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In February, Dulles summoned me to Bern where he told me I would take part in a most unusual wartime happening. I was to be exchanged, along with six other American officers, for seven German Luftwaffe people, also interned in Switzerland. Dulles had selected me for a special assignment. I spent a week in his office memorizing pages of information that he wanted transmitted personally to Washington. This was roughly three months before D-Day in Europe. When I got back to the United States, I was taken to OSS headquarters near Washington where I reported what I'd memorized. Of the seven Americans figuring in the exchange, six were pilots and one was a navigator. Though neither of us knew it at the time, that navigator had also memorized secret information, and, since interrogators spoke to him and me separately, they could check our accounts for accuracy.

I'm pretty sure Dulles had a hand in initiating that exchange and asking the Swiss government to sound out the Germans about a man-for-man deal. The Swiss, eager to get rid of extra war-time mouths to feed, did so and the Germans agreed. They made just one stipulation, however. They insisted that all of the American exchangees wear civilian clothing. They may have done this to forestall possible trouble with the French Underground. All the while we were in Germany and France, German military guards accompanied us. In France, had we been wearing U.S. uniforms, this might have started a commotion.

My departure from Switzerland became as dramatic as my arrival. The railroad station in Basel lay half in Switzerland and half in Germany. On the day we left, 3 March 1944, almost no traffic occurred. The huge main waiting room was completely deserted. The Germans had festooned the walls of this vast chamber with big banners and swastikas. As two Swiss diplomats walked us across that room to hand us over, I remember having strong feelings of uneasiness. The officer, to whom we were being given, wore the black uniform of Himmler's sinister SS. I thought to myself, "We are at war with these people. What if they changed their minds about an exchange while they have us in their hands? What then could prevent them from accusing us of being spies in our Swiss civilian clothing? What if any one of them discovered I had memorized so many things about their armed forces, including the names of some treasonable people in their midst?"

The SS officer was a major. He carried a dagger at his side in place of a sword, which struck me as an odd affectation. Clearly a Nazi, he gave us all a stiff-armed salute with a loud cry of "Heil, Hitler!" We Americans, as civilians, emulated the Swiss diplomats and simply nodded our heads. Our only protection at this point was that we'd been told that the Swiss would not release the Germans for whom we were being exchanged until we reached Madrid, Spain. Happily, the black-uniformed SS people did not stay with us long. They marched us to a German train where a three-man Wehrmacht guard, a captain, a sergeant and a corporal, took over. Only the sergeant could speak English. The captain spoke French, however, so I could communicate with him. The ten of us, the three German Army guards and the seven Americans, occupied two compartments in what became one of the eeriest train rides I've ever had.

As the train moved north along the Rhine valley that afternoon, it seemed to stop at every station. We were never allowed to leave it, but we could lean out the windows to find ourselves cheek-by-jowl with all kinds of German people milling along the platforms. At each station, more and more officers, probably on home leave, came aboard. When we finally crossed the Rhine that night and headed for Paris the train must have carried hundreds of them,

each returning to some western position. The train also carried anti-aircraft guns, front and back, so we began sweating out our own U.S. fighter pilots, who'd taken up shooting at every German train that they could.

Word got around and soon many of the officers aboard learned who we were. Some of them arranged to talk with us. A German army lieutenant told me he'd gone to Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. A Luftwaffe pilot accosted me. He was a major and highly decorated, for he wore a Knight's Cross at his neck; but he was not very pleasant and our conversation was short. He told me that he considered American bomber crews to be barbarians and added, gratuitously, that the German people did not like our President Roosevelt. When I replied that that was nothing compared to how Americans hated Adolf Hitler, he simply shrugged it off and left.

What most of the Germans really wanted was to bum cigarettes. Each of us Americans had taken along several cartons of Swiss cigarettes. We considered these inferior to unobtainable American ones but they were better than what the Germans had. Our Wehrmacht sergeant chain smoked all the time he was with us. "Albert," I told him, "you're going to have a sore throat when you leave us." "Ah, yes," he said, "but it will be the first sore throat I've had from smoking cigarettes in five years."

In Paris, using Dodge station wagons with swastikas painted on them, two German Army majors oversaw our transfer from one railroad station to another. One of them spoke English with a Scottish burr. We learned he'd been a peacetime lawyer in Edinburgh. The presence of swastikas is what I remember most from the tour they gave us between stations. At that time, hundreds of huge Nazi banners lined the main thoroughfares of the French capital and draped the public buildings.

Our German guards took us at last to Hendaye, on the French border. From there we walked over the Bidasoa River on a small bridge to Irun, Spain. Here we encountered the only untoward incident of our trip out of Switzerland. Crossing the bridge the same time we did were some 40 members of the Spanish "Blue Division," which had been fighting with the Germans in Russia. They were violently anti-American and yelled and screamed at us. But this only came to shouting, for a Swiss diplomatic courier immediately joined us and took us by train to Madrid. On the train he pointed out to us a Gestapo agent in civilian clothing who also accompanied us.

In the Spanish capital our Swiss escort took us to the U.S. Embassy, from where we drove to Gibraltar by way of Seville. We then flew to Casablanca and to New York. After reporting to Washington, and getting a home leave, I was assigned as a pilot to the Air Transport Command for what remained of the war. Back in Switzerland, my navigator, radio operator and ball-turret gunner all went to Berne to work for the U.S. Legation. Our bombardier, Bob Huisinga, became an Executive Officer for our Military Attache, General Legge. He and the rest of our crew returned to America early in 1945.

All of us considered ourselves lucky - and grateful - that the "neutral island" of Switzerland existed. Had it not, we most certainly would have spent many months in German POW camps if, indeed, we had gotten down to the ground alive. It has been a long time since our mission to Stuttgart. But every year, on the sixth of September, I take a few minutes to remember, and give thanks for, that fortuitous landing in Magadino.

