

## XXV. TWO ADVENTURES

In the course of our duties we did sometimes get involved in activities outside the scope of the mildly nefarious. Two adventures remain in my memory as episodes of more than passing interest. From this vantage point they can be seen to have turned out more comical than anything else, but both had the potential of being much more serious. Both incidents involved Russians, and both occurred because the Russians had an official right-of-way through our Sector on the *Hauptstrasse*, the main thoroughfare which linked the center of the city and the Russian Sector boundary at the *Brandenburger Tor* with the western extremity of our jurisdiction in Potsdam. The rule as I recollect it was that, in general, they were to proceed on their route without deviating or stopping while in our Sector. I'll describe the first incident by means of another of my 1950s sketches, since the flavor would be hard to recapture as well any other way:

### Russian Speeders

I was driving the Sergeant on a routine MP patrol up and down Berlin's *Hauptstrasse*. It was Dec. '45 and moderately cold. It had been a quiet, boring night, but we were tired notwithstanding and ready for quitting time at 12:45, a half hour or so away. We'd just picked up two G.I.s and were giving them a lift home so that they wouldn't miss curfew, which was our occasional custom, when a closed-in Jeep bearing Russian markings passed us doing about 50 m.p.h., in a 20 m.p.h. zone. *Hauptstrasse* is a 4-lane road split down the middle by two trolley tracks with a low wire fence between them. I took off up the middle of the trolley lane to avoid the heavy traffic that was on the road at that time of night. The fence was broken down where I started, but became whole again further up the street. I broke off a dozen or so of the wire pickets before I realized I'd have to get off. I'd gained my advantage, however, and we were right on the tail of the Russian vehicle. In a couple of blocks we passed it and cut them off. We were just getting out of our Jeep and preparing to go through the bilingual farce we engaged in usually with Russian speeders (they invariably said they thought we'd stopped them to be friendly, or told us they were special envoys of Marshall Zhukov and so shouldn't be stopped at all), when they surprised us by backing up and taking off again. They had a good start this time and made a couple of turns to try and shake us off. However, my Jeep was faster, so I caught them again in a couple of miles. We were doing about 60 by then, and apparently there was no passing them again. Even if there had been, what would be the use, we reasoned. So the Sergeant pulled out his .45 and let go with a couple of shots, both of which hit in the road a few yards behind the speeding Russian vehicle. At this they simply increased their speed. I increased mine accordingly and pulled up a little closer. The third shot hit the rear corner of the lead Jeep, and though it bounced off harmlessly, it brought them to a very sudden stop. We stopped a few yards behind them and got out, both with our pistols ready, and rather

annoyed. Seven very drunk Russian men and one equally drunk girl got out of that little Jeep, and came running toward us wildly gesticulating and shouting, “Tovarish, comrade, Moscow, Truman, Stalin,” they yelled, and indicated in pantomime that it was a very bad thing to shoot at allies, and for us to unload our pistols and put them away. We tried to explain that we were police and that they were committing all sorts of crimes, but, apparently, to no avail. As we were miles away from the nearest police station and help, we decided to let the moral victory of having stopped them satisfy us, and after watching them drive off, very, very slowly this time, we took our G.I. hitchhikers back, both of them looking rather pale, and went home to bed.

The second adventure that sticks in my memory also involves Russians on their right-of-way. It was Christmas Eve, a hard time to be on shift anyway, and I was particularly anxious to get off promptly at its end. I had just met up with a high school classmate, the only person I ever saw in the Army who I’d known before—and he was, and is, a particularly close friend—and we had arranged to lift a few glasses of cheer in honor of Christmas and the long arm of coincidence that had brought us together in this unlikely place.

I was driving, as usual, and I don’t recall who my partner was this night. On one of our stops by our office we were directed to check out a call from the sergeant who was manager of a nearby 78<sup>th</sup> Division officer’s club, on the *Hauptstrasse*. He was known as a rabid Commie hater, and this night he had decided to be very suspicious of, and hostile to, two Russians in civilian clothes, who, for some reason best known to themselves, had stopped in for a drink. His worst suspicions were justified, the manager was convinced, when, upon examining the Russians’ car in the parking lot, he discovered that the back seat was full of tires. Nothing would satisfy him short of our arresting them on a charge of black marketeering. I pleaded with him to change his mind, since I noted that he was far from sober, but he was adamant. So we had to make the arrests, impounding the car in our motor pool, and escorting the driver and his well-dressed and fluent English-speaking passenger downtown to the Military Government police station from which American, English, French, and Russian MPs patrolled together. We had no authority to prefer charges against the Russians, but had to turn them over to their own police.

We explained the so-called charges, through the Military Government interpreter, to two very hard and forbidding looking Russian MPs who were festooned with their standard sub-machine guns, whereupon they demanded identification from our prisoners. Immediately upon seeing the ID of our affable soft-spoken suspect and his driver, the policemen suddenly looked more forbidding than ever and trained their guns on us! Hasty consultation with the interpreter revealed that our prisoner was a major in the KGB and that, as such, his person was sacrosanct, at least as far as our fellow minions of the law were concerned. We were at a potentially very serious seeming impasse.

It was notable that throughout the whole episode never once did the major speak to us on any subject that was substantive: who he was, the charges, or his opinion of them. At this point, though, he did have a consultation with the Russian MPs, thus solving the problem and ending the incident peaceably. A quick deal was struck. We would be allowed to go without further involvement in return for seeing that no charges

were pressed, escorting our erstwhile prisoners back to their car at the motor pool, and seeing them safely on their way again. And that's what happened.

I presume the accusations of the drunken, paranoid club manager were simply ignored; probably the chance of his even remembering many of the evening's events was remote. I do know that we rapidly returned our charges to their car. I had been quite vocal all evening about my distaste for, and lack of belief in, what we were being called upon to do. I was convinced that we were just helping to indulge the fantasies of a nasty, drunken bigot, and I was not hesitant to express my opinion. Perhaps this had helped to ease potential tension; I don't know. Besides, they probably were dealing in tires on the black market; nearly everyone was dealing in something.

On the way back to the motor pool I was still muttering and sputtering to myself when the major put a soft hand on my arm. Wasn't this a night that signified peace and joy to us, he asked, and should I let myself get so upset over a triviality at such a time? I had almost forgotten, it was still Christmas Eve—or rather it wasn't any more, since it was long after midnight. A little abashed, I relaxed a bit and we finally parted, friends for the moment at least. The Russians drove off, I never heard any more about the incident, and I finally got to my high school friend's billet at about three o'clock Christmas morning, to tell him a tale I'm not sure he's ever believed.

## XXVI. THE END

So ends my personal saga of World War II, much less eventful than some and yet more so than many. I haven't told it all, of course. For one thing, I don't really remember it all; for another, a lot of things I do remember are dull and repetitive, which is integrally characteristic of Army life as I knew it. However, I have tried to preserve some of my more vivid memories by writing them down, and having been enabled to combine them with the "G" Company Newsletter accounts has proven to be singularly advantageous as well.

I finished out my time in Berlin relatively uneventfully and was eventually shipped home—from Bremerhaven on the *SS Antioch Victory*—when people with 45 service points were finally eligible to go. It was on April 26, 1946 that I at last became a civilian again, ready to pick up the threads of "real life" and see if I could make something of it. Both the times and I were profoundly changed by that war, but only gradually did realization of the number and extent of the changes come.