

Aleks KURGVEL

January 1964

History of My Life.

Childhood.

I was born on 13 September 1904 in the city of Kuressaare on the island Saaremaa, Estonia, which was a part of the Russian Empire at this time. I was the fourth child in the family, the only boy among five girls.

Our's was a harmonious family. Our parents worked hard. Besides a regular job with the local police before 1916, and with the Estonian local selfgovernment after 1918, father had his own garden and a little bakery, both operated by himself, with the only help of our mother and us, the children, as soon as we were old enough to help in the garden. The most joyful, best remembered events of my childhood were: digging in the garden, eating the wonderful berries, fruits and fresh vegetables of our own garden, and the family singing parties, with the father participating and the mother listening. Our father died in 1926. Our mother died in 1945 or 1946, in our parental house in Kuressaare, when Communists had reoccupied the island, and but one of mother's six children was with her.

We, six children, went all to school in Kuressaare. Four of us graduated from "Gymnasium", the approximate equivalent of American high school and junior college. One of us, Ksenia, went on to the University of Tartu and received a degree in education. Another, Liis (Yelizaveta), went to an institute of household teachers, whereas the youngest of us, Lootus or Nadezhda, took a pedagogical course in addition to the gymnasium, thus bringing the number of licensed teachers in our family to three. Two of my sisters, the oldest, Olga, and Ida or Zinaida, started early in government service. The main reason was father's lack of resources to have more than three children attending gymnasium simultaneously.

I had been in school for three years when WW I started. I had just been admitted to Gymnasium when this was evacuated from Kuressaare, because of the war, deep into Russia. I remained behind, went back to the elementary school, learned at home, and took, for two years, exams for advancement in Gymnasium, until the Germans occupied our island and started their own Gymnasium which I then entered. When an Estonian Gymnasium was opened in Kuressaare, in 1919, soon after the German forces withdrew from Estonia, I changed from the German Gymnasium to the Estonian, from which I graduated in 1923.

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I wanted to study electrical engineering. But our Technical University had no courses starting in 1923. My father promised to do his best to enable me to go to the University of Tartu. Instead of going to Tartu, I decided to try first to enter the Military Academy's engineering class: this would have been easier for my father, and also closer to my wishes to become an engineer. During the summer I, by myself, went through an extra course of mathematics, and I went for competitive exams.

Military Service.

In August, 1923, I was admitted to the Engineering Class of the Military Academy in Tallinn. In February 1926 I graduated as Junior Lieutenant, majoring in Electrical Engineering. However, my wish to be a graduated engineer, did not quite realize. I was not a full-fledged electrical engineer, although able to meet all the requirements. I finished first in my class with awards, and I was given a position in the Signal Battalion which brought me the pay of a lieutenant, senior grade. In nine months I was advanced to a captain's position, and I was detached first to the HQ of the 2nd Inf. Division in Tartu, and a few months later to the HQ of the 1-st Inf. Division in Narva, as Division Signal Officer.

At my earliest opportunity, after three years service as a commissioned officer, I applied for admission to the Advanced College of War, in 1929. The competition was heavy. Many applicants were trying for the third time. I had luck, I was admitted. Three years later I had graduated, attaining at first the degree of "K.S. officer", and after defending my thesis, the degree of "K.S. Diplom" officer, which is comparable to a Doctor's degree in the American educational system.

Thereafter I was sent to a special course for the Intelligence Officers, where I had a double role, this of a student in the matters of the intelligence service, and simultaneously that of a group leader in General Tactics. After the completion of this course I was offered to join the J2, HQ of the Estonian Armed Forces. I declined the offer because I did not feel special calling for "adventure". I was, then assigned to the "Operations" of the Joint Staff, and one year later, in the way of advancement, to the HQ of the 1-st Inf. Division in Rakvere, as Deputy Chief of Operations.

In January 1934 the offer to join J2 was repeated. This was such a distinction which I did not dare to decline, and I accepted. I was 29, happily married, we had one son. In February, same year, I was promoted to Captain. I was full of energy, eager to work, and there was plenty to do. Officially our workday was fixed to seven hours. Practically the work lasted

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often more than 12 hours. J2 was so satisfied with my work and social performance that when the Chief of my Section was advanced to the post of the Military Attache to Moscow, I was made temporary acting Chief of Section. Although many K.S. Diplom officers, majors and captains older than I, were eager to get this post, normally occupied by a Lt. Colonel or an old major, I was kept on the post, and my status was gradually changed from the temporary Acting Chief to permanent Chief of Section. My work was manifold and interesting: liaison to the foreign Military Attaches; general information about the foreign mil. forces; research work in mil. intelligence; mil. press Officer.

I had a good life, very good job, with full salary of a Lt. Colonel. My wife Salme, née Epler, whom I married in Narva in 1928, was intelligent and well prepared to participate in, and to enjoy, the plentiful social contacts with the "cream" of our own society and with the foreign Military Attaches and other members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Tallinn. In summer 1937 we participated in an one-month pleasure trip by bus through West Europe, with one week in Paris where we met an aunt of my wife, Mme Helene Iiblik.

Besides my ordinary job with J2 I had additional part time jobs as a teacher at the courses for Signal Officers, and in the paramilitary division of the Technical University of Tallinn. I had the best military education our own schools could provide, and I was selected to attend a three-year course at the German Academy of General Staff, starting in September 1939. The future looked fine. But, then the trouble started.

My Contacts with Communists.

I was still attending the high school part of Gymnasium in Kuressaare when the Communists incited a riot on the island Saaremaa during Estonian War of Independence, in February 1919. We, students, were on Communists' "black list", we had to be liquidated... My class was not ordered to participate in the defense of the city, because we were too young. But I was rather tall, and I volunteered because I felt so strongly. However, my service was short: after 12 hours in biting frost in a roadblock, my feet were so badly frozen that I was ordered back home, and to bed.

On 1 December 1924 I was a cadet in the Military Academy in Tallinn, when the Communists, during a putch, fell over our barracks, killing four and wounding about twenty of us.

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When in 1939 the Soviets demanded and got military bases in Estonia, then it was through my section of J2 that all the communications to and from the Soviet bases had to be conducted. The Soviet Military Attache, Colonel Tsukanov, got too well "acquainted" with me, and probably as a result of this, soon after the Soviets had taken over the power, on 24 July 1940 I was asked to come for a nightly business talk. However, this was not a normal business talk. The Attache introduced me to two brigade commissars who then asked me to do, beside my normal work, some clandestine work for them; to report on my Estonian co-workers and on the contacts of the foreign Mil. Attaches with our HQ. I refused. I was threatened and advised to "reconsider", and to keep this offer in full secrecy. I, of course, reported the incident to J2 the same night. The Soviets waited for one week before they ordered my removal from J2 while "nonacceptable for friendly co-operation" with them.

In those circumstances this order was practically an equivalent to a death sentence. Therefore, to save my family, and to be able to continue the fight against the Communists who were on their way to destroy Estonia, I accepted the offer of help extended by the German Military Attaches when my troubles started, and with the knowledge of J2, I left the country secretly on 3/4 July 1940.

This was the end of my regular service in Estonian Armed Forces.

World War II.

After my escape from Estonia in July 1940, I reported in Berlin to the Office of the Chief of German Mil. Intelligence. I was furnished with documents on the name of Aleksander KURBEL, and I and my family were sent for one month to Aich, Sudetenland. I was told that this was necessary to avoid trouble for me and for the German authorities because Germany was in "good" relations with the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Mil. Attache General Tupikov, who knew me well from the time when he was an Attache in Tallinn, could have recognized me in Berlin.

In late 1940, back in Berlin, I was offered German citizenship. I refused. Despite of this I was introduced in I.G. Farben Industries where a job was offered to me in the "Volkswirtschaftliche Abteilung" (intelligence work). The Mil. Intelligence furnished me with cover-documents of a German citizen under my real name. This was necessary while in the I.G. Farben Industries only German citizens could be employed.

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In I.G. Farben I worked on industrial intelligence research covering the Soviet leather- and shoe industry and different Soviet mining projects.

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Between work in I.G. Farben I visited different camps of repatriants from Estonia, with the intent to find agent-recruits willing to go back to Estonia in case of war between Germany and the Soviet Union. This I did on request of the "Abwehr II".

In June 1941, about two weeks before the start of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union, the German officer who helped me out from Estonia, in 1940, asked me to join his office in Helsinki, Finland, as a staff member of the Estonian intelligence unit "Erna", organized in Finland for participation in liberation of Estonia from Communists. I accepted and was sent to Helsinki. There I took charge of the agent-communications of "Erna". Again, I was offered the German citizenship, and again, I declined it. Instead, I asked and was incorporated as an Estonian volunteer in the Finnish Army.

In September 1941, when most of Estonia was freed from Communists, I requested, and got transferred to a subdivision of K.O.F. in Tallinn. Later, in November 1943, when K.O.F. withdrew from the activities in Estonia, I was transferred to the German mil. intelligence unit "F.A.K. 102", in Estonia. I remained with this unit up to its withdrawal from Estonia in July 1944.

Dissatisfied with German politics in Estonia, I wrote and submitted to my German and Finnish superiors two memorandums regarding the situation in Estonia (1943 and 1944), advocating immediate restoration of the independence of Estonia. As a result, I was put under house arrest, then summoned to the HQ of the German "Heeresgruppe Nord", where I defended my writings. The accusers had to agree that I had reported the bad truth, and they promised to send my memoranda to Berlin.

In connection with the anticipated armistice between Finland and the Soviet Union, and the withdrawal of FAK 102 from Estonia, I requested the release from the Finnish Army, and I reported as an Estonian officer to the Estonian mobilization center in Tallinn. I was assigned to the HQ of the German Army Group "Narva" in Estonia as a representative and liaison officer of the Estonian Inspector General, and of the Commander of Estonian "Self Defense" formations.

On 21 September I pleaded with the German C-in-C in Mõisaküla, South-Estonia, to forbid the demolition of the power station and of the water supply center of Tallinn when German troops will retreat from there. I got this order written into my pocketbook. I arranged this order to be radioed to Tallinn, and sped with the original order through the front or no man's land to Tallinn. There I helped to avoid last minute serious clashes between the retreating Germans and Communist-provoked groups of Estonians. I left Tallinn on 22 September 1944 with the last German sea transports headed for Ljepaya, Latvia.

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In Liiyepaya I joined the German mil.intelligence unit "F.A.K. 166 M" which formerly worked in close contact with "K.O.F." in Helsinki and Tallinn. With the help of this unit I went by ship from Liiyepaya to Kuressaare, Estonia, arriving there on 30th September. The aim of the trip was to try to organize there some resident-net of agents before the Germans would withdraw from this island also. This was in vain. There was no equipment locally available. I flew back to Latvia on 3 October and went to the HQ of the German Heresgruppe Nord, for help. I did not receive any, and I was forbidden to return to the island Saaremaa because the withdrawal from there was eminent. Thus I returned to F.A.K. 166 M in Liiyepaya and remained with it up to 4 May 1945. This unit, belonging to the Navy, was still able to continue to work despite the general disintegration of German forces.

During all my stay with the German units during WW II my work consisted of recruitment and training of Estonian and Russian agents, and organization and conduct of agent-communications. In the last mentioned unit I was also in charge of agents' take off for Estonia, in April 1945, for future anti-Communist work after the collapse of German forces.

On 04 May 1945 I went through the German-British front line and reported in Hamburg to the British mil. intelligence authorities, explaining the situation and asking help for continuation of work for which my agents had sacrificed themselves. The British detained me for interrogation up to July 1946. Rehabilitated then, I was kept in a safe house of the British military intelligence authorities in Germany up to 09 August 1946 when I was allowed to join my family in Displaced Persons' Camp "Oxford" near Dragahn in W.Germany.

15 November 1946 is the official date of my discharge from German Navy, as certified by the British "25 Disbandment Control Unit".

My Family.

I married in Narva, Estonia, on 25 October 1928. My wife Salme, née Epler, was born in Narva on 12 January 1909. She went to school in Narva, graduated from Gymnasium in 1927 and studied English and German languages in the University of Tartu for two semesters. Then we married and she discontinued the studies.

Our first son was born on 23 Jan 1931, in Tallinn. Our second son, Rein, was born on 04 May 1939, in Tallinn. We have no other children.

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My family followed me in Estonia through all the garrisons where I stayed for permanent duty, and also when I fled Estonia in 1940.

They had to remain in Berlin when I went to Finland in 1941. Upon my repeated requests I was allowed to bring them back to Tallinn, Estonia, in September 1942.

On 19 September 1944 I shipped them out of Tallinn, to Germany. I myself remained then in Tallinn. I found the family again in October 1944, in Kuehlungsborn near Rostock where I visited them many times, coming from Balga, East Prussia, or Nienhagen which was not far from Kuehlungsborn.

In April 1945 My family was evacuated from Kuehlungsborn to "Kreis Osterburg", which was later occupied by American units. After the Americans were changed out by the British, and just before the area was given over to the Soviets, my family was secretly helped out by the British officers and brought to Lueneburg, wherefrom they went to the Displaced Persons' Camp in Alt Garge.

From Alt Garge our older son Jaan went to Luebeck, to enter the Estonian Gymnasium organized there in D.P. Camp "Artillerie Kaserne", in autumn 1945.

My wife and our son Rein were transferred in summer 1946 from Alt Garge to Camp OXFORD in Dragahn, Kreis Dannenberg/Elbe, where I joined them a few month later.

From Camp Oxford my family was transferred together with me to Camp KUNGLA at Stolzenau, and later to Camp ESSEX near Lingen, where our son Jaan joined us again. From there we went all together to U.S. Immigration Processing Center in Wentorf, in September 1949.

Our immigration to United States was stopped due to my military record. During the waiting time our son Jaan entered the Bonn University, where he studied one year until he received a scholarship from the students of the Clemson Agricultural College in South Carolina. He left for the United States in September 1950. He received in Clemson B.S. and M.S. degrees, and is since 1956 a member of the U.S. Army, now as a Captain in QM School, Fort Lee, Va.

My wife and our son Rein immigrated to the United States in January 1952, and have lived all the time in New York, since April 1963 at the address: 46-05 90th Street, ELMHURST, N.Y., in a house we bought at this time.

Rein has finished a public school, the Brooklyn Polytechnical highschool and has earned his BA in the Hunter College. Now he is working for Master's degree in the Baruch School of business, New York City University.

My wife learned nursing when in Oxford Camp, and again when in Camp Kungla, and was licenced by the IRO as a practical nurse. She worked in Camp Hospitals (Sick bays) in Oxford and Essex Camps, and in U.S. Immigration Processing Center, and she was the Camp Nurse in Camp Kungla.

In the U.S.A. my wife has worked for two years as practical nurse in the Holy Family Hospital, for two years in the Globe and Rutgers Insurance Company, and since January 1956 she is working with the First National City Bank of New York.

In Germany, when in D.P. Camps, and in the U.S.A, up to 1960, my wife participated actively in the Estonian Girl Scouts' organizations.

My Work After WW II.

Soon after my release by the British in August 1940, I started to work in the Camp Administrative Office in Oxford Camp, and I advanced to the post of manager at this office, with up to 12 section leaders and clerks of different nationalities under my supervision.

In Camp Kungla at Stolzenau, whereto the Estonian group was transferred from Camp Oxford in 1947, I had the job of a "clerk-bilingual". Beside this I was elected the Chairman of the Camp Committee.

In 1948 I was selected, by the regional authorities, to be Office Manager, concurrently Deputy Camp Leader, of the new consolidated Estonian school camp ESSEX. There also, I was elected to the Camp Committee. Although I got the majority of votes, I insisted not to be the Chairman, and proposed the director of our Gymnasium for this post. The Committee agreed, and I was made Deputy Chairman.

In U.S. Immigration Processing Center, when my immigration to the U.S.A. was deferred, I managed to get a job there with the IRO, and I was elected Chairman of the Estonian congregation.

During my work in Wentorf, in March 1950, I was contacted by the British mil. intelligence authorities who had effected my release in 1946, and with whom I remained in contact up to 1947, reporting once monthly to the 93 Field Security Section. This time I was asked to work for them in Germany, interviewing these Germans who were at this time returning from P.O.W. camps in Soviet Union. As this work had to be done beside my long workhours in the IRO office, then the success was meager, and therefore I suggested that this contact be terminated. This was agreed to.

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My Present Job.

On 13 February I was contacted by a representative of my present employer. Some Estonian exile authorities had advised me, in their recommendation letters, to cooperate with him in the Estonian field of work. I consented under certain reservations, which I explained, and were accepted. I signed my first contract with this employer in Munich, Germany, on 05 September 1951.

Since this time I have worked with this Authority according to the orders received, at first in Munich and surroundings, and since March 1953 in Washington, D.C. or other places in the U.S.A., except one six month long TDY abroad in 1958/59.

During this period of more than 13 years some use was made of my:

- a) experiences in agent training and handling, and in preparation of plans of this training;
- b) experiences in interviewing and interrogation;
- c) experiences in assessment and selection of agents;
- d) area knowledge of Estonia;
- e) knowledge of different Estonians;
- f) knowledge of foreign languages, especially of Russian, German and Estonian, which I know better than English, and a little of French and of Finnish.

At the same time I have learned a lot, at work, and on four special courses given by the employer.

On my own initiative, beside the given assignments, I have worked on:

- a) improvement of my English, especially because the character of my work during most of the time did not facilitate, nor help, the normal improvement of it;
- b) research in the Soviet Estonian reality, as far as this was necessary in connection with my ordered work, and so far I had free time and access to materials during other periods of time. The results, in form of an improvised card file of more than 30.000 entries, and three reports, are in possession of the employer.
- c) different proposals regarding: the acquisition, the training, and the use of clandestine agents, different procedures of clandestine operations, methods of collection of information from Soviet Estonia, and from behind the Iron Curtain in general.

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My Present Attitude.

Nothing has changed in my general attitude since I joined my present employer, notwithstanding the periods of some dissatisfaction which I have been through, and which I have duly aired with my superiors. It is known that these periods brought me first to an attempt to join the U.S. Armed Forces, and later to filing of three applications with the Civil Service Commission, to check my professional qualifications against the American requirements. The Forces did not take me since at that time I was not yet an American citizen (1957/58). The Civil Service Commission found me eligible for positions in grade GS 12 in Military Intelligence Research work (1960), and ineligible for the position of a Historian, and of an Operations Research Analyst. Before and after that I have repeatedly been told by my supervisors that my stay with this employer is appreciated.

I know that in this kind of work a subordinate must trust the wisdom and the integrity of his superiors. However, it is my belief that a good helper must express his thoughts and doubts concerning the ways the work is being done or should be done, so that there would develop no ground for any distrust. I have declared this when entering this job, and I have practiced this although I knew that sometimes this was not in my personal interests. I do not mind the criticism by my superiors if this is objective. I am ready to carry the responsibility for my errors in work and behavior, and for my work and decisions, if I have to take them.

I understand that due to the changes in Communists' tactics, and due to the rapid development of the sciences, the methods of the intelligence work have changed a lot during the last decade, and that at this time, perhaps, there is now no need for the kind of help for which I was asked to join this employer. However, I feel that due to my rather manifold experiences and qualifications, and my rather broad general educational background, I am able to do valuable work even in these new circumstances.

I feel that I have always worked conscientiously. I have done what my superiors have asked me to do, and I have done lots more on my own initiative, as much as the official policies, and the limitations put upon me by the working conditions, permitted. I have honestly tried to keep myself in those limits.

I am in good health, and I like hard work. I am not choosy as to the character of work, provided it is in the field of the anti-Communist struggle, defensive or offensive, and that my superiors find me qualified to do it.

I have been in the anti-Communist struggle, in one way or in another, on my own initiative since 1940. This has brought me into great dangers and inconveniences at different times, and also to some satisfaction and to the feeling that I have done what I felt for my duty, and what I was able to do.

My political conviction urges me to stay in this field of work which needs people with zeal and self-control. I think that I have some of both. I have been able to remain calm when confronted with the enemies or a dangerous situation, although I sometimes have got a little excited when laboring to put through some of my ideas to my superiors, when forced to use a language in which I am not as fluent as the superior who speaks his own language, or when our convictions differed too much. However, I am an old officer who was taught to argue reasonably, and to advise until the superior takes the decision, and then to do one's best to carry out this decision, even if you do not like it, except if this is against your conscience: then report that you can not do this. Up to date I have never reached such a situation, although I have had sometimes to argue hard with my superiors, and to take hard decisions when on my own.

My wishes, as to the kind of work and place of work, are known: any work in which I could be of the best use in the general scope of the work, New York area is my first choice, but this does not eliminate other places or countries.


Aleks Kurgvel,
January 1964.

My Close Relatives.

Of my five sisters:

Olga Kurgvel, 65, is probably still alive in Kuressaare, Estonia. I have no direct contact with her. She writes sometimes to my other sisters in Sweden.

Ksenia Kurgvel, 64, Swedish citizen, lives in a suburb of Stockholm, and works in a private firm.

Ida Kurgvel, and
Liis Kereman, widowed, and her four children, drowned when Soviets torpedoed the ship with which my sisters tried to escape from Kuressaare in 1944.

Lootus Maripuu, 55, widowed, Swedish citizen, lives together with Ksenia Kurgvel, and works in a private firm.
Her three children, all Swedish citizens and married to Swedish citizens of Estonian descent, live in Sweden:

Oele Ussisoo, 36, housewife with two daughters;
Her husband Ilmar Ussisoo, about 40, an employee of the Swedish Government (mathematician, cartographer), live in a suburb of Stockholm,

Uelo Maripuu, 34, business manager in a private Swedish firm, his wife Juta, also working for a private firm, live in Goeteborg,

Maie Raid, 33, and
her husband Jueri Raid, about 33, live in a suburb of Stockholm, and work for private firms.

My Parents-in-law have both died in Estonia:
Karl Epler in 1950, Ida Epler, née Liblik, in 1956.

Of my wife's aunts one is known to be alive,
Miss Helene Liblik, 74, in Paris, France.

Since we lived far apart when still in Estonia, I had no close contact with my uncles and aunts. Nor have I any information regarding their fate now.

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