

War Then

by Paul de Denus

They marched in with long lines of allied prisoners and took over the whole town. A German soldier was assigned to each house. I was young, just a teenager and I remember being so afraid. We had little food so some men in our town shot the horses. My mother boiled them up like a stew, adding what few potatoes she could find. Some people risked everything helping prisoners escape along the roadside, pulling one or two soldiers into the cornfields and hiding them until the White Brigade could safely take them away. They were just boys, the Nazis I mean, young in their twenties, not much older than my brother Cyril. He was fit and they sent him to a work camp in Poland but he ran away and returned home when the war ended.

Eventually, the Americans came and they stayed longer. They would come to the small café where I worked, so happy to have a quiet place to eat and relax a little. Sometimes they'd sit out in the open fields and we'd bring them baskets of bread and something to drink. German planes caught them out there once and oh, shot those men to pieces. Their poor bodies were gathered in a barn. Later, we went in to look at them because we were curious.

We heard planes every day. We didn't know which ones they were or if they'd drop bombs on us. The Germans had a "silent" rocket, the V2 I think it was called. There was no real warning when one came in, just a whistling sound. We'd run for shelter, hoping it wasn't near. Oh, one killed my friends, you know. We were running down a street and I stopped in a doorway. They kept running. Right into it.

A family outside of town asked my mother if we would take in their newborn. They were farmers, poorer than us I suppose, the baby too much to handle. We took care of him for almost a year and then sent

him back. They paid my parents with vegetables and apples, whatever they had. My father worked in a factory where they sewed potato sacks. He used the same material to sew together wedding dresses for people in town who sometimes requested one. People still got married.

