

## The Trestle

As a winter moon reached the pinnacle of its orbit, sixteen-year-old Lucy Roesener knelt low into a fresh snow drift, alongside the opening of the trestle. She rocked her shivering body back and forth in a vain attempt to counteract the effects of the unceasing wind. The latticed girders of the trestle filtered the moon's rays in broad bands of shadow and light, alternately revealing and hiding her tear-stained face as she moved.

The wind pierced the folds of the extra clothing that she wore, her having humbly accepted each item from a few of the other prisoners, just before she entered the secret tunnel out of the Dachau.

Lucy's hope—the hope of all escaped prisoners who attempted not to be seen, as they put kilometers between the horror of the concentration camp and themselves—was to somehow board the moving supply train from Munich, as it too attempted not to be seen by the Allies' B-17 bombardiers, while making its weekly nighttime run to Berlin. If she could get on that train, she just might find her way to freedom.

Fritz Kulicki, Dachau's infamous dark angel of death and master sharpshooter, knew all about the secret tunnel, and specifically mandated to his subordinates that it not be closed. Rather, he assigned lookouts with field glasses to monitor the exit of the tunnel each night. Kulicki had accidentally discovered it one day, some one-hundred meters outside the camp's perimeter fencing, while walking his wolfhound a few months earlier.

Dachau's reputation—known only to his superiors as the camp from which no one had escaped—was due in no small part to Kulicki's marksmanship, which he practiced on the fleeing prisoners after trailing them for varying distances, depending upon his mood. He enjoyed these periodic hunts, and if he was feeling energetic, he might let them gain quite some distance in their escape attempts before dispatching them with a cool crack of his rifle.

Of course, he made sure that the remaining prisoners never found out the fate of their comrades. In that way, he could assure himself of a continuing gallery of targets on whom he could practice and thereby maintain his reputation for deadly accuracy.

This night, Kulicki was feeling quite robust, some hours earlier having had his way with one of the more pleasant-looking prisoners at his disposal. If she lacked enthusiasm for the coupling, at least she hadn't fought him or brought tears into play—two reactions he thoroughly despised. No, she had allowed it to happen, made it easy for him. And for that he was grateful. He would make sure she received an extra portion of bread the following day.

Kulicki's subsequent energy had caused him to trail this escapee even farther into the countryside this night—farther than he had ever allowed a prisoner to flee. Now that the prisoner had stopped at the trestle head, Kulicki slung his rifle over his broad shoulder and commenced to climb an oak tree that looked to favor his intended action.

Kulicki settled himself against the tree's trunk and brought his rifle into position. Through his rifle's scope, he could clearly see the prisoner's back moving, though his target's head—Kulicki's preferred bulls-eye—appeared to be lowered against the prevailing wind, just out of view. That was okay. Kulicki could wait.

Lucy lowered her head even further out of the wind, and as she did, she almost missed a light piercing through the trees beyond the far end of the trestle. She instinctively turned slightly to look in that direction, and heard the oncoming train's whistle, confirming for her that she hadn't been too late in arriving. She remained in place, muscles tightening in anticipation.

In less than a minute, the train was upon her. Lucy jumped up and began running alongside the train, her face fully illuminated in the moonlight.

The train's whistle had instantly heightened Kulicki's senses. From atop his woody perch, he gripped his rifle and narrowed his focus on his intended prey. The prisoner's head was still not in view, but as the train traversed the rickety trestle, he knew that the climax of the hunt had nearly arrived.

Suddenly, the prisoner sprung from a crouched position and began running alongside the train. Kulicki remained calm, and followed the face of the escapee through his rifle's scope, refocusing now to clearly see that this prisoner was the girl who had not struggled or cried beneath him, earlier that evening.

As the girl leaped for the rungs of the third car's ladder, Kulicki took aim and squeezed the trigger.

At breakfast the next morning, Kulicki's comrades quizzed him as to the outcome of his pursuit. Kulicki detailed the thrill of the hunt, right down to its final outcome.

One of the senior officers stopped chewing his eggs and asked, "So the record of our camp is intact?"

Kulicki replied, "The record still stands."

In Emmendingen, Germany, there was a house located at the end of a back alley, just off a forgotten street. Inside that house, in a hidden room that measures five meters by seven meters, Lucy Roesener chewed on a piece of cheese, and waited for the war to end.

THE END