

WE WERE LIKE A BUNCH OF TEENAGE DELINQUENTS

4TH NOVEMBER 1942



Smoke mingled with the early morning mist in a small clearing made by newly felled trees. The sound of an axe clop, clop against a tree somewhere in the dense forest close by echoed through the mist. A small group of young soldiers were dragging branches across to a fire that was beginning to flame up; every fresh needle-laden branch caused a new flare-up on the fire.

"George, what you playing at? You'll have the whole forest alight if you put any more on that fire."

George was busy trying to push the fire over with a long pole he had fashioned from a branch. The flames had caught the lower branches of the surrounding trees alight. The undergrowth was beginning to smolder as the heat of the fire dried it out. If it had been a dry summer's day, the whole lot would have been ablaze by now. Fortunately it was still wet from the early morning mist, still it kept flaring up then dying back.

"George, you're mad?"

"No! Come on, if this lot goes up they will have to get every one out here to put it out."

He was interrupted as a shot rang out in the wood close by, then shouting. "Run for it, he's really flipped this time."

More young soldiers came running out of the woods. "Robo's has done it, he's only cut a tree down onto the power lines, Fritzes has taken a shot at him."

With this, an elderly forester came panting, breathless out of the woods, waving a hunting rifle menacingly towards the scattering group of young soldiers. They dived for cover as he let off another shot, taking a large chunk of tree bark with it as the bullet ricocheted through the densely packed trunks of the plantation. Fortunately he was in such a state of frenzy that he hadn't aimed the shot at any of his tormentors.

"Fritzes! Steady on with that gun, could do some damage."

"Robo, leave it, he's lost it this time, we'll have to calm him down or we're never get back to the camp."

They had started to realise how serious their predicament was becoming. Prisoner of war out on a work party with local forester shot dead trying to escape. Even if the camp commandant knew that they weren't likely candidates for escape, the forester's word would carry more weight than theirs if it came to an inquest.

"Hey! Fritzes, you need us to put the fire out. Put the gun down."

Another shot rang out, more bark flew into the air.

"Smug, you OK?"

"Close one. Fritz, you need us alive."

"Save your breath, he only speaks German."

Suddenly Fritz drops to the ground out of sight.



"He's a bit quiet over there, can you see what's up to Smug?"

"Can't see him from here, better watch out, he's up to something."

"George, can you see him from there?"

"He's lying down, I'll try and get closer, see what's what."

"He's gone a funny colour, don't look too healthy."

George is crawling on towards where Fritz is lying.

"He's gone and snuffed it, silly old bugger."

"George, how do you know?"

"I'm a bloody medic, should know a stiff when I see one."

"Bloody Hell, what'll we do now?"

"We could make a run for it."

"Bloody long way back to Blighty from here mate, got a map."

"We'll have to go back to the camp, sorry, no freedom today."

"Best put this fire out or we'll be back out here again, you bet."

Reluctantly they start beating the fire out until it finally gives up to the rain that had been getting steadily worse all morning. By now they were wet, cold and going back to camp was looking the best bet. They then had to think about what to do with Fritz.

"Can't leave him here, they will never believe us until they find him."

"Have to carry him back."

They then set about building a make-shift stretcher from the scattered branches left from their morning's felling.

"Christ, he's a heavy bugger."

"Smug, get that end, you two take the middle, let's get going before it gets dark."

The motley crew set off on what was going to be a long, muddy trail back to the Stalage 8B. in the forest. After an hour of struggling with their deceased guard they reach the main entrance to the camp.



"Halt!" The guard on the gate came forward to the group.

"Christ, it's mad Polish Joe." George recognized the guard.

"Halt, where guard, please?"

"He's here! He's dead, see."

"No guard, you can't go in."

"He's here! He's dead."

"No guard."

This bizarre conversation went on for about 10 minutes before a senior officer arrived on the scene. Still no progress.

"Sorry, you can't come in unless the guard gives the pass word."

"He's dead. He can't."

More delay and more officers arrive, this time the British most senior officer in the camp with the camp Commandant.

"What's the problem, chaps."

"It's Fritzes here, he's had a heart attack and died, Sir!"

"I can see that, Smith, up to your old tricks, what!"

"No Sir! He just died on us."

"Pigs might fly. Any way, we have a delicate situation to resolve here, haven't we, What!"

After much discussion, the gates were opened and they managed to carry the guard's body through the gate. They were confined to camp for a while, but the need for workers in the forest soon meant they were out felling trees again.

