

*Neuengamme, 1945*

It is springtime and the work detail has been altered for many concentration camps and it was true also for Neuengamme. Each day men were taken out of the prison and into the city of Hamburg to help clean up rubble caused by the Allied bombing raids. Corpses of German citizens also needed to be removed.

One day a guard came up to Rottenführer Wagner and talked with him for a bit. He was carrying several shovels and acted very fidgety. Wagner turned to Kohanow and a group of about twenty prisoners and said, "Your work detail has now changed. The evil British and Americans have tanks invading our beautiful country. We want to protect you so you will be digging antitank ditches around this camp to prevent the tanks from entering. While working, if any of you try to escape, I will shoot you dead."

The group walked outside and began digging. Jozef said to the man next to him, "Did you notice have nervous the guards seem to be?"

"Yes. I wonder why."

"Hmmm." The ground had not thawed yet from the winter freeze. Shoveling was back breaking work even in the best of conditions.

The beginning of the end had arrived. Even the prisoners could sense it. They could see the guard's attention has turned more to their personal survival than to the prisoners. Spring weather can be treacherous to pilots. But on this day in early April the clouds of yesterday have cleared and every couple of hours, planes are seen and heard overhead. They do not belong to Germany. Commandant Karl Werner called all his staff together, including Rottenführer Wagner.

"Loyal supporters of the Fuehrer and the Reich. Heil Hitler." They all returned the salute. "I know you can tell the Brits and Yanks are fiercely attacking our beloved homeland. They call themselves the Allied Expeditionary Force. Our highly trained and efficient military forces are defending our country's honor. And we are succeeding. We have new orders to follow that will help in our great cause." He pauses and can see all are paying close attention to his words. Way off in the distance is a plane.

"Reichsführer Himmler has ordered that we are to immediately exterminate or transfer our prisoners. This must be done quickly and with sound German efficiency. We will not let the enemy take this camp. All prisoners who can walk will be marched to Lubeck. If any fall along the way, shoot them. Those who can't walk are to be shot here. Store the bodies in Building F. Begin now! Dismissed. Heil Hitler." A collective Heil Hitler is returned.

Jozef Kohanow was in this latter group and Rottenführer Wagner had something special planned for his death.

On May 4 there were still 200 - 300 prisoners left, including Jozef. It is time for Wagner to put his plan into effect. He takes Kohanow to the pocked wall and blurts, "Stand there you despicable human." Jozef expected to be shot and has prepared himself mentally for this event. But there is a lot of indiscernible noise coming from outside the camp. That caught Wagner's attention too. Two other guards came running up to Wagner.

Rottenführer Wolf rather excitedly told Wagner, "Frederick, tanks are outside our gates! And they are not ours. They are Tommies! We have to get out now! The back gate by the woods is our best bet."

Wagner replied, "You two go now. I'm right behind you." They didn't need to be told twice. They were gone in an instant. When the Rottenführer returned his attention back to Jozef, it was Jozef who spoke first. "The Almighty has heard my prayers."

"Why you smug Jew." For the last time, the yellow baton came across Kohanow's shoulders. "This is not over. I'm going to hunt you down and finish this."

Kohanow actually smiled as he said, "We will see."

A voice from a distance, "Frederick! Come on. Hurry."