

The Choice
by Christian O'Kane

The end of the war in Europe was different for each person. The bloody last stand of the Storm Korp in their Black Forest base has and continues to garner most of the media attention. Rhine Maiden died there - as brutal, cruel and ruthless as ever. In the end all her fancy sword moves didn't save her. Gewitter was there too and died trying to kill the prisoners still held by the Korp. A fitting end for such a killer. Even though he wasn't really German, Mjolner too was there and was one of the last to die. His body was later returned to Norway where it was cremated and the ashes scattered in a secret location. Fleur too died there still shooting flames and trying to cleanse the world of lesser beings. The French didn't want her body back so it was buried in a secret location somewhere in Germany. But not all Nazi Supers were there.

Blut Wulf fled the armies of both sides and sought refuge in the deep woods. He was eventually tracked down and captured in 1947. Put on trial he was declared mentally unfit and spent over a decade in a mental institution. There he finally got the help he so desperately needed. Zweihander committed suicide by deliberately charging a British tank column and fighting to the death. Something known in the U.S. as 'suicide by cop'. His famous sword now rests in a well armored display case in the Imperial War Museum. You can still see the marks made on the blade by the treads of a Cromwell tank. Killerwal simply swam out to sea and was never seen again. He remained on the Navy's 'Potential Enemy' list till 1975 but was never encountered. Jaeger surrendered to the Americans, was convicted of helping to execute prisoners and served 5 years in prison. When released he joined a monastery. Lowe sold himself and his skills to the Americans and spent the rest of his life developing his armored suits for military and civilian work. New York city alone has 45 of his model AW211 Emergency rescue suits. Toten decided to continue fighting for fascism in a terrorist/guerilla campaign that killed mostly civilians. He was finally captured and hanged in 1946. Much to the great relief of everyone, especially the Germans. Tuftler simply took off his uniform and went home. And since he had been solely in support and never fought anyone no charges were pressed against him. He was a founding member of the West German Supers group and served honorably till his death in 1989.

Each made different choices but all had to decide where and how to end the war.
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The super powered villain (or hero depending on your point of view) code named Doppelsoldner arrived in the town of Kelheim on the morning of April 14th 1945. The trip in the large halftrack had been long and arduous over paths that were more shell holes than roads. He desperately wanted to lay down and sleep for a week but there was no time. Even tired and a little bruised Major Philip Ritter made sure his armor was fully adjusted and correct before stepping out.

The figure that stepped out of the vehicle stood seven feet tall and was dressed in the massive plate armor of a 15th century Teutonic knight complete with the large cylindrical, great helm. In his left hand was a massive, kite shaped shield. Dangling from his belt was a large, spike headed

mace. The armor was painted the standard gray that matched the color of the standard army uniform. On the chest plate was the Balkenkreuz - the black cross emblem of the German army. On the shield was the stylized eagle that was the centuries old emblem of Germany.

Philip Ritter, the man inside the impressive looking suit did not understand the suit itself. It was made of a metal that was far tougher than steel but a lot lighter. As for the tiny motors and electronics that moved it so effortlessly he knew even less. All he knew was that sergeant Brandt (who had degrees from several universities) would spend several hours a day repairing, tinkering and adjusting it. Even he would spend time each day oiling and greasing the moving parts. But it was well worth all the effort for it made him invulnerable to small arms and any gun below 9cm. He could (and had on several occasions) simply walk through intense machinegun fire or an artillery barrage unscathed except for some chipped paint. The suit also greatly enhanced his strength making his 90 kg mace feel like it was only 1 kilogram. The sheer mass of the weapon let him smash tanks, trucks and walls with ease. But fighting regular enemy troops was not what had done for the last 5 years. Instead he had fought the super powered enemies of Germany like Mother Russia, Iron Wolf and the members of the First Hero brigade.

In the early days it had been glorious, helping drive their enemies before them and winning great victories. But gone were the glory days of 1939 & 40. All those great victories were just distant memories. The heady victory over France in 1940 seemed like a distant memory or some fantastic dream. The dreams of Poland, Norway, France, Belgium and North Africa had been followed by the nightmare that had been the Russian campaign.

As the hero of the Reich Doppelsoldner Philip seemed to have spent the last two years racing from one crisis to another fighting fierce battles with mixed results. But whether a victory or a defeat all the battles seemed to end the same way - retreat. Today he had arrived at the latest crisis. Orders from Berlin had grown increasingly more chaotic and confused to the point of being incoherent before finally stopping completely. His last order had come from the field marshal himself. "Defend the town of Kelheim at all costs," delivered over a static filled phone line. After giving that order the field marshal, with no army left to command had walked into the woods and committed suicide.

Waiting for him in front of the town hall was the entire garrison of the town. The town's total defense was the local Volksturm formation. That consisted of 95 men most of whom were too old or too young to have been drafted before now and they were either over 60 or under 15 years old. Most were young enough to be his son or old enough to be his grandfather. The young were too enthusiastic to fight and the old were only thinking of how to surrender as quickly and bloodlessly as possible. For weapons they were equipped with a mix of Italian, Belgian and Dutch rifles and possessed 2 (WW1 vintage) maxim machine guns and 9 panzerfaust.

He was very glad when the promised reinforcements arrived. With them he had hopes they might hold the town, then he got a good look at the reinforcements. The armored super stood at attention and looked confident as the elements of the Kampfgruppe slowly clattered and rattled past him. This was not hard as the helmet hid all traces of his real emotions.

Kampfgruppe Steiger consisted of 3 mark IV tanks, 2 hetzer tank destroyers, 1 pak 40 antitank gun, 1 battery of artillery using a mix of six Russian and Italian howitzers (found in a training center) and 87 panzer grenadiers. All of them looked battered, worn, thin and gaunt, even the horses pulling the artillery and the antitank gun. With that mix he was supposed to stop the entire U.S. 42nd infantry division over 18,000 strong including a full battalion of tanks and another of tank destroyers. All of which would be fully supported by the dreaded Jabos - the fighter bombers that would come screaming down strafing and bombing everything.

It was a small group that gathered in the cellar of the town hall. Just Doppelsoldner, the town mayor and a handful of officers including Captain Steiger and the head of the Volksturm unit.

The commander of the Kampfgruppe; Oberleutnant Steiger was a tall man in his early twenty's but he had a face lined with wrinkles and scars that made him look twice that age. He saluted and handed a small paper to Doppelsoldner. "We received that an hour ago by radio. It's for you sir."

The orders were plain and blunt. "Report immediately to Banshee. Signed General Wenrult." Philip read and reread the orders several times.

"What is Banshee? If I may ask, sir," The lieutenant asked.

"Banshee is code name for the Storm Korp headquarters in the Black forest," the super answered.

"Why do they want you there?" The officer asked. "No one has attacked that area."

"They have decided on some last ditch stand," the armored super explained. "They want to make some glorious fight to the death. And they have decided I should die with them."

"We need you here sir," the officer said.

"I've heard rumors about that place," the Mayor commented. "It's supposed to be an underground fortress."

"It was dark, damp and dreary. I haven't been there since I left the Korp over 3 years ago but I doubt it's gotten any better," Doppelsoldner commented.

"You're not in the Storm Korp?" Steiger asked, surprised. "I thought that all super powered people are in it."

"Not all of us," the knight answered and paused for a moment. "I had a falling out with them some time ago."

"A falling out?" The Mayor asked.

Before he could answer the door opened and a German soldier rushed in. The man was dirty and there was a bandage on his right arm from wrist to elbow. The sergeant saluted. "Sir, I wish to report the Americans took Arelburg two hours ago."

"Are you sure of this?" Kreiger asked.

"Yes sir," the man answered. "Colonel Schmidt sent me here to warn you. The Ami took town hall just after I left. "

"What of the town?" The mayor asked. The middle aged man was standing to one side and looked worried.

"Badly damaged, sir. The SS fought hard but the Americans overwhelmed them."

The color drained from the mayor's face and he crossed himself.

"I got a report from the village of Munlich. They say that Americans took the village about an hour ago," Steiger pointed to a spot on the map. "Munlich is here."

Doppelsoldner looked at the map for a moment. "We have two hours before they get here." He already knew how this would go. The Americans would get close and his troops would open fire. There would be a lot of chaos and shooting while he disabled and destroyed the enemy tanks. Finally the Americans would withdraw. Then one of two things would happen; The Americans would pull back and drench the town in artillery fire while their jabos bombed and strafed. Then they would attack again. Or they would pull back and wait for help from the First Hero brigade. In the mean time they would drench the town in artillery fire while their jabo bombed and strafed. Then they would attack. Either way it meant the destruction of the city and the death of hundreds or thousands of civilians.

The super didn't have to stay here. He could go to the Black forest. There he could fight one last battle. But he still hated them. Philip hadn't lived with the Storm Korp, so why should he die with them? Doppelsoldner would find his own place to die.

Philip could stay here in this place and die honorably. It would be a great battle, epic and memorable. He looked to the Volksturm commander; a man in his seventy's. Beside him was a boy of no more than twelve. The look on the boy's face was a mix of fear and determination and told him all he needed to know. As long as Doppelsoldner fought so would they. His death would also see the death of many of these eager boys. And how much of the town would be destroyed in the process? How many MORE civilians would die?

There was another choice. Surrender. It was well known that the Ami were lenient and merciful towards civilians. They might strip the town of all forms of alcohol but there wouldn't be the looting, raping and killing that all too often happened with the Russians and the Germans. But for him surrender meant a long, public trial and probably life in prison or even worse - hanging. He really feared being hung like some common, street hoodlum. It was a dishonorable death and one unfit for a soldier.

Some choices were easy. He looked at the message that he still held in his hand for a moment. Then calmly put one end of the paper into the candle light. Everyone was silent as the order vanished into flames taking with it his last connection to the Storm Korp.

"Your orders sir?"

The arrival of Combat command B, 42nd infantry division in Kelheim was a lot less exciting than expected. Rumor had spread that a super was there and everyone expected hard fighting. Instead the lead tank encountered a single, soldier standing in the middle of the road holding a large white flag.

The tank simply stopped about thirty yards from the figure and just waited. In a few moments a jeep raced up along the road skirting the armored vehicles on one side and the deep ditch on the other. It pulled to a halt a mere ten yards away.

The first person out of the jeep was wearing a somewhat battered American army uniform and had a rifle in his hands but this was no normal soldier. This person had the head of a white, black and brown furred dog. He even had the long bushy tail of one stretching out behind him. This was Democracy Dog even the German officer recognized him. The superhero it seemed was always in the news. With strong strides the canine hero walked up to the officer. "What do you want?"

"You are late," the German said in English in way of greeting. "We expected you here three hours ago."

"We had to stop for a beer," the American answered in flawless German.

"I am Oberlietnaunt Kreiger. I have been sent by the Commander to negotiate for the town."

"No talk," the canine barked. "Surrender and the town will be spared."

Those harsh words did not get the response the American had expected. The German simply nodded. "Good. This way please."

The drive into town was slow and cautious. The column moved at a slow pace, wary of an ambush. The streets were narrow and the buildings were painfully close, leaving no room to maneuver or hide in case of an ambush. But the streets were empty, nothing moved or was visible. The super kept looking around at the shuttered windows, closed doors and empty streets. He saw nothing and no one but he felt as if he was being watched by a thousand people. "A city of ghosts," the driver muttered. The soldier was trying to drive the jeep and look all around at the same time.

"Relax Bill," the canine hero said and patted the man on the shoulder. "We're fine. Just keep your eyes on the road."

The jeep turned a corner as the buildings fell back and they entered the broad open plaza at the center of the town. There neatly lined up on either side were the soldiers and volksturm of the garrison. They were standing in front of their few vehicles and equipment. The only things missing were the artillery. There was simply no room for the large guns although the gunners were present and like the rest standing at attention. At the front was Doppelsoldner. His armor had been cleaned and repainted but he had his helmet off and tucked under one arm. On the pavement in front of him was his massive shield but in his right hand was that famous war mace.

The American hero leapt out of the jeep as electricity danced along his arms and hands. His lips pulled back in a snarl and there was a light of anger in his eyes.

Philip looked at the advancing American and calmly placed his mace on the street in front of him. "I hereby surrender myself, the town Kelheim and all in it."

The American super stood there for a moment looking down at the mace and up at its owner. "That's it? No yelling or dramatic speech? No stupid fight to the death?"

"No," the German responded. "I am not an actor and I'm too tired for a temper tantrum. The town and my troops will be fairly treated?"

"Of course!" The canine answered. "I will hold you responsible for their behavior."

"They will give you no problems," Philip responded. "I will see to that."

"Are there any others like you around?" The American super asked.

Doppelsoldner shook his head. "No. All the rest have gone to the Black forest and the Storm Korp base there."

"Then we will have to dig them out," the canine commented more to himself than to anyone else.

"Be very careful," Philip commented. "It truly is a fortress with all manner of weapons and deadly traps."

From the ranks a child, a boy with blonde hair and who was dressed in mismatched and oversized bits and pieces of different uniforms rushed forward. He raced straight up to the Super and pounded his small fists on the man's armor.

Philip looked down at the boy. In the child's face he saw, anger, fear and loathing as the boy cursed him as a traitor and for deserting the fatherland. He wanted to fight and die for the fuehrer. That was how he wanted to end the end. Using one finger he gently closed the boy's

mouth silencing him. "Hush," he said in a tone that was surprisingly soft for coming from someone so hard. "You are too young to choose to die in a war that is already over. Hitler is Germany's past. You are its future. We need you. I need you. Germany needs you to rebuild it from the apocalypse and devastation that has engulfed it. To rebuild her, stronger than before. And guide her on the right path so that we have a fair and just government and so your son does not ever know war like you have. Now go home and be a boy, like you are supposed to be. That is an order."

Anger and confusion alternated on the boy's face. Behind the anger and harsh words Philip saw something else start to show - relief. It was slowing sinking into the twelve year old boy that the war for him was over and he would indeed live to see thirteen. He stood very still for a moment then gave a sigh of relief. "Yes sir."