

Chapter 2. Running away.

Evacuation train – not a drop of rain, only the bullets coming down from a blue sky – a secret plan: come with the Polish Army and fight the enemy – it could be done, almost, if no bad luck.

5th of September 1939, Tuesday, fifth day of the war, third day of the evacuation; Angus, stretched on his back between the rows of potato plants, looked at the blue sky and the two planes, twin engine bombers. Now they turned back and continued systematically machine-gunning the terrain on his side of the evacuation train.

This by now was an everyday routine. Today the planes were late; it was already after 10 am. There was not much danger. After the first air strike, when the shock was over, the correct response became implanted in people's behavior. The train could not travel by day on the rails disrupted in many places, so the people camped on both sides near the train. As soon as the shout – "planes!" – resounded, everybody started to run into the open fields to hit the ground some distance away. On the first day, there were a few casualties, because they did not run far enough. After that it was usual to sprint as far as possible – all at once – until you ran out of breath. It was necessary to make some hundreds of meters, over five hundred would be fairly safe; or more, depending on the condition of the person. This way there were no more victims.

The next, after getting one's breath back, was to guess the aim of the planes. Most of them were ignoring the train, obviously on their way to do other business, but some, usually two or three, detached themselves to go for this target. The planes always came high and were audible for a considerable time with the distinct alternating rise and fall of the twin motors: bru bru brouuw, bru bru bru brouwow, bru bru oouuu. Angus heard the people saying, these planes were coming back from their mission and using up the leftover ammo before returning to the base. In fact, there was little bombing and still less on target. During the whole journey, only two wagons had to be disconnected from the train and pulled away from the rails. Angus felt that something interesting was happening, this was a real adventure. Alas, Angus' mother would not allow him to give a hand to help and the others were unfairly taking her side – saying this was a task for grown strong men. He felt this was undeserved, he would never get in anybody's way, only be useful. Anyway there were not many strong men on the train, real men were in the army or at war, like his father, and had more important tasks.

So his mother said, being temporarily the only man in the family he had now the sole responsibility to take care of his mother, old and sick. He should never leave her alone, and absolutely never to leave her out of view in case she needed help. This was something which could be called a little manipulative, so called diplomatic course. Angus was aware of this, nevertheless he just loved this extraordinarily important role. In fact, his mother was not young; she gave birth to Angus at the exceptional, for these times, age of forty-five, so now she was fifty-six. But there was nothing wrong with her health, if anything she was a little overweight, the result of too much food, too comfortable a life and not enough exercise. The same applied to her son, overprotected and over-cared-for, far in excess of his own good. Now her heart troubles, rheumatism and whatever else vanished. Making several healthy runs

every day, she was as fit as ever and it took quite an effort not to lose her from view, running away from the train, or rather the line of fire. She was lying in the potato field too, the best place if under fire, but about fifty meters further from the train than he was. Other people similarly scattered around.

Again there was no bombing, the Germans doing only comfortable, low stress target practice from an altitude of about fifteen hundred or two thousand meters.

Being one of the last evacuation trains, this one was already in a trap, with no chance to continue the journey much longer, and the enemy considered it his loot. So there was no reason to bomb it and possibly destroy some valuable goods. Only the human load was a target. The machine-gunning was for the Germans probably a little entertainment or maybe it was in fashion to come home with no ammunition left. They were taking long, almost uninterrupted bursts.

Facing the planes, Angus could see sparks flickering. This was a curious feeling; reading about this in books was not the same as real life. Many times in the past he had wished passionately to be in a real battle, to prove himself a hero. In the books and movies, uniforms ruined with many bullet holes let one clearly recognize the brave men. And now he felt naked and vulnerable, he tried to shrink, to be as small as possible. He could not stop guessing where the first bullet would pierce him, would it be his arm, chest, leg or some other spot. He believed it a disgrace to turn his back on the enemy, facing the ground, or even to close the eyes. Yet it took some effort to look calm. And at the same time he was fully aware there was not much danger; the bullets were hitting the area nearer to the train. But this fear was the worst, what was he afraid of? Could he be a coward under his raw skin? Would all his dreams remain only empty wishes? What should he do if it turned out to be true, him being only a low-grade sneak? Perhaps it would be possible at least to pretend to have some courage, to hide how he was afraid inside – if it was fear indeed. But maybe, he hoped, these were only new conditions to which he was unaccustomed and therefore confused. He should have been happy; this was the baptism by fire like in the books. This was exactly the position he was yearning for and surely he would get more mental discipline after becoming more familiar with it. This was it, he lacked experience...

In this moment some movement nearby distracted his thought. What was it? As he gazed about he could see nothing but a small cloud of dust already setting on the near side of the third row of potatoes. Could this be a small animal that had panicked and run off? But if it was a rabbit, not to say something bigger, he should now see or hear something more. How great, or small, could a baby rabbit be? He knew little about the open country, being a town boy. He tried to reach with his hand but this was not enough and he had to squirm on his side holding his head and shoulders up. There was neither a hole nor anything hiding, but he had the impression the sandy earth was a little warmer there, yes, positively warmer as he put his fingers deeper. Suddenly it felt hot and his hand came out instinctively. Now he started digging with both hands and finally found it – a little piece of hot metal. He laid it aside to cool off, thinking: My God, so this oblong piece of dark, ugly metal with a deformed shape – is a bullet?

In the movies, the heroes used to show the bullets always looking shiny, polished, beautiful, indeed almost precious. Angus could not take his eyes from the bullet. For the first time in his life his own world and understanding of how it works, based on books he read, did not stand the test of reality. Such confrontations were to repeat

themselves multiple times soon. Now he was thinking: "This should bury itself in a notebook or still better in a prayer book on my breast. Or stop at a medallion, as I do not have any cigarette case. But this is plain nonsense, no holy medallion could stop it, and no book, even if it was ten or even twenty centimeters thick, would be enough, not even a brick. How come a prayer book or some other small trinket, the gift of some beautiful young woman, could save the life of so many film heroes, who always carry such gifts near their hearts?"

He only then started to realize what power bullets carry.

"I had to dig deep indeed. So why do they write such nonsense rubbish?"

Nevertheless he decided to keep the bullet as a memento, after cleaning and polishing it would look better. Now he could show some material evidence, if perhaps some of his colleagues would not believe that he was under fire, shot at in the war. He measured the distance: the bullet struck a little more than his arm's length away, surely less than one meter from him. Could he say it was about half a meter? But a little time before he had been even nearer, he had changed his position a few times; so could he say, it was thirty centimeters? Or better still, twenty? Or could he say, the bullet struck the very place he lay on a moment ago, only he moved a little before, some inner voice directed him to? But this would not be true and he would know it, and would in the future look at himself as a cheater, a deceiver. Yet, it would be not exactly a lie, substantially a truth if with a little exaggeration – and how much prettier to tell. He decided to think this over and to say nothing before he found a satisfactory solution; the bullet could wait in his pocket. Probably, he was trying to comfort his own conscience.

He got so preoccupied with his thoughts, he lost all interest in the outside world, including the planes, and came back to earth only some minutes after the attack ended. With the routine shouts "Anybody hit?" "Nobody wounded?" "Somebody needing help?" the people got up and were moving back towards the train.

The weather was splendid this day – in fact, every day was beautiful, late summer and a little later a beautiful autumn. But this made nobody happy, in fact people were praying for some days of bad weather. It was as if Heaven took the side of the aggressor, the German planes could perform all the time most effectively. This weather gave all the aces to the motorized and mechanized German Army, with all its sophisticated machines and armaments functioning perfect, without any transport or communication problems.

It was public knowledge that Poland was a much smaller and poorer country, never preparing for war unless in defense. The Polish Army might have high morale, but it was low in armaments and modern logistics. Lately intense efforts had been made to modernize the weapons, but limited by the economical possibilities. In fact Poland's entire yearly budget was about two billion zloty, equivalent to about four hundred million dollars and of this around a third was spent on the army. They had to scrape every penny, to do miracles without economic support.

Were all the potential opportunities exhausted? After the calamity of 1939, the people strongly denounced and condemned the governing establishment for assumed negligence. But the government did as much as they could, being guilty maybe only of lack of vision and imagination. Instead of alliances and treaties, that anyway never held, they should have come down off their high horse, been practical and demanded some immediate help, if only materials. Yes, let that be a preliminary condition of good faith. If help came in the form of weapons or money, not just

pretty words and assurances, this would prove the treaties could be taken seriously. If for example the empty gesture of British guaranties were accompanied by some secret paragraph guaranteeing a loan now, on the spot, it could keep the weapons industry working at full capacity. A mere nothing in proportion to British war expenses, it could be spent better, more efficiently in Poland. As a matter of fact, in 1939, Poland had to sell about seventy newly produced fighter planes, and almost all the excellent antiaircraft Bofors guns they produced (the last that went to England, as it turned out). All in all about seventy percent of their own war production had to be sold to keep the industry functioning, to supply the rest to their own army.

Paradoxically it was the poor country helping the rich one and one-way, with no returns at all. In short, Hitler armed and reinforced his army for aggression on credit received. Poland never had the slightest possibility to receive any credit for defense. Instead, it was Poland giving a credit to the rich Great Britain, if only a small one, in the last month's before the war.

But nobody considered this now, the spirit was high all the time. If Hitler united the Germans, he certainly involuntarily united all Poles. Nobody expected Poland to hold up against the full force of Germany alone, there was too great a disproportion in numbers. But against about half of this power the chances were not bad at all. The "mad Poles" had got accustomed over the last centuries to worse odds. In many battles outnumbered, they had to fight much better armed enemies, to take the weapons from them. Yet they sometimes were victorious and always made a good show. Now Poland was in a better position, fighting not in solitude, but with powerful allies that in reasonable time promised, well, guaranteed to engage a part of the German Army; that being so, surely this evacuation was only temporary.

Everybody present believed the Germans did not have a chance; the final victory would come in the nick of time. For the first time in contemporary history Poland was engaged in a war in the company of good friends, so the people were optimistic, very patriotic, prepared for any sacrifice necessary. Anyway, Poland had burned its bridges; there was no way back, no other possibility than to go on fighting.

Camping again near the train, Angus had the feeling almost of being on an interesting, adventurous picnic. He could vividly remember boarding this train two days ago. The streets in the town full of people shouting, cheering for the allies, that after some delay finally decided to fulfill their treaty obligations and join the war, if only on the third day. For some hours groups of people dancing and singing on the streets, assembled at the French and British consulates to display their affection. They ignored the danger from the planes and the fact the diplomatic personnel had already left; this was the happiest moment of the war, a good beginning indeed.

Angus' mother, at first never believing that Poznań could be seriously endangered, decided to evacuate only on the afternoon of Sept 3rd. This was one of the last trains, taking heavy machinery from railway workshops, yet families of railway men could join it. Angus was curious and excited; he had never before traveled in such a way, on top of open lorries between great machines covered with coarse gray or green tarpaulins. This was a splendid adventure, sleeping under the open sky, with food still ample. But the train covered small distances, moving only at night, after they managed somehow to mend the rails bombed during the daytime. The bad news was, there was little prospect of Angus taking part, or helping fight, as he had hoped. Even so, he daydreamed about great deeds most of the time.

Today these dreams became interrupted by two more runs to the familiar potato field. No bombs, only the usual machine-gunning erupted, nothing unexpected and no casualties. With experience and knowledge now, Angus noted the little spots of dust – the places where bullets struck. The planes were shooting first on one, next on the other side of the train over a broad belt of ground, but the people were further away. The heavy planes always approached from a considerable height, careful to avoid any risk of weapons that might eventually be mounted on the train, but in fact there were none. The first attack was longer, the planes circulating two times; the second attack, which followed two and a half hours later, was short as usual, one course on each side. Angus was glad to notice that both times he felt no emotions. Preoccupied with his dilemma about the bullet, he stayed satisfactorily calm. Compared with the serious problem he had to decide on, the planes and rapid-fire were only a boring distraction, the same procedure again and again. They were shooting without seeing any people, blindly in the general direction of the train.

"They are only wasting ammunition, the machines are bulletproof, the open lorries are not worth much, and the locomotive stays in camouflage a long way off. But what happened to me, I forgot to be afraid, am I already becoming an experienced warrior? No, probably the knack not to be afraid is to concentrate on something else. That's simple enough."

But he had little time for psychoanalysis. After the sunset, with darkness coming, he climbed to his place on the train and pretending to sleep came back to the most important subject – to make a firm decision about his bullet.

The main problem was how to join the fighting army, now, before the war's end, the Germans smashed without his help. This was the only thing of importance, all other matters secondary. It was time to think seriously, to make sensible plans for the future, not to drift passively any more. This was not to be as easy a task as he had supposed, evidently. Yet he had read of incidents, when boys yet not of age served in the army and with real distinction. Exceptionally, yes, but he determined to be such an exception.

He had read books about boys not much older than himself who in times of national emergency, uprisings, days of disaster, or other historic times proved themselves heroic, occasionally paying with their lives for their deeds. This was something he wanted to copy, prove equal to. Surely someone with experience, with proven courage and familiar with fire and bullets, would have a better chance of being accepted, even if not of age. If deceit could help him with this task – this would be a white lie for a better purpose, and he could ignore it. In fact, many times before he had regretted not living in historic times, not to be able to do great, or at least moderate deeds. Now the time had come. So he reached a decision.

The first step would be to use the bullet. Next morning he would show it to his mother and say that it brushed his hair, touching his head – only at the same moment he had moved his head a little sideways. It was a miracle he was not hit. He would make up a slight bruise on his head to show off, an easier fake than to pierce his clothes. If he knew his mother at all, it was quite certain she would tell this to everyone, and then to the rest of the world. Next he would seek out any Polish soldier he might meet, to make friends and make him hear this is a boy with some luck, who is not afraid of bullets. With such a reputation it should be easy to join the army. Eventually he would pretend to get lost from his family. He would be guilty of lying, several times; it would be necessary to say, for example, that he was at least

fourteen years old. Thank God for being tall. Once in the army, it would be up to him to make himself useful, maybe carry messages or do some scouting, he already determined to do anything necessary. His mother would be anxious for a time, but then he would make her proud of him.

Now with this problem solved his thoughts wandered back to the first days of the war. Usually the 1st of September would be the first day of classes. However because it was Friday, and the days remarkably hot (more so with the political temperature still rising) the beginning of school delayed to Monday. In the early morning the whole family and the neighbors were aware of something happening, but the news were confusing. Some told, the war had come already; others, these are only the AA exercises, like in the past, only on a greater scale. Angus, detaching himself from the chaos of contradicting opinions, took refuge in the room with the radio. There was only music, occasionally interrupted by some mysterious announcements, like "AB 91 CD, attention, attention, next letters and numbers, arrives or gone, again numbers and letters attention, attention please" and so on. Unexpectedly all this overpowered a loud voice barking quickly in the German language. Angus could understand nothing, but he hated this voice with all his soul from the first moment on. Angus called his mother and with astonishment saw her change; she listened to this voice transfixed, as if something froze her to death. After some minutes, Angus disconnected the radio and began to shout to his still fixed mother: "Don't listen to this. They are lying!"

He slumbered on, and woke up only for a short moment as the train started about midnight with the rails mended after hours of fiery night work. Next morning the train was standing near a forest, with some of the trees on the other side too. After a few hours there came news: for a time the journey will be impossible, the train will stay a few days. The location was several kilometers from Gniezno but the nearest little town was Czerniejewo and it was possible to go there on foot. Or still nearer was an estate named Żydowo and the heirs of the estate offered temporary shelter to the refugees; if the train were to be ready for further travel, they would supply the information.

Angus' mother decided to go, but there was the problem of the baggage, it was impossible to carry it and impossible to find any help, since most of the people had similar problems. It was necessary to do great unpacking. Take only the things most necessary and perhaps a few most valuable and leave all the others, hoping to find them on return, if further evacuation became possible. This took much time and it was already afternoon when they were ready, among the last. Angus was carrying two lighter bags, gaining distance from his mother who had a single, much heavier valise. He heard the talk, about the only interesting theme, the chances of war. The little group of people stopped from time to time, waiting for the stragglers at the tail end. It was a plain country dirt road, not hardened, with one or occasionally two rows of trees, some of them old and big.

The plane came unexpectedly, low – it jumped from the horizon with unbelievable speed. This was something quite different from the planes seen before, that at a great height almost slowly came for the train, signaling their advance a long time with sound. Now this all happened so quickly, he could not believe it. Angus had only once before see a plane going so low – it had been a Polish plane, unarmed, with two fliers sitting in the open cockpit. Probably one of the mobilized civilian planes used for carrying orders and for observation. It came very early on the second day of

the journey, along the train - greeted by the refugees with great shouts of enthusiasm, the only Polish plane they ever did see at the time. It gave the impression of high speed, but only because it was flying so low over the train. In fact it was much speedier than the fastest automobiles Angus had seen in the races. He almost missed it, it all lasted only a few movements of the eye, to see two heads in leather caps and goggles, the second man still waving back to the cheers.

But if that before had been swift – now it was like lightning. Angus was still hitting the bottom of the shallow trench, as a dark shadow was already on top of them, the bullets dusting the road and the noise hitting almost at the same time – and already gone. Next it was coming back, but never fully got there, made a turn some distance off, still shooting, then another and another turn and disappeared finally.

Angus started to run to where he last saw his mother. There she was standing beneath a great oak, on her feet – and not hit. But the ground was covered with heaps of fresh and dead wood, bark and twigs. She was not trembling, only pale and Angus had to speak several times before she heard him.

– I was not much concerned with the bullets – she said – the tree was large and an attempt to shoot me was stupid – but I was afraid the plane would crash direct into the tree, which would be the end. The third time was the worst. I was sure the plane would crash here; I truly cannot believe how he managed to fly past. Besides, running around the tree I almost fell down over the rubbish he shot down from the tree on the first charges. –

Several people came to them. Somebody picked up the luggage thrown away before she started for the tree, everyone spoke at once. It was almost incoherent, but it amounted to, why should the German flier take such pains, trying to shoot a single woman? Angus' mother thought it was all because of her hat – it was a light greenish color.

– Nonsense, it may be ugly, but not to such degree that every flier should run amok at the mere sight of it –

– Perhaps the flier held me for a soldier –

– This is ridiculous, he would have to think you were some French foreign legionnaire. This is not like the color of Polish uniforms at all – and with a white band too. If this gives any associations with the army, so the most likely would be from the film "Morocco," with Marlene Dietrich – that was the comment and all laughed; the comment was not funny, but the laughter came naturally as a reaction to the tension before – and helped.

Other comments were not so funny: do the Germans have so much planes and ammunition, they can use them on a single person – a civilian and a woman at that. This flier wasted several hundred, no, more than a thousand of Reichsmark worth of ammunition. This all happened when the Polish radio was repeating, again and again, at intervals of two hours the appeal of Polish commander to the Polish Army: "Soldiers, shoot slowly! Soldiers, take good care with your aim!" All to stop any unnecessary waste.

In fact, Angus and his mother were lucky twice: first, evacuating by a train and again, doing so late. This way they missed the worst experience of millions of refugees: the overcrowded roads, with the pressed stops and detours and the constant strafing by the Luftwaffe. This was the worst, the hell of all main roads. The never-ending column of civil refugees – on foot, on horse wagons, occasionally cars or whatever – and the planes, almost always unexpected. Going low, shooting at

everything that moved, sometimes dropping too a few small antipersonnel bombs. The road behind left paralyzed and obstructed with corpses, dead horses and pieces of cars, luggage and other debris.

Only afterwards, comparing their experiences with other refugees, would they know what they with some luck avoided; this one isolated incident was typical like bread with butter for many, but usually a hundred or so kilometers further east.

At this time Angus and his mother were in no man's land. The Army of Poznań following orders retreated a long distance without battle (the soldiers begging their commander – and next the Army Poznań commander, General Kutrzeba proposing and suggesting repeatedly to the High Command to turn back and fight, but without any effect so far). The German offensive aimed north and south at the territory of Great Poland and in effect left this country here empty of almost all military forces, but nevertheless the Germans delayed their move in. They already considered this terrain their loot – so there was not any point in destroying what in fact was already their property. In all likelihood this one flier, probably on his way back, decided to take some entertainment, a little hunt and performed for a single person the same job he was doing methodically some distance east.

Now, Angus' reaction was not exactly fear for his mother. Sure, much concerned for her and angry with the flier, but on the other side it was exactly what one expected during war, wasn't it? Germans were no gentlemen. But he believed his mother could never get killed – this was indeed out of the question. Anyway, in the books and films the heroes came out of worse hazards, and neither the hat of suspected color, nor any other part of her clothes had been pierced by bullets. So he felt safe for her – but what a splendid adventure she had had! He was proud of his mother.

But most of all, trying hard to suppress this feeling, he was jealous; deep inside he was green with envy. This was unjust – his mother had behaved like a real hero – yet she did not boast a bit about this. She did not give a damn about it and she did not need to. She was not going to join the army; she was not going to fight actively against the Germans. Yet he was craving just such an incident and he needed a credit for bravery. He would give anything to be in her place, well not exactly an arm or leg, because this would prevent him from joining the army, but certainly his back teeth; in fact all his teeth or anything not vital for fighting.

If it should be known that he was in real hot place, stood his baptism by fire, and behaved fearlessly! His mother could talk about this to all the people – his chances for joining the army would increase enormously. Why did this damned plane not pick him out? For him in particular this would mean so much, probably the difference between success and failure of his life task. His mother considered it neither luck nor distinction. Oh God, the world was a damned unjust place! And what was now the worth of the former incident, the one bullet that struck near him, in comparison to the hundreds that struck near his mother. If he were to mention this – why, now it would be ridiculous.

With despair he put his hand into his pocket and threw the bullet faraway, only now realizing what it was all about. This was a finger of God. He was preparing to lie about his bullet, to cheat, to boast. He had not yet had time to do it and that was in part his luck – but he was already guilty in his conscience. So this was a test, made by God or the Devil. If he will behave well, the good God may send him another chance.

It was afternoon as they came to Żydowo. All the buildings and the palace were open to the refugees and by that time almost full. The estate owned the family of Chełmiecki. The heir and his wife greeted the newcomers, directing them and helping with what was possible. Angus' mother at the welcome mentioned her sister Frances and her husband, who were during WW I and in the following years administrators of the nearby estate of Iwno, before settling in Podłaziny. Based on this she was invited to the main table for dinner, but found some excuse not to go – being unable to dress properly after loss of baggage. So she got a small, single room in the palace where she could rest and eat meals. She accepted the invitation to breakfast the next day and went by herself, using the excuse that her son was in poor health after all these hazards. To Angus she said openly, that was because she had doubts if he could behave at high tables. Angus was happy with this arrangement. He remembered several formal dinners and suppers in his uncle and aunt's house in Podłoziny when there were guests. This was always a long, uncomfortable and boring affair. And on top of it, whatever he did, there would afterwards always be remarks, what he should know or do better at his age.

What mattered and pleased him was that he could play with the children. They were younger than he and in short time he became accepted as natural first in the games. Initially he hoped to find a colleague from his school and class, because there was one with the name of Chełmiecki too, one of four "aristocratic" students of his class. There were three more – a high percentage for one class, nevertheless the spirit of the class was unquestionably democratic. The boys evaluated themselves only after their own personality and merit – in first place strength and courage, much less so learning ability – but never after their parents' position. If one of these four boys was the unquestionable natural leader, it was because he was the quickest, boldest, no, perhaps not exactly the strongest, but acting as if he was. To tell it short, his nickname was Tarzan and not without cause. No one interested themselves about his parentage – well, maybe with one exception. It was known that his granddad was a national hero, a general (not exactly a lucky one) in one of the Polish uprisings and earlier one of the aides and officers of Garibaldi – much merited in the Italian wars. His trusted companion was Dzwonowski and it happened so, the same friendship connected their sons and now the grandsons.

Capsule: Tradition of the freedom fighters

This third combatant, of Italian Wars and Polish uprisings, name of Mizera, was quite another fish. He was an ordinary fellow, no connections, no money, hard work to Italy and back, he served as a volunteer in the infantry, never met the horse folk. Still another student had a great dad, fighting in the Hungarian revolution. And obviously more boys, including Angus, had a family tradition of Polish uprisings.

This was almost standard procedure – many of the Poles, in the time between their own uprisings, turned fighters for freedom and democracy for other nations all over the world. Similarly, in the Polish uprisings there was always an open proclamation "we fight for our own freedom – and the freedom of other nations too." The well-known names such as Kosciusko, Pulaski – are in no way exceptional, but rather almost typical representatives of Polish – how to say it - quasi-professional revolutionaries, freedom fighters. Neither these men, nor the nonexistent at these times Poland, the so-called "Polish cause" were successful in their efforts, nevertheless in the long run the tradition created a positive world opinion. From about the second half of the 19th century, many known writers and thinkers declared

the so-called "Polish question" or "Polish cause" as real proof and confirmation of true democratic and liberal feelings. These are the exact words, expressed so by the contemporary authors and philosophers. The resurrection of Poland in 1918 – preceded by way-breaking declaration of US President Wilson, naming the independence of Poland as one of the main points of the peace proposal after the World War – resulted from this public opinion. In fact, much more so than from the efforts of the contemporary Polish leaders, as Dmowski, Pilsudski or Paderewski, without decreasing their great merits. This one time in history "the appeal of lost case" turned human hearts and minds – and Poland finally profited.

Coming back to the boys – the names of Teczenowski and his trusted companion from the time of the Italian wars, Dzwonowski, if not of the same caliber as the former ones, remained in the history. By a curious coincidence the grandson of Dzwonowski was of the same age as that of Teczenowski and, this surely not a coincidence, in the same class at school. But never did either of them boast about nor even mention their family deeds. Angus got knowledge of this causally, only this year learning history. Now the point is, many of these boys became preconditioned and influenced right from birth to a certain behavior and thinking.

A funny example, how little boys try aping the great ones: about three years ago, in the third-class of primary school, Angus had written his first registered letter – personally and direct to the Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie. A long and heavy work – full month's worth – to produce it clean and calligraphic, remove as many grammatical errors as possible, in short to do it almost correctly. All this in secrecy from everybody and first from his parents, who possibly would not approve (to put it mildly).

He proposed to join the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Army, because he considered the Abyssinian people as an unjustly oppressed side in the war with Italy. And he motivated his plea by the well-known historical fact the Polish people, if not exactly busy fighting for their own freedom, always fight for the freedom of other nations. Because Poland was free and safe now – he wanted to help other countries. Admittedly so far still young, he already had learned much on the subject of poisonous gases, in fact he had read all the books available, so he could perhaps be an expert at neutralizing and avoiding them. This might be useful since the Italians were inhumanely using these gases just now. If not, he could start his service as a simple soldier, hoping by his own merit to become an officer eventually. He would like to offer his money too, but regrettably he had only little and found the postage expensive. It would be more economical if he would take the money with him and give it personally. Unfortunately the King of Kings, probably too busy with the current fighting, could not find or seek a satisfactory interpreter to translate the letter – in result Ethiopia lost the war without Angus' help. Undeterred, he wrote a similar offer, sending it a year later to Chang-kai-shek – also receiving no answer.

All this he remembered now, only as a childish affair, ridiculous indeed. At the serious age of eleven, a boy almost grown up, mature – if not full physically, at least mentally, he could look down patronizingly at his former self; say candidly that he acted like a little don Quixote.

This comical detail may serve to explain the background, the state of Angus' feelings and mind. Now, not some faraway country, but his own – and his own people were under attack. The compulsion to do what he considered his duty was urgent, obsessive. The question was, to find an ingenious way to do it. That was the reason

he wished to find at least one of his classmates. In the days spent on the train – or near it under fire, he many times daydreamed imagining his whole class, or all the older classes of the school going to the war. Or turning the school into a stronghold and defending it for days, weeks until a successful rescue by the Polish Army. But daydreaming is enough only for the inadequate ones. Action was necessary, and two heads are better than one, to think out a sensible plan.

The problem was, he was so damned alone.

Alas, his new friends were small children (the oldest being ten); old enough to play with – but nothing more serious. They sure were fine children – and he had debts to their parents, so he considered he should give them a good time, and have a good time himself. There was a great garden and a park too, with a stream flowing through several little ponds, with many trees and bushes. There were several friendly dogs and cats – with a little fantasy, they could function as lions and tigers in tropical forests, near wild rivers, seashores and what not. They even built special nautical transport lines – with a wooden washbasin attached to ropes (but the name, CCL, Cats Communication Lines, proved rather inadequate; only the distinguished dogs consented eventually to play, the cats simply ran away).

And so the time was full up, in fact too short. More so, as these children had a private teacher, or rather two – one for the regular lessons and the other for learning languages (they learned, naturally, French and as second foreign language German, if now unwillingly). There was not any question of taking part in this – Angus being older and in a more advanced class – although at zero point with foreign languages, for he had never studied any other than his own. So this time was free, and he used it for further exploring. And now his luck changed, he struck gold – finding what he believed to be his great chance in life.

In the last month's, the Polish Army, besides the traditional units, had created the so-called National Defense Companies. Designed as reserve and reinforcement units, they could by law also serve as temporary aid to the greater units, especially for defending local territory. In fact, they were like the National Guard in the US or the Home Guard in the UK, just not organized to such a high degree. The organization ended at the level of company, or a battalion, because according to rules they should never undertake a mission independently. Routinely they should serve just as a source for replacing men lost in fight (like the WW I "Marschkompanies"). Therefore the soldiers were armed only with light weapons, usually the personal ones, rarely some machine guns. As mentioned before the Army Poznań had already withdrawn faraway, nevertheless the Germans were cautious in moving into the empty territory. With the main offensive directed north and south, the Greater-Poland become something of a no-man's-land. Maybe remembering the uprising in 1918 the Germans chose not to complicate their speed and smoothness of movement, expecting possible guerrilla warfare.

In all this turmoil, a few of the National Defense units were left behind with no orders. Some companies not full organized yet, some left incommunicado because of a faulty dispatch system (radio being only available at high-level in these times), some perhaps simply forgotten in the general withdrawal. Exactly such a case had happened at hand. Back at the stables, in the so called "folwark" (meaning the agricultural farm, near the residence), some ten soldiers of a National Defense company, commanded by one petty officer, took temporary quarters.

Angus was a bad mixer, because his mother opposed of almost all new acquaintances – allowing for contacts only with children whose parents she knew. Even with these she could find what she called bad influences. And in time Angus found it difficult to make contacts and form new acquaintances – but not so now. This time he acted like a thunderstorm inspired by the Holy Spirit, already pressing access to the soldiers' quarters and doing his utmost to appease.

The next task was to seek out the most sociable and pleasant soldier. He found one and they took to each other at once and became cronies.

Every time he now ran to visit them, he never forgot to take something good along, never tasting any of the delicacies he got himself, but explaining to his mother:

"Oh, this is so good, I shall better eat it in the fresh air, in the garden."

"All right, go ahead – the air surely does you good. You have never had such an appetite, take some more."

The soldiers did have fresh and nourishing food, but rather simple (Angus tried some of their meals as well and found the beans with meat good). Nevertheless a supply of something mouthwatering they always accepted willingly, a welcome diversity, if in fact not much for a group of grown men. Acting instinctively, Angus found out the old truth, the best friendships start at the table.

The second items were the cigarettes. Angus found out one of the servants agreed to sell some (but became rather disgusted with such a young customer – Angus had to explain the circumstances with a promise of silence – in fact, they both kept their word).

All boys have a natural interest for weapons. Nothing extraordinary, that his new friend the soldier agreed to show him his gun – a Polish infantry carbine – in all details. First Angus could hold the empty gun – without bullets – find the safety catch, the loading and repeating lever, the firing pin with mechanism, arrange the visor for different distances. Next take the gun apart and put it together again, this exercise repeated till the timing was satisfactory – and finally being able to do this without looking, under a blanket or with eyes blinded.

Next they came to the loading practice. This model, produced in Radom, had a structurally built in, permanent magazine containing up to five bullets. Eventually the sixth bullet could be put directly into the firing chamber (though never left there). For loading, the five bullets were held together by the so called "boat," a slight flat oblong piece of metal with two little shackles on both sides. From this they could slip all together or one after another under the pressure of the palm on top of this appliance. Three such boats with cartridges were put in leathery or coarse green fabric, like a purse, a soldier carrying six of them on his belt, all in all ninety rounds. After some exercise Angus found this all simple and efficient, the important matter to remember being – his instructor impressed upon him – never to forget the safety catch. Afterwards, by working the lever he could successively put the bullets into the firing chamber and take them out of the gun one after another. Next load again and repeat the procedure several times, again and again, to gain speed and automatic efficiency.

Sometimes the soldier deliberately fed him with false commands. In a rapid succession of instructions, some should be ignored. As a standard procedure never to be missed he learned to check both the magazine and the firing chamber before he ever started to do anything to the machinery. No matter if he remembered having

done it only seconds before – always recheck. Now his guru tried to confuse him, to imprint the basic rule even more firmly.

Angus was properly elated by the course, appreciated every minute he could get. He loved the gun. He had seen guns before – hunting guns in Podloziny – but all his sympathy then was for the hunted, so he never felt like this.

He learned how to put the bayonet on as well, but this was no-good, he could not exercise with it, the composition was too heavy for a free use. Never mind, he considered, if one could shoot right, only rarely would it come to the occasion of close combat. This was something he believed outdated, old modish.

Alas, there was no possibility for the most important – shooting practice. But on Angus' plea, his new friend agreed that on the next day they would go into the open field to do some "dry" target practice with an empty gun.

Angus could almost not sleep at night – for the first time in the war – it was too much for him, the happy hours. Next morning they walked away to the open fields. After first repeating the known procedures, now Angus learned how to hold and "shoot" (in fact "firing" an empty gun), repeating and "shooting" again. How to take the first and second trigger resistance without losing the target from vision, control the small natural movements of hands and body and calculate the right distance.

"Take aim at the bush there. No, not this one. Look at the high tree, point at it with your finger. Your aim is seven fingers right. Do you see? Your fingers are thinner, but also your arm is shorter than mine, so it will be about the same. What is your account for the distance?" "

"I should say, five hundred meters."

"Not good at all, in reality it is about eight hundred. Compare your finger with the dimensions of a man nearby – do you see? This is too long for a clean shot; it could be good only for a salvo from a group, or with a special rifle with optics, which we don't have. But imagine you are shooting in a group, take aim and mimic the shooting – take the first resistance, hold your breath, now take the second.

"Not too bad for first time, but probably you would have missed. You move the gun too much, it is almost trembling. Try to control your arm only in the moment of shooting, not the whole time, do not hold it too long. The longer you hold on the worse it will be, easy does it, imagine you are holding a bunch of flowers for a girl. Keep it easily and hold it straight only after the first resistance and then do not wait, the first time you see the target well, squeeze delicately the hand, not only the finger – the whole hand.

"Now again, take aim at the small tree two fingers left. Hold it, hold it – what account of the distance? Better, but not good enough. I think you underestimate the distance; it should be a hundred meters more. Now do it."

And so it was on and on. The boy, worn out before, with some luck could at least perform the exercise free and easy enough. No strength left, but he was eager to continue after a few hours rest and dinner.

"Could we not take one-shot for real, only once?"

"No, this is impossible. This doesn't depend on me, I wouldn't be able to either. No soldier can fire without order. Besides, you can never know what a stray bullet can do, this is not a hunting gun, a high-powered bullet can travel a long-distance and endanger someone. Then, if the bullet is in fact high-powered – it means you also can get a powerful buffet from the recoil of the gun – and I do not want you with a

broken collarbone or a few teeth less. No, no, I will show you something extra instead, a fair irregular but possible use of the gun."

"But what's the use of learning something theoretically, if I cannot shoot the gun for real? And how can I find out if I am strong enough to do it, if not by trying?"

"You have something there, but I say and you can believe me that it is too early. You take your time, grow up a little more – and I mean not the weight, but first the muscles. I see this is a dark cloud for you – but the silver lining is, you will get better and better with time.

"Do not take it so hard – this is best we can do for now. But if you exercise more and if I feel you are comfortable enough with the gun, maybe I can find a spare round. I have ninety, but they are all accounted for. Perhaps I can lay a hand on one super-number. Understand that I promise nothing but maybe. First try to develop your catch and handling of the weapon. And to scatter your sorrows I promise to show you something special about the gun."

As they met again the soldier came directly to the point:

"This is something you will never learn in an infantry course, because it is high irregular, forbade and officially doesn't exist, but useful in hand-to-hand fighting. At close distance and only if your life depends on it: rapid firing point-blank at close range. You do it by pumping one bullet after another without quite closing the catch – with one cuff of the hand only. The bullets don't have the full speed because a part of the gas escapes by the not secured catch, but you can do it really quick this way. As fast as the movie cowboys did it with the old-time Colts. That is, if you don't burn your hand and don't drop the gun altogether. I have this from an experienced soldier that fought in the war of..."

He stopped suddenly as they heard and sighted a single plane traveling a steady course, not as high as was ordinary, perhaps some eight hundred meters.

"Mother of God, do you see this devil with the black crests? He is in range and going as if for a picnic. I have hunted flying birds in my life; I am almost sure I can take the right correction and hit the son of a...bachelor. Such opportunity is too much, this is the eighth day of war and I have not once fired at the enemy in anger. Can I brace the gun on your arm? There is no time to go to the tree; we have only seconds, we must do it quickly if at all."

"But yes, I will be glad!"

The soldier half kneeling directed Angus

"So now try to be like a rock. Stay rigid for a sec."

Then the whole world exploded, shattered and collapsed.

After centuries or rather millions of years, perhaps eons, new clouds emerged, new stars and suns formed. Angus managed to open his eyes. The sky was blue as before, without any cracks. The sun was in the same place – so were the trees, the fields. Only in front of his eyes appeared the anxious face of the soldier, who dropped the gun and holding him by the shoulders, was moving his mouth, as if speaking, but without a sound. The whole view was curiously unreal – as if looking at a picture that has nothing material behind it.

Then he remembered, looked around and croaked:

"What happened to the plane?"

"It got away."

If weak, the hearing came back little by little – especially when he looked direct at the person talking. The same with his position, he could stand straight only with his

eyes open, because when he closed them he would lose his sense of equilibrium. It was like swimming or rather floating in water.

"I lost my head and acted too quickly. Forgive me; I should never have held the rifle so close to your ear."

"It is nothing. It hit me a little, but already I can hear you better and better."

This was true enough. The only permanent result was that Angus lost his balance for a longtime. It took years to recover and never returned in full. This limited somewhat his further efficiency. But with eyes open it was nothing serious.

Suddenly, surprised them the voice of the petty officer, running from the farm.

"Soldier, was it you shooting? Soldier, what did you shoot at?"

"The plane, sir."

"How dare you shoot without orders? You son of a bitch, you half-head of a pig, you are more stupid the constitution allows. They should never have accepted you into the army right at the start. Do you realize that you only wasted your round without a damn chance to hit anything? It would be a miracle if at this elevation and distance you could hit the target. But even if this miracle happened, the bullet would already have used up its energy, not much left to penetrate the metal fuselage or wing. It would be like knocking, to the pilot. Did you expect him to say "Please, come in?" And open the door? This was a German reconnaissance plane, and if he noticed a soldier shooting, he would do nothing now, but in the near future you could expect other planes to drop their bombs on the houses and buildings here. Now, the people here gave us shelter and acted always as best they could. Do you think it fair, if we help them to get their roof burned or even something worse, thanks to your irresponsible action? All this because you lacking the discipline!"

Angus, standing at attention at the side of the soldier, squeaked:

"Sir, allow me! Sir, please!"

The petty officer shuddered at the unexpected voice:

"And what the devil do you want?"

"Sir, allow me to report. It is exclusive my fault; it was I that talked him into this. I pleaded so long to take one-shot; I insisted so long he did it on my express provocation."

"Boys are often silly and that is to be expected. But a soldier should act responsibly; this is not a playground, nor a picnic. We are at real war and our lives and other lives depend on our acting as fingers of one hand. However, I will not punish you now, soldier. Normally I would give you a few hours of exercise, but now, the orders have come and we have a long way before us; we will all find it heavy exercise and punishment enough. So now go to the quarters and rest – you and all of us tomorrow evening may be half dead from fatigue. But remember, one more such action as today – and I will take your gun and on my own responsibility throw you out of the army – the army would be better without you, and you would be better at home. And I will be happy, to have the biggest fool off my back. This is final. Go!"

They went in silence through the fields, Angus thinking:

"So now the final, decisive moment has come – and I am not prepared, I cannot even find the right words; all was so well, and now, like lightning from a bright sky....but why, oh why exactly now? If only all this had happened another day...how to say it, there are only a few minutes left...and if I do not start now, afterwards there will be no more hope, all will be lost."

He said:

"I will go to the army; I want to fight for my country!"

"Oh yes, I'm sure you do. And if you were under regular fire you would have your trousers full – and call your mum for help. War is not for children."

"No, I say! I was under fire many times already."

"What dream are you composing?"

"The evacuation train came under rapid-fire six, no, seven times. And bombed, too. And afterwards we – my mother and I, well, a hunter-plane hunted individually for us, he made three flights and shot hundreds and hundred of rounds. That is the plain truth!"

So it was "we" instead of "my mother" now – but there was no time for splitting hairs about truth or lying now – it was the final heads or tail, the decisive, terrible purpose of life at stake.

"Oh, this occurred to you of all the people?"

So the incident with the airplane and its efforts to kill a single woman (possibly a kid too?) was already mentioned and talked of – this was a small world and a small community indeed. He added a little, but not too much, the dust from the stream of the bullets was in fact near.

"So you have already more practice than I, indeed. I apologize. But there is nothing we can do, the army never takes boys of your age. If you were at least seventeen, maybe sixteen – even then it would be difficult."

"I want to go with you tomorrow. I know about cases when boys become sons of regiment or whatever, I did read about this. I shall be useful. I can act as a scout, I can run errands, carry orders – in fact to do so, a smaller boy may be more effective than a grown man. A small target is more difficult to hit."

The soldier halted.

"Listen, I understand you and I sympathize. I didn't come from a mobilization, I am a volunteer myself. You are not a small child anymore, so be your age and try to understand, this is quite impossible. Plainly speaking, even if I would agree, this isn't in my power. I have my commandant, I take orders from him and it is for him to decide. If you think I could speak for you – no again. I would, if there were the smallest chance of success – but don't you understand, that especially after the latest incident, it would not help you, rather the opposite. Also, don't try to speak to him direct either, because this would probably only antagonize him. If now the time of waiting is over, he has more important problems than to bother about trifles. So make an effort and try to understand: nothing doing, no way. Sorry, but I can only wish you more luck next time."

"But this is not a trifle, not for me. I know my age, but surely there are some tasks a boy can do better than a grown man and I am not afraid of death. Or maybe a little, but I faced it before and know how to control myself. The only event I am desperately afraid of is to lose my chance, to fail to do my duty. If this would end so, my life would not have any sense anyway. Don't you see, all I have done in these last days was work for this final purpose, only I delayed to speak openly for some time. This is the only chance I have found, it is too late now seek any other possibility."

"I understand your emotions better than you think. But be practical – what can we do? Let me think a little, wait for me here – first I will go to the quarters to hear what is the exact news. I will be back shortly and we'll do the thinking together."

The soldier returned after some fifteen minutes, which seemed like an eternity to Angus.

"We leave at 6 am sharp. Listen, I've deliberated several courses, but neither of them seems good. There may be one small possibility, but this may as well lead to nothing. However, it is up to you if you are willing to try. But remember this is only a gamble. You may strike gold; on the other hand you may strike shit. If you come now with your story to the commander, it is as certain as two plus two equals four he orders you delivered directly to your mother.

"But if we found a lost boy on our way, going to the same direction, there is reasonable chance he might allow him to come along under our protection. Especially, if you said your mother is probably ahead of us somewhere, she decided to escape further – for example to Kutno, and you got lost. That is our destination – but I never said so – and you had better forget it. The risk is, we may have to leave you behind even if we do not find your mother – and as you know, we can't find her there. In this case you would get lost in truth. But then, I will say some words for you and work up the opinion of the men, and I hope we may back you up. I will not brighten the perspective for you; you must calculate the risk involved and decide how much you are ready to take."

"I will try my best, with all my heart."

"Wait, there is some bad news. We go in a hurry and we take tomorrow a double distance, more than sixty kilometers. This is not fun for the strongest of men and it would be common sense, if you resign now, before it is too late."

"Thank you, but walking is my strong point" – and in fact, during every vacation Angus used to go with his father on his excursions, sometimes far, looking for mushrooms.

"Good for you; so now for the details. We start at six, and you follow us, but not too close. The common practice is to make a small pause every hour, but better not to approach us at the first one. The second will be longer, about ten minutes, as this is the time you start to feel the baggage, your boots, and you need to adjust it all. And you can evaluate your strength then – if you find it is not enough, or anything goes wrong, in short if our plan fails, you will still be able to find your way back. But remember, we have orders to march twice the ordinary distance. This is neither a wisecrack nor a play, you can still resign."

"I'm sure I can manage the way. Thank you very much, many times."

"Don't thank me too soon. This is all I could think of, but it can end in nothing, so wait for results first. So be here at six, do not show yourself but follow us, it will still be dark – and as the sun comes up, increase the distance. The second stop. Are you with me so far? Good, best of luck – you will need a lot."

* * *

It was still early evening, but it was necessary to make a few preparations and rest as well as possible. It was naturally impossible to tell anything to his mother, so with a bleeding heart he decided to write a letter, explaining that now came the time for his departure. He must do his duty, but he promises to come back soon and in one-piece. He remembers all the good advice his mother was so generous with and will be very, very cautious. Then, he discretely put aside a small supply of food from the supper and got to bed early, saying he was weary today. He could not sleep, it was

only a few short naps, being afraid to oversleep the hour. At last, it was time to get up and dress quietly, put the letter on the pillow and slip away from the chamber and next from the palace. It was dark, but not fully so, and the birds sang loudly.

Nevertheless the whole idea proved not fortunate or perhaps the day was not a lucky one. The quarters lay still dark and quiet; Angus waited and waited behind a bush some distance off a longtime. Should the soldiers not wake up, dress, wash and prepare breakfast? Finally came a woman, she was the cook – with a light and the place was empty.

She said:

- "O yes, the soldiers. Yes, they left about two hours ago, yes, about 4 am, poor souls and in haste, they said there is a battle going on and they have to take part in. They took little time for breakfast and took most of it with them."

Angus leaned on the wall, thinking what to do. Follow them, but which way? He knew only the general direction, he would have to ask, should expect to make some mistakes, come back and seek again. And even if by some miracle or direct contact with the Holy Spirit he never made a single mistake, what would be the chance to catch strong men hurrying with all heart to battle after two hours delay. No, already more. It was a bad idea, a wild-goose chase.

So, that was that and here he was. Angus felt deceived and cheated. He shivered with cold and at the same time sweated freely. He felt weak and sick, but most of all duped, in a foreign and hostile world. No sense to stay here, it was a bad day. It would be better to stay in bed.

But with time he changed his mind radically.

First, there was a battle going, it started yesterday. At the time the soldiers heard about it, already it was in full swing. This was the decisive battle of the whole 1939 campaign. These are the facts: as we have seen, the Army Poznań was withdrawing by orders of the High Command with little fighting. At the time, the most dangerous strike of the Germans took direction to the south – the tank force and behind it the 8th Field Army going the shortest way for the capital. The Army Poznań hung directly over their communication lines and their back.

General Kutrzeba recognizing the situation, repeatedly proposed, insisted and finally pleaded from the 4th of September on, for an all-out offensive, but got no such orders. Finally the Commander in Chief allowed only a limited offensive, using up to three divisions stepwise, one by one, from the 8th of September, with the prospect of engaging further forces only if the promised French offensive were to begin. As agreed in treaties, this should happen at the latest on the tenth day of the German aggression.

Certainly, with the existing disproportion of numbers of men and weapons, any offensive was suicidal – but if the design of General Kutrzeba took their course, there could at least be some achievements for this suicide. He would fight the final battle near Łódź and without any doubt crush the German Eighth Army and the tank force. Surely this could not turn the war and after a short time the Army Poznań would end its existence too. But such a fate was anyway a forgone conclusion, from the moment the Germans concentrated their full attention in this direction.

As it was, one German division was smashed and one badly beaten, the breakthrough of German tank force before Warsaw temporary stopped without fuel and ammo. Hitler next supplied them by the air force, but withdrew from Warsaw and

used all available forces from every direction against Army Poznań with the known fatal result.

On the other side this action bought time for organizing the all-round defense of the capital – and the almost miraculous withdrawal of the badly beaten Army Łódź. These troops, under the Vice-Commander General Thommee, vanished in the Skierniewice Forest and next, to the full astonishment of both fighting sides, reappeared near Warsaw. They ran the defenses of the outdated old fortress of Modlin, an important help in the defense of Warsaw.

And second – if only after many years – Angus found his time and place to fight the war. Nobody, from either enemy sides, anticipated this war could go on for such a longtime, nobody would have believed it, if told so in 1939.

Nevertheless so it happened, and the basic impulses implanted in these early days proved valuable indeed, even if with other weapons. There is no telling what might have been if – but Angus remembered with gratitude his former tutor and believed perhaps it was his training that made the difference between Angus' life and death. So the soldier proved a great friend after all.

But meantime this day was heartbreaking indeed. He met few people on his return and his mother still slept. This was his only good luck, because after coming back to the bedroom he was able to remove the letter before she noticed it. Although thoroughly unhappy, after he closed his wet eyes in bed he unexpectedly fell asleep and did not wake up even with his mother, nor in time for breakfast.

* * *

In fact, Angus slept tightly till his parent come back from town and woke him with the news:

"We go back to our home."

"But why – and how?"

"Imagine only, there is still one taxi left at Czerniejewo and I already called it – it takes us tomorrow morning. There is not any hope for a further escape – we are from all sides surrounded by the Germans. That being so, it will be better to be at home and lay low there."

"But this is impossible. We shall beat the Germans."

"I hope so, but this may take some time, more that we expected – and we have to survive this time somewhere."

So he decided to take a day off, forgot all about the bad world and play in the paradise of the garden with his friends, the children. This was the last time, he had to leave behind the new young friends. So they said farewell warmly and all promised to write to each other (except the youngest girl who had not yet learned the art). But with the flux of time and bad luck, it came to nothing, they never did.

Next morning the taxi driver, elderly and in a car also almost pensioned off, a Citroen 1928y a little senior to Angus, arrived as agreed, bringing some shocking news:

"Today the German army occupies this terrain."

"I do not believe this, it is impossible."

"Alas, the priest announced this in the church before the mass. He said further, the civil population should be prudent and cautious, not to give the slightest offense, because the Germans will take any opportunity to react in force in the worst way possible. Like they killed the priest in Gniezno"

This all proved the truth and the priest was only too right. In the small town of Czerniejewo, after a marginal incident where not one soldier of the German force became wounded, let alone killed, the troops torched some houses and killed several people. Also this priest himself did not survive long, he found his death in one of the German concentration camps. And in Żydowo too, some people died, if not so many as in the massacre of youth intended to set an example, in nearby Kiskowo. A group of juvenile workers there, equipped with spades and shovels for road and ditch construction was called an irregular armed group, and a substantial number murdered.