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# LOOK OUT BELOW!

By REV. (Lt. Col.) FRANCIS L. SAMPSON

## 18 Thousand Starved To Death

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"Zaza" was one of the most interesting characters in the camp. He had been brought to the camp when he was not yet four years old. His parents had been killed in a bombing early in the war. An Italian soldier had picked him up and taken him with him.

As both of them had been picked up by the Germans and sent to Stalag II-A, Zaza had been reared in this abnormal environment.

He had never known or played with other children, and his manners were very grown-up. The stocky little fellow looked like a midget Mussolini although he would get fighting mad and throw stones at anyone who called him "Mussolini."

In this strange environment Zaza had matured way beyond his years; he fixed his own bunk, went to bed and got up when he chose, washed his clothes, and prepared his own food which he was able to scrounge from the Americans.

He was given the freedom of the entire camp. He could speak fluent Italian, some Polish, German, and French and could get along fairly well in English.

"Would you like to come to the United States with me when the war is over?" I asked him one day.

"I think America be vera nice," he replied, rubbing imaginary whiskers on his chin, "but Italy want us there; many things to build in Italy when war is over."

I never ceased to be astounded by his mature outlook, but I fear his abnormal childhood will result in later, emotional crisis. One day I went to the bathhouse to take a shower (a privilege the German commandant had granted me). The German in charge, however, said that there was no water. On my way back to the American compound I met Zaza, who had the same bathhouse privilege.

"Whassa mat?" he asked.

"The Heimele says 'no water'," I answered.

Zaza laughed. "He is liar." He went into the bathhouse confidently. I waited to have a laugh at Zaza's disappointment. Pretty soon Zaza stuck his head out of the window and called, "Come didn't I say he is liar." We both had a good shower.

The saddest part of prison life was the lack of the bare essentials for medical care. Quite a number of Americans and British had arrived at the camp with frozen feet.

Although the Serbian and the Polish doctors did everything they could and worked with heroic patience and skill, they were hopelessly handicapped by their lack of supplies. Five men had to have both their legs amputated; eighteen had to have foot or leg amputated. Many of these and other wounded were serious gangrene cases, and the lazaret was filled with pneumonia and dysentery patients. Many of these poor boys died.

The Polish doctors would sometimes actually cry when he himself, must ever be grateful for the price he paid for our

ultimate freedom. His Church recognizes here a sacrifice close y linked to the sacrifice of the crucified. To this ground we permit his mortal body, but into God's merciful and loving care we commit his immortal soul. Taps would be blown, and we would return to the camp.

Of the twenty-one thousand Russians who had been registered in the camp eighteen thousand died, most of them by starvation.

Every day the pitiful sight of a wagonload of naked corpses on its way to cemetery hill made us Americans mighty grateful for citizenship in a grasping, capitalistic country that has no regard for the masses. Russia has no affiliation with the West. Communists believe me, the Russians that survived needed no argument other than the sight of our parcels to convince them that there was something mighty phony about Uncle Joe and the government of the proletariat.

The hatred of the Germans for the Russians was just about incredible. The Russian dead were buried in pits five hours deep to a pit and lime was shoveled in on top of them. On one occasion when I was burying an American and two British soldiers, a Russian corpse had mistakenly been placed along side of the other three.

All four bodies were buried in coffins and separate graves. When the Germans discovered the mistake the next day, they dug up the Russian and dumped his body into the large pit with the hundreds of other Russian dead.

Some Russians were buried while still breathing, for if they were unconscious or in a coma, they were tossed into the wagon of corpses as it made its morning rounds. Doctor Hawes had examined some of the bodies of the Russians, at the request of the commandant, to verify what turned out to be authentic cases of cannibalism.

(Somehow or other the commandant thought that this was evidence of the Russian prisoners' degradation rather than of their own actions. He had been responsible for such inhuman conduct.) It was also a common thing for the Russians to keep their dead with them for days so that the dead man's meager rations could continue to be drawn from the kitchen.

At roll call a dead man would be held upright by the men on each side of him in the close, tight formation.

Horrible as all these things sound, I have come to believe that there is nothing that a starving man will not do to stay alive. Who can say that these poor, starved-out men were in any way responsible for their actions?

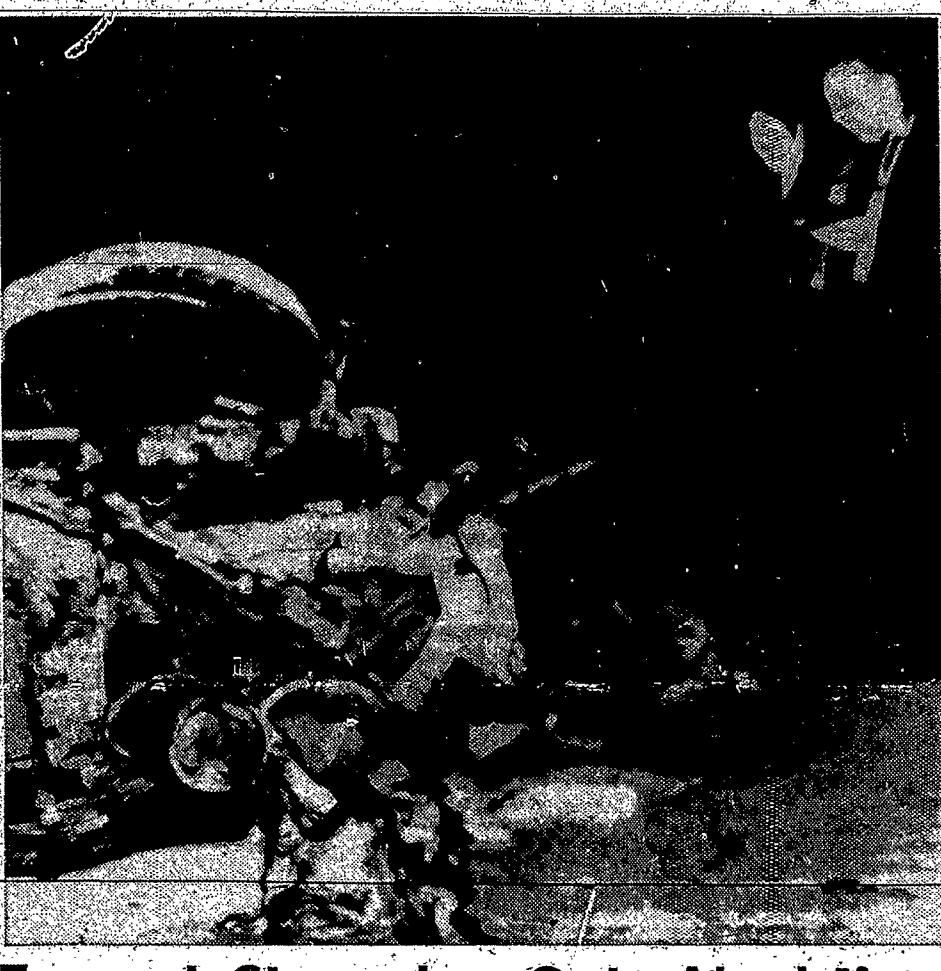
The above descriptions sound like wartime propaganda at its worst. Had I not seen and heard things myself I would seriously have doubted their actuality, no matter who told me. But in this instance there are thousands of living, reliable witnesses who can substantiate every word.

On one occasion a little fourteen-year-old Russian boy was caught stealing potatoes from the kitchen. A guard made the lad lie flat on the ground and stretch out his arms. The guard shot him through each hand.

One of the American aid men cared for the boy's wounds, and we collected some food for him. Two or three weeks later Sergeant Lucas managed to get the boy into our compound infirmary. When his wounds healed somewhat, he remained to help our own aid men.

He carried bed pans, washed and shaved the sick, scrubbed the place regularly, and became devoted to the Americans. I have never seen a happier boy in my life than when some Red Cross clothing came in and we fixed him in an American uniform.

NEXT WEEK—Prison Faith



## Trapped Stewardess Gets Absolution

Baltimore — (RNS) — Making the sign of the cross, a Catholic priest imparts absolution over the body of a stewardess trapped in this section of a Capital Airlines plane which crashed in Baltimore, killing 27 passengers and a crew of four. Civil Aeronautics Board investigators said the plane, powered by four jet engines with conventional propellers, apparently exploded or disintegrated in the air during a thunderstorm.

### Notre Dame Graduation Rite

Notre Dame — Cardinal Koehnig, Archbishop of Vienna, and Chairman John A. McCone of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission will be the principal speakers at the University of Notre Dame's 114th annual commencement exercises here June 13 (Sunday), it was announced today by Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., University president.

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## Chaplains Rap Obscenity Gains

Washington — (RNS) — The Military Chaplains Association of the United States called for a stronger campaign to protect youth from obscenity.

In a resolution adopted at their annual convention here, the chaplains said that the American public should be made aware of the quantity and quality of obscene and pornographic material available through the mail and on newsstands.

"AGAINST THIS background of public awareness, the law enforcement officers, public prosecutors and judicial officials—should be expected, in keeping with our Constitutional guarantees, to protect our citizens against the ravages of this contaminating evil which threatens the moral life of this nation," they declared.

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