

through binoculars. It seemed reasonable to assume that it was this farmer who had reported us. It made me feel much better to know that it was not one of our men.

## 17

My birthday was coming up and I had a daring plan for it. Part of it was suggested to me by the friend who worked in the camp kitchen, whose name was Theo. I mentioned to him that I would like to get out of the camp to meet with Sue and he told me that he could probably arrange to get me a uniform, which was worn by Polish volunteers.

These were young people, originally members of the former Polish military, who defected to Germany after the occupation by Russia, and then switched to join the British army. Many of them did not go back to their homeland but stayed in England. They wore the same uniform as the British except for the epaulette on their shoulders, which was plain, and they did not show any rank on their sleeves. That way, they could be identified as being Polish.

We discussed all this in the kitchen one evening while no one else was there. I noticed that there was no barbed wire outside. Theo told me to open the window and I saw that there was a sheer drop all the way down into the quarry. So there was no need for barbed wire.

I told my friend of my plan to get out of the camp in broad daylight, by going through the window. Naturally, he told me that I was crazy. I explained to him that where I grew up in Germany there were many rock faces and mountains. I learned to climb as a small boy and was in

my element in such a challenging environment. Coming back into the camp would be relatively easy because I intended to wait until dark and go through the opening in the barbed wire.

Now I had a lot of planning to do. I was so excited.

First I wrote a letter to Sue to let her know that I planned to meet her on Sunday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. The meeting place would be near the street that crossed the rails, about a quarter of a mile from the camp and about a quarter of a mile east of the rails. Also, I would be wearing a British uniform.

My yard supervisor mailed the letter for me the following day. [He never minded mailing my letters. I was not sure if he ever guessed that they were addressed to my sweetheart].

Then I told Heinz and Seppie, who were surprised at my plan but assured me they would do whatever they could to help. They also wanted to know who my friend in the kitchen was so that they could contact him if need be.

It was a beautiful day. The boys were playing soccer. Seppie, Heinz and myself were sitting on the ground next to the field.

Seppie was telling us of his intention to create a camp choir. He already had a few volunteers for it. I thought it was a great idea. I liked to sing myself, but for the moment I wanted to concentrate on other things.

While we were talking, my eyes were fixed on the railway lines. I longed to see Sue, although I had very little hope she would be coming back to the camp so soon after what happened only a week ago.

Heinz got up to go and then turned back and whispered to me, "There are two girls coming up towards the camp along the rails." I jumped to my feet to see for myself. It was Sue with another girl. This time I went to the corner of the camp where we had met and talked before. I looked over at Heinz and Seppie. They said, "Go ahead. We will cover for you"

In a few minutes the girls were close to the fence. First Sue threw a letter, and then a packet of cigarettes, over the fence. She introduced the other girl as her cousin Lorna. She told me she had received my mail and would try and see me on the following Sunday. I told Lorna that I was pleased to meet her and would she please give my love to her little sister Kathy. After only a few minutes, Sue apologized for

having to leave so early and they turned to go. As they went back down the embankment Sue turned to wave and then they disappeared.

I was amazed at the courage of my little Sue. I didn't think she would dare to come back to the camp so soon after what happened.

That evening I read Sue's long letter, and read between the lines that she loved me as much as I loved her. There was also a birthday card for me. I thought how privileged I was to receive a birthday card in a prison camp. Probably I was the only prisoner of war in the whole of England to enjoy such good fortune.

Sue mentioned in her letter that she especially dreaded my being found out, and then moved away, and we would never see each other again. She dreamed one night that I was being moved far away to another camp and she found herself sobbing when she woke up. Her mother had warned her, "Sue dear, if you fall in love too deeply with this boy, it could be heartbreaking for you when he is repatriated back to Germany."

So far no one knew when this would take place. There were rumors circulating around the camp from time to time but I had learned not to take any notice of them.

Before the week was out I received another birthday present. The card, which I was allowed to send home through the British government, was returned to me. It contained good news. All was well at home, which was a great relief to me. Unfortunately they were not allowed to write anything else.

As more and more cards arrived from Germany I found out that many of my fellow prisoners were not as fortunate as I. Many of them were notified that they had no immediate family left. This caused a great deal of sadness.

The man who had the bunk below me became so depressed that he tried to take his own life. I found out when I followed him into an empty shed in the middle of the night. I sat down and talked to him for at least two hours until I finally managed to talk him out of it. He then came back with me to the barracks.

One evening we were all asked into a large hut. The camp commander had a big world map hanging up. He explained to us which areas of Germany were occupied by whom. I learned that my hometown was occupied by French troops. The dividing line between

the French and American occupation zones was only a few miles from my hometown.

## 18

The first thing I did when I woke up on the following Sunday morning was to wish myself a happy birthday. I had a good feeling about this day. The following Tuesday was to be my second birthday in captivity and I would be 22 years old. There was no table decked with flowers and greeting cards. I could not even stand the birthday card up which I had received from Sue. I would have liked to keep it and treasure it as a keepsake, but it was too risky. I couldn't even keep any of Sue's letters. Sad to say, they all ended up in our potbelly stove.

I couldn't have wished for a more beautiful day. If it had been raining I would have had to abandon the whole idea. No way could I have attempted to climb down into that steep quarry in wet weather.

I breathed the fresh spring air and noticed that the hedges and trees outside the camp were in full bloom. There were the forget-me-nots, which I had brought from work and planted in front of our barracks, and cowslips and pansies, which my fellow prisoners had planted. It gave us such an uplift to be able to tend to something which was alive and which belonged to us. It helped us to forget the circumstances we were in. All the flowers and blossoms, which I saw that Sunday morning, seemed to smile at me and say, "Good luck, Karl". A small bird in a tree just outside the barbed wire sounded as if