

## Meeting The Enemy

### Page 23 (learning to hate)

When I actually make the effort to calculate the time I spent in Africa, I realize that it was not very long. But as I remember it, it was a very long time. It was an eternity, a lifetime all rolled in to slightly more than a year. It was a time when I transformed from a boy to a hardened warrior, that probably deserved the title a commander has among his men; "The Old Man". Partly this was due to the strain of command with its isolation from the rest of the troop. But it was also due to a transformation within myself. As I stated earlier, I started the war viewing the enemy not with hate, but as opposing soldiers. I viewed the fact that they were English with regret. The English were not the enemy, the enemy forces just happened to be English. I tried to hide this from my comrades because to not hate the English would have been viewed as heresy. It was bad enough that I had, upon first arriving in the unit, spoken of my time as a student in England before the war. For some time I was labeled the "English lover" behind my back. It took me some time to gain the confidence of my troops.

However, as the first year wore on this mental separation of past feelings and present duty changed. I don't know exactly when it happened, but I realize now that slowly the English did become the enemy. I replaced my hate of a faceless enemy with a hate for the English. Part of it was their persistence. It got so that all one looked forward to was some respite from the constant jab and parry of their patrols. Why wouldn't they soon realize that the German war machine was superior and just give up?

### Page 130 (meeting Americans as a POW)

Our progress was very slow. It was obvious that we were a very low priority train. We stopped in nearly every small town. Had we been in Europe, we would have never gotten anywhere at that rate, but it seems that there are very few towns in the southwestern part of the United States. In most of the towns a crowd would gather to stare at us. At a few stops we were allowed to get off, under close watch, to get some exercise. When we were off the trains the local crowds would back off quickly and give us room. At one stop to our surprise a table was set up, manned by a group of ladies, laden with coffee and sweet cakes (which I later learned were donuts).

At first we didn't understand, but when a lady at the table gestured to me I looked at the closest guard. He shrugged, and then nodded, so I carefully walked over to the table. A smiling young girl gave me a donut. The next lady, a rather old woman, asked me,

“Would you like cream in your coffee?”

I smiled and responded, “Yes please. That is kind of you.”

As she gave me the cup I noticed that I was standing at the table all alone. I looked back to the other prisoners and saw that they were all watching me with a look that was a mixture of fear for my safety and envy. “Come on,” I yelled in German, “these ladies will not hurt you.”

I looked back around and saw very confused looks on the faces of the ladies at the table. I stepped aside as some of the POWs formed a line and came to the table. When the old lady asked the first guy in line if he wanted cream in his coffee the *Soldatin* just looked blank. When she asked a second time, I translated. The *Soldatin* smiled and said to the lady, “*Ya! bitte Ganitikafrau.*” At this a gasp went up from all of the American women. A rather large, officious lady in the rear said, “My God these are Germans!” Another women said, “Oh dear, what should we do?” One lady threw down the towel in her hand and muttered, “Well I won’t serve them.” Just when things looked like a panic would set in the young girl that gave me the donut said, “Please ladies, the Lord said to love thine enemy and to minister among the heathens. We can prove to these misguided souls that they are in a land of civilized Christians.” She then turned to me and asked, “Are you in charge here?”

“I am an officer Miss.”

“Then tell your men to come by and be served.”

“Yes Miss, I will be pleased to do so, but please tell your ladies that we too are Christians and appreciate their kindness.” I then passed on her request to the men, who began to file by and take the offered coffee and donuts from the, now stern faced, ladies.

“Are you really Christians?” the pretty young girl asked.

“For the most part, yes we were all raised as such.”

“Then how can you be involved in fighting a war for those terrible men?”

“Just what ‘terrible men’ are you speaking about?”

“Why those Nazi people led by that mad man Hitler.”

“We are soldiers Miss. We do our duty for our country, just as your men do.”

“But our men don’t kill innocent women and children.”

I looked her right in the eye and said in a calm voice, “I pray to God that you are right.” I wanted to tell her much more, but instead I just smiled at her and said, “Thank you again, and may we all hope this madness of war may soon be over.” I spun on my heel and walked back to the train. This incident was to incite a flood of thoughts of home and the safety of my loved ones. Could peace ever come no matter who won when even women like those righteous ladies had so much fear, or perhaps even hate, for people they knew nothing about?