

ving to get into that band, believing for some strange reason that it would offer better prospects, left a day later still.

The R.A.F. had been operating in the Po Valley, and signs of its handiwork were evident. It was because so many railway junctions were unusable and so many bridges across the Po were damaged that the first stage of our journey was made by motor-lorries. These were driven by boys barely over sixteen, and the one in charge of ours, I'll swear, had never shaved, and should still have been at school. But he did his job as well as any man, and watched us so carefully and so competently that there was never a chance for an instant of making a break.

The unhappy party duly escorted to Mantova Station at about midday, our driver and his co-fledglings left us to the tender mercies of our guards for the railway journey, who also were too young for soldiering—by our standards, at any rate. Be that as it may, the S.S. sergeant in charge knew how to work them to best advantage, and with a minimum of fuss and a maximum of accomplishment they herded us into the goods-wagons which were to take us to Germany. Every one has heard of the famous "8 horses, 40 men" chalked up on the sides of troop-carrying box cars. Well, this was not one of that kind—it was a smaller edition, a "5 horse, 25 men" type. Even so, the Nazis did not let it rest there—they had to cram an extra two in for luck.

As soon as the train got under way we started to take stock of the situation. Our wagon was about third from the rear van where the guards travelled, with machine guns mounted to fire along both sides of the train. The trucks were closed at each end by narrow double doors which were bolted from the outside and wired tightly together in addition. Apart from two closely grated narrow windows there was only one other exit—a heavy sliding door immovably locked. All told, the prospects of breaking out seemed pretty slim, and the whole set-up one to try the patience of a Houdini. The only bright spot, and a small one at that, was that there was no Nazi in the truck with us, so that at least we could try out our schemes undisturbed.

First off we tried to remove the window grating. But the screws were rusted firmly in, and tugging at the narrow bars even by groups of five or six produced nothing but torn hands and strained muscles. No, it was obvious we had to look elsewhere.

Then we turned our attention to the big side door. Immovable at first, it remained so despite every heave and kick and push and grunt. Another avenue was closed. That left us only the doors at either end. These at least would *have* to yield; the alternative was too grim to contemplate. So with redoubled energy we worked on: straining, puffing, tugging, and lunging. We panted away for some two or three hours, and all the while the train was clacking steadily on, bearing us to Germany. Would they never budge? And even if we did get them open we still had to jump from the moving train, risk the reaction of the Germans, and, on top of all that, make our way back to our own people. Surely Fate would help us with at least the first step. But no, the doors remained firm.

Now the train is slowing down. We peer out and see railway tracks and wagons everywhere—we are in the goods-yards of Verona. And then we notice a strange sight—one huge railway engine, belching smoke and vapour in every direction as it drags eight other huge engines. Whoever saw a train made up of nine engines in such a manner: suddenly the explanation dawns on us—the Nazis are taking them all off to Germany.

The S.S. sergeant gives us permission to open the side door and to leave the truck. Gratefully we stretch ourselves and try to snatch a word or two with the fellows from the next wagon. They tell us they have succeeded in breaking open one lot of end doors and that during the darkness they are going to make a break. Lucky fellows.

When we are moving again we discuss their good fortune. If they can do it, perhaps we can. So we return to work.

But still no luck, and night is upon us. Oh, well, perhaps later on. So we settle down to sleep as best we can . . .

But Jim Stone of the long legs is restless. Perhaps if we did this, and he put his legs so, and we pushed . . . He