to the central, leading to the side door. The right side contained a second office and the room of Mr. Joe, a relative of Angus' uncle who acted as trusted administrator. Accommodations on top were relatively low, two rooms occupied the central part of the house and the rest consisted of a roomy attic, full of wonderful old things. Alas, Angus was never allowed to play there and he therefore considered this realm even more attractive and curious, as well as the best place for getting dirty.

But for all its glory, the house was really like an addition to the veranda, or rather a pavilion of glass placed on the end of the central corridor, opposite the front porch. From the early spring to late autumn, and even in the warmer days of winter all the inhabitants congregated in this large area, between walls of glass.

On the left of the veranda, close to the house wall was a glass door to the garden. Next stood a long table with a bench down one side, five chairs up the other, two more at the short ends of the table. If necessary, two to four more could be squeezed in. Whenever possible the entire household took all their meals there. During the evenings on this table stood one or two oil lamps with a cylindrical wick. These lamps gave a very bright light, not a bit worse than electricity, an everyday normal item to Angus, who lived in town. They were big, on metal ornamental bases with painted fuel containers and lampshades; in one lamp the shade turned slowly, influenced by the warmth, casting colorful moving images on the walls.

The right half of the glass enclosure contained some great bowls with decorative trees and flowerpots with asparagus, as well as an oval table with a cane couch and two cane armchairs, several ordinary chairs and a smaller round table. At these tables in the evenings the cousins did their homework, by the light of a third lamp if necessary. Sometimes, with informal guests for dinner, the young people had the bigger of the two tables for their exclusive use; it was called then "a folwark."

On such a fine day there were not many occupants indoors. Only the aunt and Angus' mother settled on the pillows of the cane armchairs for an easy chat. Angus' mum was the oldest daughter in a numerous family and thus for a longtime in boots of vice-chief, followed by Angus' aunt. So all their lives the sisters remained close, and they understood each other perfectly.

Both sisters were stout, it was a family feature, but Angus' mother was of average height; his aunt, one may say, was an impressive woman, she towered above most men, including her husband. However what amazed Angus most was the aunt and uncle never quarreled, ever. Angus accustomed to another model of family. His own mother and father's marriage was good, the parents always loyal held together, in fact were the best parents anyone could imagine, but they argued often, disagreed hotly even over small details. He was familiar with fortissimo voices and crashing of doors, genuine thunderstorms which as soon blew over.

Angus' mother, hot-tempered, rapid and rash, thought fast and acted even faster, but often changed her opinion, being rather inconsistent. Father responded better to Angus' image of how a man should act: consequential and solid, sometimes had to defend his line. Angus, feeling the comradeship of men, generally shared his views. On the other side, he accepted a belief that women are just the way they are, and acceptance is more practical; this way, conflicts take less time.

But with his aunt and uncle, Angus was surprised, astray and lost, never noting like a slightest trace of any quarrel. They always presented the same opinions, even if they had had no chance to come to agreement beforehand. And here the aunt presented the consequent and stable factor, for the uncle was impulsive and rapid, sometimes like a volcano. But he never growled at his wife, never even looked crossly. It was just incredible, hard to believe!

Father had already left with Angus' uncle; he wanted to take a walk. The uncle, an excellent and dutiful farmer, had in front of him many fields and working teams to supervise. But Father's crowning intent was to go to the forest and search for mushrooms, his favorite hobby. All vacations he planned from the angle of mushrooms, even this year Father had opted for Biały Dunajec rather than Zakopane because of mushrooms. Angus suspected the talk about the possibility of a speedy return was only make-believe. And in fact, Father returned only after he had stalked whole fields of delicious milk-caps on the hills.

As for himself, Angus had taken many books, six, more than he could expect to manage in the rest of this day and tomorrow but he liked to have an overdose stockpiled. Like a connoisseur choosing the most savory tidbits from the delicatessen. In fact he preferred to take them both, books and some good snacks too, adding a blanket and walking with this load in the park part of the garden. Next to the house grew bushes and trees and then followed a lawn. But between the trees, about thirty meters from the glass doors, was a little grassed opening. In the middle of it stood an athletic appliance, two rods with wooden crossbars.

The older of the two male cousins, Mieczek, after taking his exams for the secondary school certificate, had decided to apply to a marine school. This needed a perfect physical condition. So, after classes – and the exams, which took a lot of work – he performed intensive physical exercises, seriously and with great engagement. Uncle was not happy with this. He wanted his older son take over the farm after him. Because of it there was notable tension at home, but the son was insistent, strong-headed – or pigheaded (as his father said). Probably, if not for the war, he would have carried out his dream.

Angus repeatedly tried too, looking at these exercises, but never could copy them, there was not a hope. However, he selected and managed a few of the simplest. With difficulty he did pull himself up first on the bottom, next to the higher crossbar, hanging first from his arms then tucking up his legs till he was suspended from bent knees with his head down. Finally with much trouble pulled himself up again, or dropped to the earth in exhaustion. Of all these achievements, only the drop was easy. However, with time he could do better and became fond of the position with his head down, because afterwards he could think clearly and had a fresh, bright mind. So now, he started with a minute hanging upside down and stretched afterwards on the blanket on top of the

grass, turning to the books. In about two hours, another minute or two hanging on the crossbars, then further reading.

The early tea was served, as usual, in the glass veranda, but supper was to be eaten in the dining room because there would be visitors. It was not a formal visit, only an ordinary dropping in of some neighbors, but anyway a terrible ordeal for Angus. First, he needed to wash again and put on proper, clean clothes, brush them, his shoes and his hair – all with different brushes to be sure. Next, submit to the survey of his mother. It would only be half bad with just Mum. But there could well be a frontal inspection attended by the governess, the supreme tamer of cousins. Miss Sophie was a small person of post-Balzac age, ardent, compulsory, hard-driving and as booted with energy as a dynamo. Unfortunately, she has also hawk-eyes. If a boy had the misfortune be near her at the critical moment, there was sure to be much faultfinding, nothing escaped her alertness. She had almost finished her educational duties, what with the girls already at academic studies and the older boy finished secondary school, only the youngest remained in her care, being halfway through school. But after over ten years, from the position of governess she had become a constant resident of the house. Having more time and trying to be helpful, even more valuable, she sought out and performed various domestic duties, from the care of dogs to the carrying out of any orders detailed by Aunt. She invariably performed these duties to perfection. But Angus tried always to go around her in a wide circle, because she was a plague sent from God to the sinful. And she had experience, knew all about the educating and coaching of boys. It was as if she had a hundred eyes around her head!

But after having achieved what may be called a decent appearance, when the washed, brushed, sorted and smooth-licked Angus had fulfilled all demands, including the exchange of his handkerchief for a fresh one, the nightmare had only begun. After entering the dining room, the boy was expected "to behave": step slowly and quietly and then to seat and sweat, straight and orderly, stiff and uncomfortable. Never bend, lean back in the chair or on the table, rock, reel, spin, totter, swirl nor even waver. And the hardest challenge was to be silent and reserved. Agreed, "the children and fish don't take a voice," but now he was not allowed to speak one word unless one of the adults spoke to him first. Even daydreaming was impossible, because he had to concentrate on the correct manipulation of instruments, some alien to him. Angus sat as in torture with a hot prayer, may the performance end. But instead of this, there came a hot, roast poultry in front of him which was difficult to eat

with good manners. And if he didn't take any, his mother would surely make remarks, which may concentrate on him the attention of other persons. Including Miss Sophie, sitting only two places away on the other side of his male cousins. The female cousins, sitting opposite, managed to cope more successfully with the poultry. He almost asked the older how she managed the final dissection at the medical school, but instead bit his tongue. But really, after finishing her first year of medicine study, she could deal with all the instruments. Anyway such foods were fitting for surgeons and pathologists needing the exercise of the hand, not for normal boys. The adults fared better, and Uncle could repeat his favorite joke about the duck being an awfully stupid bird "because it is too big for one guest and too small for two." But even if an adult did something poorly, nobody would make a comment. There is no equality, and Angus felt much discriminated against.

The only silver lining in the cloud was that as he sat distant from his mother, she could not order him to taste a drop of every wine and define which was which. Angus, as most boys of his age, was a greedy pig, but rigorously denied and denounced this. His worst habit was to eat when reading. But generally overfed, he didn't relish the occupation and Mother pushed him often with the best morsels. In result, he ate fast, but never enjoyed the meals. Today it was boring, but with some luck he could finally listen to interesting conversation about politics.

Father had his great day. Usually he took the floor, if at all, clemently and with temperance. Today first he made the mysterious face of a well-informed person who however cannot share the secrets in public. Finally he announced, the danger of explosion had decreased already and if this course were to continue, in a few weeks the threat of war should pass over. These words all accepted with respect, coming from a person with inside information. No doubt, transport is of utmost importance when at war. Poland was almost without motor transport, but the railroads functioned excellently, like clockwork. In next years to come they never regained their former perfection.

Father tasted the savory moment. Only Angus recognized that he almost burst with pride. He spoke short, cautiously and briefly but every one of these words all present took as a revelation. The almost unanimous opinion was, whether there were a war or not, Hitler had no chance against the powerful coalition of Poland, France and England. A shame what happened to Czechoslovakia, but maybe they would come back to independence without much risk and soon. Only Mr. Joseph, the relative

of uncle and manager of the property, upheld a separate judgment. "You do not recognize how powerful the Germans are. There can be a gruesome war and a long-lasting one. I only hope Hitler may pull back, not take such a bad risk. May God allow, the Germans recognize this. They would suffer too; the war will bring no luck to anybody."

Angus for the first time heard the voice of – he considered – a genuine defeatist, and this shocked him. He hadn't any doubt about the outcome, but wished the war might delay a bit, at least until the next year, when he would have a full twelve years. At the age of twelve a boy is almost adult; he may fight, possibly step into the army and even die a heroic death, as in the books. He decided tomorrow in the church at mass to make a pledge and an oath to God, meantime considering what might be a proper offering.

Not only Angus mistook the words of truth and reason for defeatism, at the table followed an embarrassing silence, then the talk changed to the prospects of next year's crops. Next the aunt proposed to come over to the salon.

The supper was served rather early and outdoors it was still light enough, but in the dining room, low and with the windows covered by vegetation, the lamps already burned and now they lit them too in the salon. Angus used the pause to get away from the table and escape for a moment outdoors, but in fact didn't go to the lonely construction between the lilac bushes some distance away. He wanted only to get some fresh air, to be away from the official atmosphere, and returned only when the musical interval began. Miss Sophie, after a short, hopeless defense terrorized Stan, the youngest cousin to play a fiddle, with the older Mieczek at the piano, but after a moment, not satisfied with the accompaniment, took the place at the piano herself.

After the music, she repeated a never-changing story about some virtuoso she had heard of, it might be Wieniawski if she had it from her mother. Or maybe Paganini, if the source was her grandmother. After his concerto the audience had remained in dead silence, for a longtime no one dared to applaud, so great was the admiration. The moral of the story was, the violin is the only and unique instrument, where such an effect may happen. (Angus felt a real compassion for the poor Stan. He had about as little talent as Angus, but the governess had decided to produce at least one genius in the family; or perhaps it might have been a pretext to hold him a bit longer in her care.)

But this time the moral cut short one of the girls, who sat at the piano and played La Paloma, followed by some quicksteps and fox-trots. Afterwards the guests began to say good-bye, preferring to leave before darkness. It took some time, because always at the last moment the guests and the hosts remembered different themes not yet closed or not mentioned. The talk revived, becoming hot and chaotic, finally definitely interrupted by an announcement: "Lady, Sir! The horses have arrived!"

These words Angus remembered from early childhood, forming his belief that horses must be much important figures, because this interrupted all talks and doings. His mum allowed him even to leave the table, where he had to sit eating to the very end all he had on his plate. Any questions she answered with: "Never mind, we must hurry, because THE HORSES have arrived!" Now he understood it was necessary to make a start to be on time at the railway station (which did not apply in the present circumstance), but the magic power in the words remained: THE HORSES have arrived! No way to let THE HORSES wait.

The rest of the evening Father, Uncle and Mr. Joe played a card game, now outdated, called Preference, first in the salon, but next decided the high chairs and the long table in the dining room would be more comfortable. At this age Angus was a devoted enthusiast of this game (later he got bored). Basically it is like whist, but played by three, the one who announces the higher stake always opposed by the remaining two. Angus got a pencil and a sheet of paper, and may to keep a record of the game. Dividing the page with two diagonal lines, he made the rubrics and noted the names. He could look at the cards but not comment; this rule concerned not only him, all present could comment only after the match. After every match, he counted the result and wrote it down; the father probed in and nodded the head approvingly. If he behaved unimpeachably – not a light matter, a fan should be invisible, silent and odorless – and all were in good humor, sometimes he could play a game he specialized in, the so-called "mizerka." It was a simple game, worth a normal No Trumps, but already if the partners played a more complex game of the same type, called Null Over, they did so exclusively, without Angus' participation.

Uncle auctioned fast and played fast, but sometime laughed, the only sound, as the other partners remained quiet. Father had a moment of reflection occasionally, he didn't like the smallest error, but just now he knocked the taken cards lightly on the table before putting them aside, which to Angus was a clear mark of satisfaction. But after they dealt the

next hand he decided only reluctantly to say something. All others passed so he brought out the two cards, twisted his nose and said: "If you agree, Angus may play mizerka, he has behaved and never looked at anyone's cards."

The game called mizerka introduces some comic distraction into the otherwise serious play. If one player opens by a careless call with weak cards and has no luck with the two cards, his cards are so bad that he expects few or no tricks, he may try "mizerka" as last chance. In such a case the opponents try to give him all the tricks and he tries to take none. There is no way to open the cards, all play on the strength of their own hand, feeling their way in the dark. If the one who called first takes no tricks, he wins, but if he takes any, he loses as many times as the number of tricks. The higher and more serious game called Null Over also goes on the same basics, the leading player attempts to take no tricks, but one of opponents may open the cards and direct the game. The purpose is to give some chance for the players with exceptionally bad luck and weak cards. Finally, if agreed upon beforehand, there is a version called a Great Null Over, valued as eight No Trumps. As in a game known as a Great Totus, the leading player must open all his cards including the purchase and the opponents decide which two cards he has to lay off.

But Father thought this not in accord with the rules of Preference; at least in the clubs, members never play so. "Yes, really," laughed the uncle, "because in the clubs, no one plays Preference any more. The last such club they discovered beneath an ancient pyramid in Egypt, the mummies sat there with the cards in their hands."

Angus got cards, as one may say, full of holes, no-good to take tricks but also no-good to miss all tricks. He decided to lay aside not the strongest two cards, but those which could inconvenience him most right at the start. So he didn't take the first tricks and managed to throw off a few cards worrying him most. Towards the end, he did take one trick, which was not bad. If the opponents guessed better, he could finish with three tricks.

After two rubbers followed a short pause, Uncle filled two glasses with Baczyński brandy. Father passed; he declared many times, he didn't like the stink of alcohol in any form. Eventually this may overcome after the first glass. But why start at all, if you have to overcome yourself? Even in society he only maneuvered with his glass, emptying it discreetly, never into his mouth. The uncle, to the contrary declared that cards like the

stink, both of alcohol and tobacco. But he drank moderately and only good drinks. So did Angus' aunt and his mother, but strangely enough, Mother insisted on her son's knowledge of all basic sorts of wines and even strong alcohols. Of course not to drink them, but only taste like the professional wine tasters do. It is difficult to judge why, but the result was that Angus, like his father, took dislike to all alcohols, except for of some wines. But this was something he decided later, independently, because his mother like many females preferred the sweet wines, brrr!

Uncle lit a cigar and handed one to Mr. Joseph, who smoked rarely only after dinner or supper. Father preferred cigarettes; he made them himself with a special utensil, filling the Morvitan hulls with a Turkish Superfine tobacco. He smoked too much, but within fixed limits, one cigarette case filled in the morning and never surpassed the quota. This evening he left a reserve, decreasing the day's portion.

"We may play again tomorrow," said the uncle. "As for this evening, I suggest two more rubbers and then I'd like to stretch myself on a bed. I feel all my bones, it has been a hectic day."

"I intend not to sit long, either. But I must be tomorrow in Poznań," answered father.

"But why?" - asked the surprised uncle "You may take the morning Monday train with my daughters. The older must do something in the university, and the younger go to the "Quaestor" office, before beginning to study."

"Yes, but I have an extra duty in the Railway Direction tomorrow evening."

"Duty? In the night?"

"Nothing extraordinary, it happens sometime. I will take a thermos bottle and a few sandwiches, and probably can shut my eyes for part of the night. But talking about closing the eyes," he looked at Angus, "it is time for you to go to the bed."

Angus was in no mood to sleep.

"But it is only half past nine. And there is no school tomorrow!"

"Yes, but you must be in bed at ten sharp, and you have still much to do: wash yourself," (what, again! – Angus almost protested), "go to a place where even royals go on foot alone, attend to your clothes and

change into pajamas. Remember you are not in your own house, everything takes longer. If you start right away, you may be in bed at ten. Enough talking, go!"

"And we, instead of all these accounts, shall play a bit with the chips," added uncle. "Why hold such a big kit and use it so seldom?" So saying, he extracted from a drawer a box full of multicolored squares, rectangles, triangles and circles. Uncle preferred to play with the chips, but Father normally objected, saying this resembled gambling, playing with money.

In fact, it was still early and Angus felt a deep injustice, but he knew better than to argue with Father. Father issued few orders, but Angus had to fulfill them. Different from the mother, who often overburdened him with many erratic errands; more might follow before he managed the first. So it was possible to carry out only a few of the lot, the ones repeated several times. Even with these it was always possible to propose deals, bargain, haggle, play for time.

Now he had to obey, but got suspicious. Do they want only to dispose of him? What was the secret they did not want to say in front of him? He said good night and left loudly enough, but returned quietly and came to the intentionally not fully closed door. Clear, overhearing people or peeping at them is low and ugly, not for gentlemen, but an old saying says - "All's fair if in love and war". Damn the love, who cares about such nonsense? But what about the war?

And Hurrah! He heard the end of a sentence: " - ...now you can talk, knowing us. We are serious men and can close our mouths and hold our tongues."

"But can you keep a secret?"

"Of course!"

"So do I!"

"Do not fool with us – we are two against one. We will make a small fire right here in the dining room and roast your bottom, till you tell us all," laughed the uncle.

"Then listen! The war started in the early morning and has already ended. Last night infantry units of regular German Army, not any diversion groups, invaded Polish territory from the former Czechoslovakia side, and took the target, a mountain tunnel near Węgierska Górka.

However, they were unable to hold it. Polish troops did envelop them, but did not start a battle, even with the Germans shooting first. As I came to work, the railroad was under alarm and already put on martial law. The Polish commander ordered neither a liquidation nor surrender of the enclosed troops, because the German General sent an official apology, pleading for a permit to take them back, and after more communications, the Polish side granted this. The official reason the Germans gave, was that during the night exercise they lost their orientation due to fog. It couldn't be fog, though; it is an exceptional summer, never a trace of dampness. Poppycock! Probably some German officer acted too ardently and this way spoiled prematurely the plans of his superiors."

"It is understood... The most probable judgment...." Father now spoke the words in such a low, indifferent tone, as if the Chief of Staff personally had taken his advice and opinion, "...the chances for an unexpected attack decreased. The strategy demands now, at minimum the German Army shall keep a low profile for some time, or even delay the aggression till next year."

A silence followed.

* * *

In fact, Hitler designed the start of the war for the date August 26th, but at the last moment canceled the already issued orders, because on August 25th the British-Polish alliance was definitely signed. Also at the same time Italy declared she was not ready to join the war, needing much and significant help in armaments and many raw materials.

(Excellent diplomacy of Italy, maybe Poland should have learned from this example, keeping all appearances as if ready to accept Hitler's proposition, but with conditions of a large help in weapons from German supply. With this pretext continuing the play for more time. Who knows, perhaps Hitler would have swallowed this temporarily, because he really wanted Poland on his side. Mussolini, despite the existing alliance, could avoid war, but impressed by Hitler's success, jumped later to his side.)

Hitler especially wanted to verify whether, given the changed scenario with an English commitment, the French army would start any serious action on the Western front. War on two fronts was unpopular among the German people. Also the army feared it and Hitler wanted to avoid any such eventuality.

The rapid cancellation of orders succeeded, except for the troops advancing over the mountain saddle "Przełęcz Jabłonkowska." The messenger missed them, and the radio communication did not work properly in the area shadowed by mountains. The two companies of infantry, about half of a battalion, left in the early evening to start the offensive by 5 in the morning, and acted according to the first orders. All press news suppressed the Polish government on the advice of the Allies.

The only detail less known today is the commanding officer of these troops was the same person who in 1941, commanding the Ukrainian battalion "Nachtigall" of the Waffen SS Division "Galicien," executed the professors of Lwów University. Among them killing many world-famous scientists and humanists.

* * *

Angus like a mechanical toy got into his bed, crushed with the weight of this secret, for which he now felt co-responsible. Nevertheless, this was good, the best possible news! There would not be a war this year! He had time to prepare himself for the next year! He had no doubt that war would finally come. He was jealous of the ancient heroes, who in dangerous times could prove themselves by memorable, splendid action, as described in books. Unfortunately, present times were too quiet, well organized and comfortable, they demanded no heroism. Interesting to ponder what the ancients would do if they were living in such an easy time. It is not enough to wish, not even to have the necessary personal qualities; one needs an opening, a crisis and some luck.

But now, he had his share of luck. He was still too young and too small, but growing rapidly. If he exerted himself, he might be OK by next year. He must and shall fight! And it was good that he didn't have to pray the following days, making pledges, promises and oaths before God, trying to close a contract. In such a case it would be necessary to make exceptionally heavy promises. With the coast clear, he was now free to concentrate on the next challenge.

It is not necessary to add, how much afterwards Angus regretted his decision, how many bitter reproaches he felt after the war exploded. Why had he abandoned his primary plan? He rarely tried to plead for something with God, but God granted so far his rare requests. At least so he imagined. Assumedly this was an exceptional matter and

demanded much commitment. If only he had prayed with all his soul, if he had promised something that would be pleasing to God, maybe....

Sunday, as usual, they all traveled to church, but he already regarded an attempt to close a special agreement with God as unnecessary. All the following year and more, the infantile boy believed that WW II happened through his guilt, a sin of negligence. This is what drove him so hard to desperate actions.