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NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
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SOURCE Karl Heins Pfeiffer, 18 year old German who was born and raised near Frankenstein, Upper Silesia [50°35', 16°48']. Because of his mother's membership in a Nazi organization and his own Hitler Youth membership for two years, he was arrested by the Poles after the annexation of Silesia and placed in a work camp near his native village. He was a prisoner from September 1945 to 5 April 1952. He impressed the interviewer as a bright young man whose ready response to questions appeared to testify to his willingness to cooperate as much as possible.

- As an inmate of the prison camp for former German Nazis near Grossalbersdorf, Kreis Frankenstein, I had planned my escape for a long time. As an only child whose father was killed in action and whose mother had died since World War II, I felt I had very little to lose in spite of the fate which awaited me if I were apprehended in Poland or Germany. The fact that I would not be completely safe even in West Germany was demonstrated to me in early 1950. At that time, prisoner No. 1327 whose name I never knew, a 23 year old German, escaped from the same prison camp and made his way to West Germany. As the story spread afterwards in the prison camp, he was caught in West Germany when hunger drove him to raid a farm. The West Germans returned him to East Germany whence he was sent back to the prison camp. I saw the man arrive, with bruises showing serious mistreatment. He was subsequently beaten by the Polish prison guards, presumably interrogated about his flight, and shot. As I understand it, an escapee must be able to demonstrate his political opposition to the Eastern regimes to be granted asylum in West Germany, and I am not certain whether No. 1327--or myself, for that matter--could qualify in this respect.
- Pointing out this risk, I should also clarify, however, that there were certain modifying circumstances. The prisoners did not bear any permanent marks denoting their status. Prison numbers were not tattooed or otherwise marked on the body of the prison inmates, but simply worn on the prisoners' shirts which otherwise resembled work clothes. It was therefore possible for an escapee to remove all traces of his imprisonment from his person. Moreover, I found no indication that prison guards were subject to severe penalties for permitting an escape. Presumably, the chances of a German escaping from Poland to the West were considered non-existent.

NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
2000

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3. On 5 Apr 1942, I carried out my escape plan. After being returned to the fields from lunch at the prison camp, I realized that an opportunity for escape offered itself. The guard assigned to our little group was eating his lunch, and supervision was at a relative minimum. I told my German colleagues that I wanted to be excused and ran to a wooded area adjoining the field. Instead of returning within a few minutes, I kept on running through the woods as long as I could. Then I stopped and waited for nightfall. I had no indication, then or later, that search parties were sent out after me.
4. At this point, I had several alternatives for reaching the Polish border. I could head south and cross into Czechoslovakia. Although this was the shortest route out of Poland, I felt that nothing could be gained in this fashion. Heading for the East German border, I could have attempted to make my way westward through the Eulen-Gebirge and Riesen-Gebirge to Goerlitz. I understood, however, that the spas in that general area were crowded with Soviet personnel and most of the routes therefore strongly patrolled by Soviet security forces. I therefore chose a fairly roundabout course where I expected--quite correctly, as it turned out--minimum controls.
5. It should be understood that I took whatever precautions occurred to me. I marched only during nights, hiding and resting during the day. I did not cross any major bridges on the assumption that they were controlled; as I did not attempt to approach any but small bridges over minor rivers, I had no way of determining whether this precaution was necessary in all cases. Moreover, I was used to a minimum of food intake and therefore went without food for the entire period of ten days until I reached the East German border, with but one exception. After several days, I was so weak from hunger and thirst that I went to a farm (Polish, like all the farms in the area) and begged for food. If the farmer had been unfriendly, he could easily have overpowered me and turned me over to the authorities. Instead, he gave me potato soup, a loaf of bread to eat immediately and a second loaf for the trip. As I spoke German, he might well have inquired about my business, but he asked no questions. As on previous occasions, I had the impression that the Polish farmers (including the few Byelorussians who were settled in former German areas) are by no means enamored of the new regime and need not necessarily be feared by a German traveller. At another time, when I was already fairly close to the German border, I approached a farmhouse to ask for food. I was very careful, however, and noticed a man in uniform in the house; I therefore gave up any attempt at contacting anybody and proceeded with an empty stomach.
6. In addition to the precautions mentioned above, I want to stress that I avoided major highways and roads as much as possible. Even at nighttime, I felt that any encounter was potentially risky because of my ignorance of Polish; I therefore moved along footpaths or through fields. As I was dressed as a poor farm-help, I thought that I would arouse the least suspicion in this fashion. As I had no maps, I had to depend on road markings for directions. In most cases, German sign posts are still in evidence, but frequently the new Polish place names have been added. With the elementary knowledge of Polish spelling which is common among Silesians, I found my way even where the signs were in Polish only.
7. At first, I followed a northerly route. I found the villages north of Frankenstein only thinly populated. I had to bypass Breslau (Wroclaw) on the west because I did not know what checks I might encounter in a city which has a large complement of Soviet troops. I swam the Oder near Dyhernfurth [51°16', 16°43'], in fact within sight of the city. The next logical destination would have been Liegnitz [Lignica; 51°12', 16°12']. It was, however, general knowledge among the Polish population, as we prisoners had gathered from conversations of the prison guards, that the area around Liegnitz was a military area and closed to civilians. [Source has no further information on this subject.] I therefore

crossed the Oder again north of Parchwitz [51°17', 16°22'] and walked westward to Sagan [51°37', 15°19'] and Sorau [51°38', 15°09']. I reached the Neisse River, which in this area forms the border between Poland and East Germany, south of Forst. [Source thought that he crossed 40 to 50 kilometers south of Forst; in view of the fact that he pursued a generally western course and subsequently reached Cottbus, it appears that he was closer to Forst than he realized.]

8. The East German-Polish border is quite well guarded, especially on the Polish side. I had previously heard, and my experience appeared to confirm, that Polish double guards patrolled an area of 100 meters, that is to say, they started from positions one hundred meters apart, walked up to each other and returned to their starting points. Moreover, many of the guards were accompanied by dogs. I found it impossible to cross on the spot which I first considered favorable for a crossing because I heard dogs in the area. I therefore went downstream to a point where I noticed a small boat tied up a few yards from the bank. I was probably lucky in that this was a rainy night. Apparently, the guards there did not have any dogs and did not patrol too regularly. Anyway, I did not see or hear anybody, jumped into the river, loosened the boat and let it drift downstream for some distance. Then I steered it as best I could in the direction of the German side and swam a few yards. When I reached the German side, I saw the light of a match, apparently lit by a German VP (People's Police) border guard, avoided him and another guard nearby who was silhouetted against the sky and made my way through the high grass away from the river. Fortunately, the German guards did not seem to have any dogs in that area. I had heard a few stories of border crossings by Germans and took some clues for my own escape from these stories. It seems that some Germans from near the Polish border cross the Neisse at night. They find that their East Marks have a greater value than the zloty and therefore buy some goods cheaper on Polish territory. The border guards are said to be aware of this traffic and not to interfere very much. From firsthand knowledge, I cannot tell how much of this is actually going on.

9. On the German side, I did not proceed very far; instead I looked for a hiding place and rested for many hours. By that time, I was in fairly poor condition, wet, hungry, and quite exhausted. I therefore decided to trust my luck and to go straight to Cottbus. In the city, I inquired about the location of the Red Cross and went there. An elderly lady received me. Upon her sympathetic inquiries, I told her quite truthfully about my escape from the Polish prisoner camp, but did not mention any future plans. It was quite obvious to me that the lady (the first person in whom I had confided since my flight from the prison camp a week and a half earlier) had no intention of turning me over to the authorities. She fed me and provided me with shelter for the night. Just the same, I took no unnecessary chances and left again before daybreak.

10. I found it quite easy to move around East German cities without any documents; I did not encounter any police checks anywhere, and if there were any traps for unauthorized people like myself, I did not become aware of them. The great advantage over the trip through Polish territory, of course, was that I now spoke the language of the local population and could safely inquire about places to avoid on my peregrinations. I learned of several areas which were closed to the German civilian population. Even there, the danger of detention was not very great. On major and even minor roads, signs in German, Russian, Polish, and Czech would say, "Halt! Sperregebiet!" [Stop, closed area/ and indicate a detour. These signs themselves were not guarded. I was told that somewhat further along these roads approaching closed military areas there were guards posted who had orders to detain the trespasser, but of course I made sure not to go beyond the signs.

11. Sperrgebiete [closed areas] about which I was told include the following:
 - (a) The area of Lübbenau in the Spreewald [51°52', 13°58'], where Soviet engineer troops were located, according to a statement by a German farmer near Cottbus.
 - (b) The Senftenberg area [51°31', 14°01'], location of briquette mines, where Soviet communications troops were believed to be stationed.
 - (c) Several military areas near Wittenberge [53°00', 11°45'] on the banks of the Elbe River, where mountain troops were said to be in training; I know least about this particular area because I did not come anywhere near it.

12. I continued to walk mostly at night, but I stayed closer to the roads now in order not to find myself in any Soviet military areas; as far as possible, I still avoided the main highways. In the cities, I encountered some VP (People's Police), most of whom carried carbines. The Germans did not appear to be very frightened at the sight of this "police", and so I did not always take to my heels when I saw a VP uniform. I took the following route: Drebkau [51°39', 14°13'], Calau [51°45', 13°56'] (avoiding Senftenberg), Kirchhain [51°38', 13°34'], Dresden, Flauen [50°30', 12°08'], Hirschberg an der Saale [50°24', 11°49']. I had no particular impressions or experiences of interest along this route, which I covered in just over a week. There were many Soviet troops in evidence in Dresden and again in the Hirschberg area.

13. I crossed the zonal border from Hirschberg to Hof in broad daylight. On the East German side, the border was patrolled by Soviet guards. I had previously learned that many Germans crossed back and forth at that point within sight of Soviet border guards. Most of the time, no action was taken against border crossers. On certain occasions which were difficult if not impossible to predict, the Soviet guards arrested anyone approaching the border from either side without proper papers (about which I know nothing). It was my impression that it should not be too difficult to avoid arrest even in such a contingency. Soviet border guards operate from special guard houses which are marked and lit at night; my feeling was that most illegal border crossers avoided these guard houses, and that it might be relatively safest to pass near them--or else to wait until the arrest waves subsided again. As it was, I waded through the Saale river along with many others and was neither challenged nor in any apparent way in danger of being blocked on the road to freedom.

14. In Western Germany, I proceeded more slowly than at any previous time, earning food here and there by working for farmers or applying for handouts in migrant shelters. I did not register in any location by keeping on the move, and I did not relate the story of my flight to anyone because of my determination to leave Germany altogether and the impossibility of doing so legally within a reasonable period of time. After less than one month's stay in Western Germany, I stowed away on a Pan American Airways Stratocruiser on the Rhine-Main airfield at Frankfurt on 19 May 52, departed on 20 May and landed at Idlewild International Airport, New York, on 21 May, where I gave myself up to the authorities.

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