

# ★ About the **RUSSIANS** in NORMANDY ★

**... AND THEY WEREN'T MUCH HELP TO ADOLF, EITHER. HERE ARE TWO STORIES, ONE OF WHICH TELLS HOW RUSSIANS, CAPTURED AND FORCED TO FIGHT FOR THE ENEMY, TURNED THE TABLES ON JERRY; THE OTHER TELLS WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE AMERICANS LIBERATED RUSSIAN PRISONERS FROM A CONCENTRATION CAMP.**

**By Sgt. REG. KENNY**

**YANK Staff Correspondent**

**N**ORMANDY—Two American medics, the motor of their jeep opened wide as they approached the railroad crossing near Portbail—where everyone knew that the Jerries had already zeroed in their 88s—were startled to see two bedraggled figures in the unmistakable uniform of the German Army waving white flags at their approaching car. Despite the fact that they were unarmed, the medics stopped and ordered the prisoners to get aboard.

Thus started the following incident which might easily be taken from one of Hollywood's best.

Cpl. Sansjar Waliulin, a sandy-haired, happy-go-lucky little guy born in Moscow, joined the Russian Army at the age of sixteen. Six months later, during the siege of Smolensk, he was captured by the Germans. Thrown in prison and fed just enough to keep alive, he found escape was impossible. All around him his fellow captives were ill and dying from lack of treatment. Then, when all seemed hopeless, their captors offered them a chance, knowing well that they were in no position to refuse. "We promise you good food and treatment," they said, "if you will join one of our voluntary organizations. Just sign here and you will be released. Otherwise, you will work anyway and your conditions will not improve."

Grasping at the slim chance of the possibility of escape, the Russian Corporal accepted the offer and together with his fellow captives was put to work digging gun emplacements and building barricades. A few months passed, and then one day he was put into a German uniform, given a rifle and told that he must fight for the "Fatherland." With the muzzles of his captors' guns constantly in his back, he could do little but obey. "If only I can escape!" was the thought that kept him going. Freedom was the only thing that he and his comrades talked about.

Two days after their arrival at the front, the little Corporal saw his chance. When none of the German officers or non-coms were around, he picked up his friend Ivan and started down the railroad tracks, which he knew led into the American lines. As they edged their way across the steel-ribbed "No Man's Land" towards our lines, their hearts pounded with fear as they waited for the crack of the German rifles or the bark of American infantrymen's guns. Then, where the tracks crossed the road, the American jeep picked them up and they were safe.

No sooner was Cpl. Waliulin safely in custody than he began to repeat over and over, through interpreters, that his countrymen were waiting to surrender, if only they knew how. They were afraid to cross into our lines for fear of being shot.

"I will write a note to them," he said suddenly, "and tell them that it will be safe for them to give themselves up."

Then, while the Intelligence Officer and his staff hurried about borrowing reams of paper and mimeograph equipment, the little Russian sat down and in large, clear letters wrote:

*"Comrades and friends:*

*Come here! The American soldiers are friends. You will get enough to eat and to smoke. Don't be afraid. Tell your comrades and Russian non-coms to come. Wave this leaflet over your head. Don't be afraid! Shoot the Fascist pigs! Come during the day."*

Following a fierce artillery barrage, copies of this leaflet were loaded into 105-mm. shells and fired at the spot where the enslaved Russian battalion was



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dug in. Soon after the noise of the shooting had stopped, two Russians, the leaflets clutched in their hands, crossed over to our lines. The rest were afraid to risk being shot by our men after they had left the Germans, and before they could make it clear to us who they were. Pvt. Dimitri Biakin, a swarthy, bushy-headed man of 43, holding on to his leaflet, spoke up: "I will go back through the German lines to my comrades and tell them that it will be safe to come out and surrender to you."

Now the question arose! Would it be a trap or would it be a safe gamble to allow the captive to return to his own lines? The decision was made by the CO of the Division. After talking with the prisoner for some time, he was convinced of the Russian's sincerity.

With three enlisted men, one of whom could speak a little Russian, a lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps brought the captive back to the spot where he had been picked up by our jeep. The scene that followed is best described in the words of S/Sgt. Walt Strauss, of Jamaica, L.I., who was one of the four Americans who volunteered for the job of bringing in the whole Russian battalion.

"We were all kind of uneasy as we released our prisoner and watched him disappear down the tracks. We had told him before he left that if he did not return in two hours, our artillery would open up and blast both himself and his countrymen out of hiding. We repeatedly told him that it would be perfectly safe for his return; that all of the American troops in the area had been warned of the plan and would not shoot at him.

"**N**ONE of us said much after he was gone. We checked and rechecked our carbines, and kept wondering what the four of us would do if this was a trap. As the minutes dragged by—five, ten and twenty—we began to get worried. Maybe it was a trap after all. Maybe the Russian had lied to us. Maybe at any moment the German 88s would blast us to bits.

"Suddenly, far in the distance along the railroad tracks, we saw a score of tiny white dots, heading straight for us! I know that there was not one of us who did not have an awful feeling of uncertainty as we strained our eyes to see if they were Germans or the Russians. Then as they got closer, we could see that the white dots which we had first seen were white handkerchiefs tied round their owners' caps. In their upraised hands, the Russians carried the bolts from their rifles and machine guns, according to our instructions. Our long chance had paid off!"

For the rest of that day and the next morning, more and more of the Russians made their way safely to our lines, until their number swelled past the hundred mark. They were still coming in as I left the regiment that afternoon, and the last thing I heard was the laughter of the MPs who had been told by the last man to surrender how the German Commandant in charge of the Russians was doing the Nazi counterpart of "blowing his top" over the sudden death of his best non-coms and the disappearance of his entire battalion!

Hitler should reread the Fable about leading a horse to water. . . .

### About Jerry's Russian Prisoners

By Sgt. BILL DAVIDSON

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**N**ORMANDY—The battalion CP was a tiny rectangular cubicle scooped out of a solid concrete wall which the Germans had erected as part of the western defenses of Cherbourg. The room was bare of all furniture except for a German officer's trunk—which served as a seat for everyone. Piled neatly in a corner was the usual collection of battle flotsam—German hand grenades, ammunition, letters, fatigue caps and underwear. There wasn't a single window or opening to the room except for a heavy iron door with a few slits near its top. The room had a slightly sickening, musty odor.

"What was this place?" I asked.

"This," said Lt. Col. W. A. Strickland, CO of the light ack-ack outfit that had fought its way in here, "was a solitary confinement cell." He spoke with a heavy Alabama accent. "It was a solitary confinement cell," he repeated, "in one of those nice little Master Race concentration camps you've been hearing about. They had 2,000 Russian prisoners of war penned up in here."

The Colonel's outfit had broken into these last defenses of Cherbourg with the infantry. When the doughboys and ack-ack men saw the barbed wire fences and pig-pen barracks of the concentration camp, they attacked with an unreasoning fury, smashing down the gates and storming inside. The half-starved, emaciated Russian prisoners came yelling out of their barracks and went to work with



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the doughboys on the German garrison. In about 30 minutes, there wasn't much left of the garrison.

One unidentified infantryman, according to Col. Strickland, burst into the office of the German colonel commanding the concentration camp. The colonel emptied his Luger at the doughboy, but every shot went wild. The infantryman didn't waste a cartridge on the German commander. He just grabbed the colonel, wrestled him to the floor, and with his trench knife, expertly slit the throat of the Nazi.

Outside, in the meantime, tremendous scenes of celebration were going on. The Russians embraced the GIs, kissed them, patted them on the back. They danced, and brought out accordions which somehow they had managed to hide from the Germans. After that, they showed the GIs where the Germans had kept their stocks of stolen French cognac, and everyone settled down to a big party. According to Col. Strickland, there were 2,000 Russian prisoners here originally, of whom approximately 800 had died of starvation. There were genuine prisoners of war mixed in with youthful labor conscripts carried away in sealed cars from their overrun native towns in Russia. In defiance of the Geneva Convention, all were forced to work fourteen hours a day on the tunnels and fortifications of the area. When the German prison garrison learned that the Americans were approaching the city, they selected 200 of the toughest and strongest prisoners—all those capable of heading up an insurrection—and shot them. The liberated Russians showed the GIs the bodies of their comrades lying where they had been shot two days before.

Later, when 400 German prisoners of the garrison of nearby Fort Querqueville were being marched down the road, the American guards had difficulty in preventing the Russians from falling on the Germans and tearing them to pieces.

I met two of the liberated Russian ex-prisoners in Cherbourg two days later, just after I had left Col. Strickland's strange CP. I saw what appeared to be a young French civilian standing on a street corner and asked him how to get to a certain place. He offered to come along in our jeep to show us the way. A moment later, he pointed to himself and said, "I am a Russian."

His name was Vladimir Lorontiusz and he was a Caucasian who had worked in the oil refineries at Batum, near the Iranian border of Russia. He couldn't have been more than 23 or 24. He had been in the cavalry, like his father before him, and had been captured by the Germans and Rumanians in the fierce fighting around Odessa on 1941. The Germans had put him in a sealed boxcar with about 30 other prisoners and transported him across the continent of Europe. He had been working at hard labor ever since and had lost nearly fifty pounds since his arrival. His greatest concern was for his teeth, which had gone bad on the calcium-less diet the Germans had fed them.

He introduced me to a friend of his, a blond, red-cheeked youngster named Edward Skorospenko, who couldn't be mistaken for anything else but a Russian. Skorospenko was 18 years old. His father was a well-known journalist in Russia, who, at the time of the German capture of Smolensk, was bureau manager there for the Russian newspaper *Pravda*. Edward's father had escaped from the Nazis. Edward had not. He had been conscripted, brought to Cherbourg, and put to work on the fortifications of the Isle of Jersey.

**T**HE two young Russians told me that they had been interviewed by "fine American comrade in your uniform who spoke Russian." They were awaiting shipment back to England, from where, they imagined, they would return to Russia. All the prisoners had held a meeting, however, in which they decided to request permission to form a separate battalion to remain on the Western Front and fight the Germans side by side with the Americans. "The Boche," they said, "is less far from here."



Under the watchful eyes of an American officer, a Russian Corporal sits in a French farmhouse penning a leaflet urging . . .



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**2** a Nazi-conscripted Red battalion opposing the Yanks to cease their forced bloodshedding.



**3** Some, like this soldier, were impressed and surrendered quickly.



**4** Prisoners say that many more of their comrades also would like to accept the offer . . .



**5** and here they carefully point out the position of the battalion on the map to the Americans.



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6 To convince the doubtful ones, Pvt. Biakin volunteers to return to his own lines.



7 Biakin is blindfolded so that he can't memorize the American situation,



8 then helped into a jeep by S/Sgt. Walt Strauss, of Jamaica, L.I., and driven close



9 to the Nazi lines. After a nerve-wracking delay, he returns with his battalion.



10 YANK's Reg Kenny, lower right, wins four new readers for us; Hitler loses four more fighters.

