

On that night Juergen was at the third station in town before he was joined by a friend. Normally at least one of his friends got there sooner, but this being the third night in a row the other boys were getting tired of the exercise. At first the alerts had been very exciting, despite it being a very scary job. Juergen and the other boys would be out there in the dark by themselves, with bombers assigned to drop bombs just on them, (so they imagined). There was, in fact, some danger because of falling debris from bombers shot down by the *Luftwaffe*, and from spent rounds tumbling to earth after they were spewed out by the *Luftwaffe* fighter aircraft that were constantly attacking the enemy flights. At least the inhabitants of Konigshorst were spared the deadly rain of steel fragments from anti aircraft artillery, since no such batteries were stationed in the direct area. Rumors were also rampant about enemy pilots that had parachuted down and were hiding around the village. After the Americans started to bomb it seemed there was always one of those "colored" Americans hiding down in a milk shed. No one actually saw him, but the local boys "knew" he was there. Juergen believed this even when his father told him that in America Negroes were not allowed to serve in the bomber crews. And, his father added, even if they were, from his experience in working with many Negro people at the Swift plant in Chicago, the fact was that they were very nice people. It was even common knowledge among these imaginative youngsters that the black American's ate people, especially children.

Like all of the downed survivors they found, the young man was turned over to the army officer whose headquarters was in the village. Later, Juergen was overheard talking to some of his friends, laughing about the cowardly way the *Ami* had acted. Hermann sat his son down and stopped that nonsense. "Son," Hermann quietly said to Juergen, I have heard you laughing at the poor scared American airman we captured the other day. What do you think you would feel like if you had been in his shoes?"

"I would have stood and shown my captors that I am a brave German."

"Are you sure of that son? If that were true, why were you all afraid to go in and save him from the wreckage?"

"Well he was nothing but an *Amerikanerschwein*," the defiant Juergen declared.

"No son, he was a frightened young man; not much older than you. And, why do you call him a swine?"

"Everyone knows that Americans are swine."

"Have you forgotten that you are an American?"

Juergen sat looking blankly at his father as he thought about that. Such had never occurred to him.

"I know that I was born in America, but I am a German," he stammered.

"Yes you are German Juergen, but you are also legally an American."

"How can I be both. Isn't one either one or the other?"

"That is a matter of perspective son. We here in Germany feel that all people of German heritage are rightfully citizens of

Germany. However, there are many Germans in America, and though they are proud of their heritage they are also considered Americans, and they are proud of it.”

This was a concept that Juergen was not able to understand until many years later.

Page 70

During the entire project living conditions remained so horrible. They seldom had any shelter and were forced to continue to bed down in fox holes, which they had dug by the second night, and cover themselves with straw. Small groups began to form that would huddle together for warmth. It was Fall and was not yet freezing, but that area of Germany is known for its rains. At least slit trench toilets had been dug so the stink of human waste was a bit more confined, but there were still no privacy fences, nor designated male and female areas. In the morning they would be roused out with bayonets. The rations consisted of the same gruel of beets, barley and old meat three times a day. Each day new stock was added to the old and it normally tasted rancid. Almost every one had a serious case of diarrhea or dysentery. At the work sites slit trench toilets were not even provided. The work crews were still sexually integrated so that women and men were forced to squat in front of everyone. To add to the discomfort, there was also no toilet paper. One had to clean one's self with bunches of grass or weeds. Juergen remembers being so sore that he would actually cry when he would have to relieve himself. One day two Polish girls had enough and started to run. They were shot by the guards and left laying there until evening. Some Russian workers were also shot.