



PRISONER OF WAR

by **Adrian Song**

HITLER WAS DEAD. HANS STARED ACROSS THE BATTLE-field in despair. In front, Soviet forces openly lined the entire ridge, not fearing attack from non-existent German artillery, nor from the decimated Luftwaffe. Behind, American forces waited patiently in a defensive posture. Between them were the remnants of the once-mighty German Army. Hitler was dead. One week ago, Hans was battling furiously against the Americans. A desperate rear-guard action to hold them at bay. Gone were the euphoric first days of the war, when they had stormed across Europe and the Soviet Union. They had seemed unstoppable. Then a failed air campaign against Britain. Then a catastrophic winter in the East. Then the shock of an Allied invasion of German-occupied Europe that actually succeeded. Since then, it had been a relentless advance of the western forces, pushing them back. His unit had fought well, holding themselves together while others collapsed. He was contemptuous of his comrades that fled or gave up, and scornful of the cowering women and children of the German towns and villages they retreated past. Cowards! Had not the Fuhrer promised victory? Just fight! Final

victory is at hand! But retreat turned to rout. And town after town fell. Then two days ago came unthinkable orders... all units were to abandon the western front and head east to fight the Soviets, so as to surrender as much as possible to the western forces. He remembered receiving those orders in shock. He had screamed at his commander. He had no quarrel with the Soviets! It was the hated Americans he wanted to fight! How could they just give up? His commander had made no reply, and only looked past him with sad, empty eyes. Hitler was dead. Hans stared across the battlefield in despair. There was nothing left to fight for. He had seen the Soviet soldiers. Russian survivors from previous Nazi brutality, hungry for blood. They would show no mercy. A whistle blew and the Soviet line lurched forward. Hans looked around desperately. Less than a hundred German soldiers remained. They had no chance. As one, the German soldiers abandoned positions and ran towards the American lines, waving white flags. The Americans, who seemed to have been waiting for that moment, rushed forward to meet them in pairs. At first, one American would point his weapon at the German. The second would hastily check he had no weapons, then slap a blue flag on his helmet, declaring him to be a prisoner of war. The first soldier would immediately swing his weapon towards the approaching Soviet forces, indicating he was now under American protection. Hans glared at the soldiers approaching him with hatred and screamed abuse at his would-be captors, then threw his rifle down in disgust and surrendered. They quickly slapped the flag on his helmet and ushered him to safety.

Epilogue One week later, Hans was confused. He had expected torture and hard labour. Instead, he was given a bunk, hot food, and a wash. He was better off here than he had been as a soldier in the collapsing German Army. During lunch, he had found his ex-commander and spoke to him. Why were they being treated so well? Weren't the Americans their enemy? Ja, came the reply. And weren't we their enemy? A pause. Only because we started it. Hans was silent for a long time. Only because we started it.... Hans pondered. Then broke down and wept bitterly. For all the waste, fighting against an enemy that had never wanted to fight

to begin with. After an endless moment, he straightened himself, wiped his nose and looked at his ex-commander. “So, what do we do now?” He asked. Just then, an American officer walked in and drawled, “We got some German units about to be overrun by the Soviets. We’re taking some tanks to “overrun” them first. But it’d sure be helpful if we had German-speakin’ folk along with us to explain we’re really tryin’ to save ‘em, know what I mean?” A slow smile crossed Hans’ face as he got up and walked over to the officer.