Neil Graves

THE P.O.W.

by

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SUPER OVER "EIGHT MONTHS INTO WORLD WAR TWO, GERMANY INVADED WESTERN EUROPE. WITHIN DAYS THEIR ARMIES WERE ROUTING THE FRENCH FORCES WHICH ALSO INCLUDED REGIMENTS FROM HER COLONIES: ALGERIA, MOROCCO, INDOCHINA, AND THE SENEGALESE RIFLEMEN FROM WEST AFRICA."

EXT. EDGE OF A FOREST - DAY

Two African soldiers, MAMADOU and ABDOUL, garbed in their French uniforms, keep low behind a barrier. They snap to attention as a WHITE LIEUTENANT struts by then relax as he disappears down the line.

MAMADOU

(disdainfully) Officers.

ABDOUL

The sergeant said we have to fight till the end. Because the Germans hate us. Hate us worse than the French.

MAMADOU

Never dreamed I'd miss smacking mosquitoes in Sembene's paddies.

ABDOUL Belly-aching, belly-aching. You never quit do you, Mamadou?

MAMADOU

I suppose freezing through the winter made men of us?

ABDOUL You never see the big picture.

MAMADOU

Which is what? Surviving January so we can get killed in May?

ABDOUL

About fighting hard. If we show the French what we can do -- that we can take care of ourselves -- maybe we can gain our independence.

Mamadou rolls his eyes. Suddenly, he freezes and cocks an ear.

MAMADOU

Abdoul! There's something out there!

They both go silent.

MAMADOU (CONT'D)

You hear it?

They listen intently.

ABDOUL

No, I hear nothing.

After a few moments, they relax somewhat.

MAMADOU

The officers promised relief. Where's the relief? I say we should fall back to a better position. Behind that hill.

ABDOUL

Lead the way, Mamadou, lead the way. If the Boche do not get us, the French patrols will.

MAMADOU

You think too much. Always have.

ABDOUL

Behind the hill. Across the river. We do not know where we are.

MAMADOU

Belgium. Somebody said we're in Belgium.

ABDOUL

How do they know? All I know is I got sick rocking around in that ship. Must have been a week. Then they dumped us in some port.

MAMADOU

Where we froze.

ABDOUL Where we froze. And now we are here.

MAMADOU

In Belgium.

ABDOUL

If you say so.

Two German sergeants, HEINZ and REINHART, relax at their parked motorcycle. Heinz greases the motorcycle's chain mechanism while Reinhart thumbs bullets into the magazine of his German Luger pistol, one round at a time.

REINHART

Orders coming down we move out at oheight-hundred hours. Tomorrow.

HEINZ How do you know these things?

REINHART Because I got contacts, Heinzy. At headquarters.

HEINZ Sure, Reinhart, sure you do

REINHART

About time we saw more action. Shoulda been with us when we went into Polack-land. It was fun.

HEINZ

Fun??

REINHART

Sure was. There was pigs, butter -loved the butter -- lots of chickens. Never ate better. No schnitzel, unfortunately.

HEINZ

You make it sound like a traveling picnic. You see any action?

REINHART

Let me tell you. We cornered some Polacks in a barn and we torched it. Got 'em good.

HEINZ

So -- so you killed somebody?

REINHART

Just fired away with the rest of the boys. Sounded like some horses were in there. Felt a little sorry for the horses.

HEINZ Then you don't know.

REINHART

That was the problem, Heinzy. The grenadiers always beat us to the Polish scum. Everybody got a chance to shoot somebody except me.

HEINZ

Story of your life, isn't it?

REINHART

Not quite. We advanced up a road; made it to this Jew town just as the sun was setting, y'know? Came across a synagogue and torched that, too.

HEINZ

Bit of a pyromaniac, aren't you?

REINHART

A maniac? You don't know how tough it was getting that fire going. Fires, Heinz. Nothing's prettier than fires. Especially at night.

HEINZ

I see. I just want to get back to the university and complete my studies. Why couldn't the French had left us alone?

REINHART

Them and the English. That's been a real scary combination, hasn't it?

HENIZ

You're quite cavalier about this.

REINHART

Damn right. Can't wait to move out tomorrow. I hear some of the boys are mopping up right now.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST - DAY

Abdoul and Mamadou are still holding their position.

ABDOUL

OK, OK. So we're in Belgium. I say wherever we are, maybe the Boche will attack someplace else.

MAMADOU

I hope they do come. If I can't get myself a French officer then a German will have to do.

ABDOUL

You're the great warrior around here.

MAMADOU Don't take this the wrong way, friend, but you're too weak. You'll never even lead this platoon.

ABDOUL Nobody's coming to help us, Mamadou. Maybe we will never see home again.

MAMADOU Speak for yourself.

ABDOUL I am. And I am getting back.

They hear voices ahead. The two look to each other apprehensively. Suddenly, SEVERAL FRENCH SOLDIERS burst out of the woods, running straight toward them in panic.

> SOLDIER 1 Nazis! Nazis! Tanks!

SOLDIER 2 They're all over the place!!

Mamadou and Abdoul watch stunned as the soldiers run right past them and continue fleeing.

ABDOUL Let's get out of here!

MAMADOU

Hold on! Hold on a second!

After a few beats, engines start to hum then: A spray of bullets, ricocheting wildly. Mamadou and Abdoul hit the ground. They fire back: Mamadou calmly choosing his targets while Abdoul, somewhat rattled, firing more hurriedly.

The incoming rounds clearly are getting the upper hand. Then, noticing something behind them, Abdoul swivels to look over his shoulder.

ABDOUL

Look out!!

Mamadou whirls about. As soon as he does, he takes a shot in the head and flips backward, dead. PING! PHEW! The cacophony of German gunfire rings even louder. Abdoul pauses, quickly mulls the situation, then drops his weapon. He raises his hands. SEVERAL Africans kneel on their shawls, saying afternoon prayers. Although the GERMAN GUARD pays little attention to them, an off-duty Heinz saunters up to Abdoul and stands over him.

> HEINZ What are you doing?

ABDOUL

Sir?

HEINZ Why are you crawling on the ground?

ABDOUL We are praying to Allah, sir.

HEINZ

You mean God?

ABDOUL

I mean Allah, sir.

HEINZ

Allah? You people are Islamist? Not French Catholic or something?

ABDOUL

My people prayed to Allah long before the French came to our shores.

HEINZ

I see. I was beginning to study you people at the university. Your people. The yellow people. They call it anthropology, understand?

ABDOUL

Anthropology. I think I have heard of it, sir.

HEINZ

But I got inducted ... We used to have colonies in Africa, you know.

ABDOUL

No, sir. All I know is the French. They run everything.

HEINZ

Not any more ... At the university they teach things that seem sort of odd. Parts of me want to question them, but the professors ...

ABDOUL

Could I ask what kind of things?

HEINZ

What would you know about this? Well, they spend a lot of time measuring the slopes of foreheads and the circumference of skulls and the width of nostrils and all that.

Heinz nods toward some other Africans.

HEINZ (CONT'D) Who is that one over there? That leader fellow.

ABDOUL

He is Ousmane, our imam. He comes from my village. Owns a lot of goats.

HEINZ

Goats, eh? So he's a priest or something?

ABDOUL

Yes, he leads us in prayer. When we get back, I will ask him to do the honor of uniting me with my lady love.

HEINZ

Y'know, my grandfather was an assistant pastor. Was a little church near the end of the trolley line. He used to take me to Sunday School, but I stopped going when I was 17 or something like that ... You think your Allah and our God are the same?

ABDOUL

I cannot say, sir. I do not know of your God. Perhaps.

Reinhart comes over.

REINHART

Heinz! What're you doing? Why're you talking to that schwatze?

HEINZ

Just curious.

REINHART

Leave those savages alone. You'd be better off talking to that dog the lance corporal found. Arrf! Arrf! NAMANGO, an African soldier, speaks with Abdoul.

NAMANGO

We can't go on like this. We need food. Talk with that German.

ABDOUL

He is not an officer. He is a little like us. But, yes, we have to find something for that fellow from Goree. The one with the head wound.

NAMANGO

Forgive me for saying this, but why him? He'll be dead by sunrise.

ABDOUL Maybe it will keep him alive a little longer. Until the French do something.

NAMANGO

What did that German want?

ABDOUL I do not know. Says he is a student.

NAMANGO Talk to him. Get him to give us some food.

ABDOUL Do I look like an officer to you?

NAMANGO Somebody has to do something.

ABDOUL That is for the lieutenant.

NAMANGO The lieutenant is dead.

ABDOUL Then the sergeant.

NAMANGO No. You have the connection.

ABDOUL I will see what I can do.

They hear a ruckus. TWO GERMANS manhandle an AFRICAN and drag him over to Reinhart who awaits them with a kettle of boiling water in hand.

The two Germans, one holding a cake of soap, struggle with the African trying to hold him still. Laughing, they stretch out his bare forearm and Reinhart dramatically pours scalding water on it, as if he's serving tea. The African screams. The German with the soap starts scrubbing the arm.

REINHART

I told you, it's not coming off! Go ahead! Rub, rub! Rub all you want!

Abdoul, looking from afar, winches at the sight. Heinz comes up to him, peering at the roughhouse Germans as he walks.

HEINZ

Guys from Dusseldorf. Just having some fun -- I think.

ABDOUL I see no fun here, sir. This cannot be good.

HEINZ

They were policemen before the war. They've never seen anything like your people. Here --

Taking a small, fist-sized package, Heinz sneaks it to Abdoul. Namango's eyes grow wider. Abdoul merely holds the package, not sure what to do.

> **HEINZ** (CONT'D) **Hide it, dammit!**

Abdoul shoves the package into his overcoat pocket.

HEINZ (CONT'D) It's some rations. They leave stuff around the quartermasters and nobody was looking so --

ABDOUL Thank you. Thank you, sir.

Namango taps Abdoul on the elbow, urging him to speak up but Abdoul nudges back. Heinz points to Namango.

HEINZ

You! Go!

Namango backs off, pausing as Heinz continues to glare, then leaves altogether. Heinz turns to Abdoul.

HEINZ (CONT'D) I've been thinking -- I've been thinking I'll write a paper on you, my Zulu warrior. When I get back to the university. ABDOUL

I am not Zulu.

HEINZ Of course. They are much taller than you, correct?

ABDOUL I think you mean the Watusi people.

HEINZ Yes, yes. Watusi. Watusi. Watusi.

ABDOUL Have you any -- more of the packages?

Heinz looks at Abdoul incredulously.

HEINZ No! What do you take me for? ... Tell me, you shoot any of us?

ABDOUL

Sir??

HEINZ Have you killed anybody?

ABDOUL No, sir! We just got here.

HEINZ I see. I wonder what it's like to --

Reinhart storms over.

REINHART

Heinz! Didn't I tell you to stay away --! What's wrong with you?

HEINZ What were you nitwits trying to do?

REINHART

Those people must be stamped out. Bowing to Mecca and all that mumbojumbo. What does it say on our belt buckles, Heinzy? What does it say?

HEINZ

"God is with us."

REINHART

We can't be rubbing elbows with these Islamist. Sure, the darkies were duped -- by the French, by the Jews -but how can they know any better?

HEINZ

Reinhart, I heard better lectures in training camp.

REINHART

They don't fight with honor. I mean, they mutilated our boys. With those -what do you call 'em -- machetes.

HEINZ

It's all talk. Everybody's got their idea of what a savage is like.

REINHART

I've seen the bodies.

HEINZ

Funny you've seen them and I haven't and we've been riding together for the whole campaign.

REINHART

They hide in trees, like monkeys, and shoot at us. They're terrorists. And these are your friends?

HEINZ Wait, they are not my friends.

REINHART We've gotta clean up this world, Heinz. It's on our shoulders.

A GERMAN wanders by.

HEINZ

Got a smoke, soldier?

The German pulls out a cigarette. Heinz lights it and gives it to Abdoul for him to take a puff. The German smiles in a patronizing way, but Reinhart is steamed. He wheels about, speechless, and storms away.

EXT. LATER, GERMAN CAMP - DAY

Heinz lies on the ground beside the motorcycle, keeping in the shade. He reads a paperback, occasionally jotting in the margin. Shortly, Reinhart comes up.

> REINHART Look alive, bookworm.

HEINZ Sergeant Kepplemann.

REINHART

You're always reading. Every free minute you get.

HEINZ You ought to give it a try yourself.

REINHART Y'know, we're still moving out tomorrow. And we're not taking your schwatzes with us.

Heinz shrugs it off.

REINHART (CONT'D) We can't feed them and we're certainly not marching them back across the river. So orders came down to eliminate them.

HEINZ

Who told you that?

REINHART

I know what I know. They're excess baggage. We're forming ten squads. I volunteered to command the first.

HEINZ

Then I guess you'll finally get your chance to shoot somebody.

REINHART

I recommended you to handle the second.

HEINZ

You did what??

REINHART The captain wants to see you.

HEINZ Why would you do that?

REINHART

Because we need you to get into the spirit of things.

HEINZ Spirit of things? What are you talking about?

REINHART The spirit of the Reich! (MORE)

REINHART (CONT'D) That's what I'm talking about, man. Y'know, after your squad fires off, you've gotta go up to each ape and put a bullet through their head. Just to make sure.

HEINZ What gives you the right to --

REINHART I said the captain's expecting you, Heinz. Now.

EXT. MOTORCYCLE POOL - NITE

Heinz sprawls on a sleeping mat, trying to get some rest. But his eyes are wide open. An exasperated Reinhart, on his own mat, rolls over and faces Heinz.

> REINHART Will you go to sleep!

HEINZ I can't do it.

REINHART

You will do it. It's your duty.

HEINZ

You just can't hate somebody because it's your duty.

REINHART

That's been the song for the last few years and everybody's singing in harmony. How many times I gotta tell you: We didn't start this. They declared war on us.

HEINZ

We'll see about this tomorrow.

REINHART

We certainly will. The SS has ways of identifying troublemakers. And nobody wants the SS on their trail. Or their family's.

HEINZ So, you're bringing the SS into this?

REINHART

Don't have to. They have ways, Heinzy. They have ways.

HEINZ

Thanks for the words of encouragement.

REINHART Don't mention it. Now get some sleep. We've gotta get this business done by oh-seven-hundred.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - DAY

German troops are mustering near some trees. They yank back their rifle bolts, slam in the bullet packs, then jab the bolt back into place. A FRENCH OFFICER feverishly pleads with the Germans but is being ignored. The Africans eye the Germans apprehensively as Heinz speaks to Abdoul.

> HEINZ Look, I have to do this.

ABDOUL If there is no other way, then you must.

HEINZ

But I can't. I can't. Dammit, I just wanted to get my dissertation done.

ABDOUL

Your what?

HEINZ

I may have dozed off for an hour last night. Maybe. All I know is when I came to, I was still here. I was thinking real hard about climbing over that Reinhart. And leaving.

ABDOUL I think the military police would catch up to you.

HEINZ

That would be the least of my worries.

Abdoul sighs a half-muted chuckle.

HEINZ (CONT'D) Why --?? You're about to die, dammit!

ABDOUL It just occurred to me that all we wanted was a little food. But biscuits will not do us any good now. HEINZ You know, I don't even know your name.

ABDOUL Abdoul. Abdoul Gueye.

HEINZ Abdoul, eh? Abdoul, I'm sorry.

ABDOUL No need, sir. We were all pulled into this.

HEINZ Maybe you would have made a good Lutheran, Abdoul.

ABDOUL I think I will see Allah before you do. Could I take a moment to pray?

Heinz pauses.

HEINZ OK. You can have two minutes.

A rifle volley suddenly erupts in the background. Heinz peers at Abdoul then turns to his fellow Germans.

HEINZ (CONT'D)

You men -- you, you, you and you -- fall in. Let's get this over with.

EXT. A FEW YARDS AWAY - DAY

Gunfire continues as TWO YOUNG GERMANS approach the CAPTAIN, click their heels and salute. The officer nods.

SOLDIER ONE Sir, is it over? Can't we join in?

CAPTAIN I appreciate your enthusiasm, soldier, but we have all the men we need.

SOLDIER TWO

You sure, sir?

CAPTAIN You should have been here last night. When we were a few men short. But I got all my volunteers now.

SOLDIER TWO

Yes, sir.

I don't need any long faces, men. I got a feeling we'll be doing more of this as we move south.

EXT. THE FIRING LINE - DAY

The Africans stand in a line, the Germans pointing their weapons at them. Some blacks look defiant, others rather calm but in unison they all jut their chins out. Except Namango, the only one whimpering. Abdoul looks down the line to him.

> ABDOUL Namango!! Remember your fathers.

Namango pulls himself together and stifles the whimpers. Abdoul and Heinz lock eyes for the final time.

HEINZ

Ready! Aim! ...

ABDOUL Long live black Africa!

HEINZ

... Fire!

Ka-POW_POW_POW!!

Heinz steps up to the Africans, surveying the sprawled bodies. Two are still alive, their last breaths intertwining: One is moaning uncontrollably and the other is crying: "Mommma." Heinz looks at Abdoul's body with a hint of remorse. He then turns to the moaning African and reaches for his pistol.

(FADE TO BLACK)

BANG! The moaning stops. BANG! The "momma" stops. (Beat) BANG! ... (Beat) BANG! ... (Beat) BANG! ...

(FADE TO)

FREEZE FRAME of actual black & white photo of the cigarette exchange incident.

CAPTION: "TAKEN IN MAY OR JUNE 1940 IN FRANCE"

Credit line: "Courtesy of Holocaust Memorial Museum in cooperation with the Bundesarchiv in Berlin."

(FADE OUT)