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When Ivan Meets Joe The Bottled Goods Flow



Al Newman, NEWSWEEK war correspondent, was on hand to add his own personal welcome to the Red Army when it met with the Americans. He sends this Newman's-eye-view of the festivities.

Abruptly at the beginning of the week the United States First Army let its guns cool and the resulting quiet after eleven roaring months was ear-splitting. Dough-boys rode horses, played ball, and basked under the fruit blossoms in the April sun.

Division and corps headquarters, however, hummed with excitement. Observers' powerful telescopes reported fires and shell bursts in the low hills east of the Mulde. Radios picked up fragments of conversation in a strange tongue. Green flares were issued to all battalions, as this was agreed on as the recognition signal, and all eyes strained for white-banded tanks, another prearranged sign.

The Gaudiest Snafu: The Russians were coming and every imaginable precaution was taken to make the linkup of these powerful fighting forces a peaceful one. Consequently, all but a small bridge of guarding patrols were withdrawn west of the Mulde and artillery fire ceased. Then the gaudiest snafu in army history happened.

It began Monday, April 23, when the 69th Division reported sighting a tank with a white band. The patrol sent out discovered the Russian tank to be a mound of earth with a rope lying across it. The next day the Second Division reported a two-way radio communication with the elusive Russians.

On Wednesday, patrols were authorized to a depth 6 miles east of the Mulde, but no farther. At noon I accompanied a reconnaissance force of the 23rd Regiment as far as Leisnig. Despite positive reports that the Russians were at Leisnig, we found none.

After 5 in the afternoon, the 69th reported physical contact with the Russians somewhere between the town of Wurzen and the Elbe River. The patrol was supposedly still out at this extremely indefinite point, so there was nothing for a task force of correspondents composed of G. K. Hodenfield of Stars and Stripes, Russell Hill of The New York Herald Tribune, and myself to do but take off into enemy country east of the Mulde and find it.

About 15 miles ahead of our lines in thick wood we came over a rise in the road and saw nine enemy soldiers heading toward us 200 yards away. They leaped from bikes and took to cover.

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We could not turn around, so we went on into them and when we stopped they came out with their hands up. It was a mighty sweet feeling. Hodenfield, who as an Army lieutenant is empowered to accept surrender; disarmed them. We were out of the mess and continued on the main road.

Contact: Before the battalion command post in Wurzen a German body lay twitching in the twilight. It was an ugly corpse, because it had no face. The patrol had returned with four Russians and, seeing them appear to be on evidently the friendliest terms with the Americans, this German prisoner had wrested a rifle from a careless GI, tucked the muzzle under his own chin, and pulled the trigger.

The regimental colonel would not let six members of the press be present to see our Allies. Presumably, he was scared stiff over the diplomatic possibilities of the situation, and even more frightened because not one patrol but two had flagrantly violated orders by far exceeding the 6-mile limit.

GI Ivan: What happened turned out to be far better than any careful plan, because GI Joe met GI Ivan and they adored each other. Among the four Russians we were finally allowed to interview that midnight at 69th Division headquarters was a private first class. He had been wounded but was still in fine spirits. While his officers were making high-flown statements about brothers in arms, Nicolai Andreyeff gave me some good Russian GI talk. He thought the Red Army was a hell of a fine army. "The Germans send out five tanks to chase down one Russky soldier," he said. I asked him what he thought of the Germans. "They are uncultured people," Nicolai declared. This, in Russian, is worse than calling them bastards.

Captured Wehrmacht cognac overflowed into the small hours. I wondered at the time how the Russians stood up to it so well, but in the light of later events I realize the cognac must have tasted like soda pop to them. There were innumerable toasts to Stalin and the late President Roosevelt and both armies and both countries, and down with the Nazis and to hell with Hitler and the whole Kraut hierarchy, one by one.

The next morning a strong force of correspondents knifed its way through the panicky shreds of the Wehrmacht to the Elbe at Torgau, a turreted old city with a population of 13,000, the scene of Frederick the Great's victory over the Austrians. Torgau, though undamaged, was almost completely deserted because every German who could walk, fly, run, or crawl had got out of there toward our lines on the Mulde. We passed a disapproving bronze statue of Frederick and met our first real, live, roaming Russians in the city square. As we were kissed and backslapped, a Russian Airacobra stunted nuttily overhead. One Russian soldier pointed a tommygun at the sky and let go a joyous burst of fire. It was quite a moment.

Fraternizing, Plain and Fancy: We were escorted to the river bank like visiting commissars. There some plain and fancy fraternizing took place. GI drivers got together with the Russkys, and, as I had long predicted, immediately started

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had long predicted, immediately started photographing each other and swapping souvenirs and insignia.

These keen, rugged, tired, dirty men in brown uniforms are not as tall as the Yanks, but they are broader, plenty tough-looking, and plenty smart. They fire automatic rifles in sheer exhilaration and it seems always the bullets are flying somewhere around the Russian camp. Their equipment, except the automatic weapons, does not look as good as ours—less motorization and older artillery. There was not a helmet in evidence in the whole camp.

We were taken across the 100-yard-wide Elbe in racing shells. We did the rowing, but in each one a Volga-boatman character insisted on standing up in the stern and steering picturesquely but ineffectually with a long oar.

We walked a quarter-mile through tall grass on the river bank to a Russian battalion command post. Sentries saluted smartly as we passed the outposts, and officers appeared from all over to add themselves to the triumphal parade. Inside the building there began another long series of toasts and speeches by both sides, understood by practically nobody.

Unfortunately, the toasts were drunk no in cognac but in red and white vodka in brimming tumblers, bottoms up. From there on events of the day grew rather vague. Maj. Gen. Emil F. Reinhardt of the 69th arrived in mid-afternoon in a shell, on the bow of which some refugee had placed a baby carriage for transport across the river. His opposite Russian number appeared suddenly with a staff.

Once again the same process began and late in the afternoon Yanks staggered down to the river bank. The day wound up with one drunken Russian chasing another, yelling and firing a tommygun. The victim escaped over the hill along with two American Signal Corps officers who showed an amazing foot for the impost of vodka.

By Friday when the corps commanders met there were casualties snoring all over the place and one interpreter tossed his cookies in the middle of a particularly impressive speech and then passed out cold. After this dramatic bit of punctuation, he was dragged off and stacked up with other corpses, but intelligible conversation ceased though members of both armies continued to shout merrily at each other. Thus in drink and song at Torgau ended long roads from Stalingrad and Normandy.

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THE ARMY



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The Fall of Germany

A 28-MAN, six-jeep patrol of 60th Division Yanks under the command of 1st Lt. Albert Kotzebue of Houston, Tex., and his platoon sergeant, T/Sgt. Frederick Johnston of Bradford, Pa., and a Russian cavalry patrol made the first link-up between the Eastern and Western Fronts. The meeting took place on a hill outside the village of Zauwitz just before 1330 hours on April 25.

The jeeps roared up the hill smack into the middle of a group of hard-riding Cossacks who were patrolling the area in search of stray pockets of German resistance. Both units recognized each other so there was none of the confusion that attended some later Russki-Yank meetings.

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The Cossacks detailed a Russian civilian to guide Lt. Kotzebue and his men to where the CG of the Russian division was waiting to greet them on the other side of the hill. Then they galloped off in search of more Germans.

The American patrol crossed the Elbe in jeeps ferried on a platform raft and fell headlong into a lively Russian celebration.

A Russian major who spoke a few words of English set the tone of the celebration with a toast. "Today," he said, "we have the most happy day of our lives. The years 1941 and 1942 were a most difficult time. Germany was at Stalingrad. It was the most difficult time of our lives. At that time we do not think of our lives; we think of our country.

Just now, our great friends and we have met one another and it is the end of our enemy. Long live your great leader. Long live our great leader. Long live our great countries."

Maj. Fred Craig of Friendship, Tenn., and 2nd Lt. Thomas R. Howard of Mississippi, were in command of the second patrol to meet the Russians. They made contact at 1545 April 25 at Clanzchwitz with a column of Russian cavalry.

The Russians galloped across an open field to meet them, throwing their helmets in the air. Maj. Craig was ferried across the river and taken back to the Russian corps headquarters to meet the lieutenant general commanding. The general asked him if he were the highest American officer available to greet him and Maj. Craig explained that his was only a patrol, not the official greeting party.

The major and his men had two meals with the Russians, one at 1900 and one at 0930 the next morning. Once again there were toasts and mutual greetings. The Russians had several cameramen and correspondents on hand to record the meeting and seemed sorry we didn't have any of our own. The general told the major he was sending a message direct to Stalin to inform him of the meeting. The Russians and Yanks fired each other's weapons and criticized them. Red Army men found our M1 too heavy for their taste but liked our carbine and .30-caliber machine guns.

During the night the radio operators at the major's CP on the west bank of the Elbe, relieved each other so they could cross and enjoy the Russian party. A Cossack column stopped by the CP and put on a two-hour serenade of Russian songs with harp, mouth organ and accordion accompaniment.

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