

Lycanthrope Legionnaire
January 15, 2013
Panzerkrieg Chronicles: Part 2, Netherlands - Chapter 1

Requiem without Repose

Hauptmann's Notes

*Taylon Ritter, Hauptmann
Fifth Panzer Army Remnants
Panzerkampfwagen Tiger 432 (DIA)
Namur, Belgium
7a.m. September 1st, 1944*

This is my first time writing since our failure at Reims. By now, all of France has most likely fallen to the Americans, British, and Canadians. The French are free to danger us once more with their proximity and unquelled, violent nature. I fear they may have gotten to Montbert and hung him. I've been asking around but no one has heard of his escape, or death. I hope my friend is well and makes his way to us again someday. I already miss his accent and laughably terrible skill at card games.

I dare not command my men directly because I weep at the loss of Sven as often now as I piss. A commanding officer does not cry like a baby in front of his men unless he wants them to soften and falter.

He is my every thought, of every minute. I let him down, I let him die, I let them take him from me. We had such plans to accomplish. We were going to keep Germany safe, we were going to see the Nazi's thrown from power, we were going to live out our days in the forest. There was so much promise, so much to look forward to, so much love. It's gone now, Jägerwolf, Sven. All of it taken from me by those villains.

I'll not let them get away with this. Those "allies" are not friendly liberators, they are murderous thugs out to destroy Germany, my men, and myself. They've always been planning to finish us off since the Great War, just like pa-pa always said. I will stain my hands with the blood of them all, to their very last man. None are innocent.

Fifth Panzer Army Remnants: 7:45a.m. September 1st, 1944

Overwhelming despair, two words to sum up the entire camp of Fifth Panzer Army remnants. Not one man had a smile on his face, not even a grin. Each and everyone was looking down at his feet, blankly ahead of himself as he walked, or up into the sky seeking favor from some deity. This was the reality brought on by the onset of the crumbling Reich. With France liberated, the invincible German war machine was now facing extreme losses on both sides of the war. News that the NCO's denied were true came in scarce shreds, Russia was on a winning warpath. Besieged from both sides and facing catastrophic losses, the Fifth Panzer Army had reason to fear for their Fatherland's well being. With each day they were pushed farther back into territory they had conquered in their much-lauded Blitzkrieg years before. Each and every soldier had defeat on their minds, even the three men huddled under a tarp stretched between two trees. The Saint Bernard, German shepherd, and fox all conversed in hushed tones, the same as every somber soul around them. Serge Aegerter slowly nursed at his field-tin of water with a grumble. The Bernard was none too happy to be deprived of his most sacred morning ritual, coffee, and it was reflected in both his face and tone.

"This war is unbearable without coffee." Serge gestured with his free hand to all the stalhem clad soldiers trudging through the makeshift camp. "How do all of them work and fight without it?"

The fox, Eckart Brandt, chimed in with a sullen mumble. "Most of us are independently operating creatures, Serge. We start our engines by just waking up and putting a little bread in our bellies."

"Sounds like black magic to me." The Bernard scowled and looked down to his tin before resigning himself to another sip. "I haven't been able to get up right without getting myself a cup of coffee in years."

A young man's voice rose up from the rucksack nestled against the base of the right tree holding up the tarp. "That's pretty bold Serge, to say you do anything yourself."

Across the tiny space under the tarp Serge's jowls rose up and the dog growled at his German shepherd subordinate. "What's that pup? I couldn't make out your squeaky voice from the birds. When are your balls due to drop anyway?"

The rucksack practically shredded open as the black shepherd threw it open in a rage. "Say that to my face fatty, I dare you!"

The Bernard sipped his water nonchalantly as Eckart looked on. He licked his lips and cleared his throat. "Your balls... haven't... dropped. Go back to suckling your mother's teat."

Nicholas Reen, the shepherd, scrambled across the ground like a furious, canine crab. He came to a stop with a fist balled and curled back. "You bastard! I'll rip that tongue of yours from your mouth, provided it's not stuck up the Hauptmann's ass."

Serge swallowed his water, hard. The behemoth of a dog got to his feet and stood up, towering a foot over the shorter shepherd who menaced his chest with his angry stance. "You take that back. Don't insult Hauptmann Ritter."

"I wasn't insulting the commander. I was just commenting on your lack of ability to not hide behind him, with your nose up his asshole!"

The two dogs looked like if there were any time to come to blows, it would be now. Eckart looked from Serge to Nicholas, then back to Serge, then back to Nicholas. The fox's tongue was dry and he was panicking to find words to calm his crewmates and friends. Serge's eyes narrowed and his uniform bulged as he drew back one of his massive arms and curled his hand into a fist. Nicholas' hackles rose up and the shepherd fangs came to light, bared for all around to see. Soldiers all around the panzer crew stopped their trudging and melancholy chores to watch the two dogs rise at each other. Everyone in the camp was on edge and balanced on a hair trigger, best friends were at each other's throats from the stress of constant retreat and near-death encounters.

"LEUTNANT AEGERTER, UNTEROFFIZIER REEN!"

Like the word of god made manifest, the air around the camp silenced in awe. Every soldier tensed up and rose to attention. Dirt-caked heels clacked together, backs straightened up tightly, and hands flew into the air in salutes. Every man within ear shot instantly rose to the shout and stood silent where they had been in the camp, facing the same general direction. All eyes and bodies except Serge's and Nicholas' were pointed at the green tent at the back-left corner of the camp and the black wolf that stood there seeming ten feet tall. Like someone had put a gun to their heads, all color disappeared from any visible flesh on the two confronting dogs.

Serge was first to react of the two, his legs straightened together and his hand went out and up into the air in a salute. "Hauptmann Ritter, sir!"

Nicholas followed suit just as quickly and in the same order. "Sir!"

Behind Serge, whose bulk blocked Nicholas' view towards the tent, the jet-black wolf strolled forwards with anger and purpose in his step. His coat-tails kicked up with his boots' steps and the wolf's arms were statically bent in a state of rage. The soldiers around the two dared not move; all were silent and frozen in place as their ranking officer stormed past them with the air of due respect on par with the Fuhrer himself. The white tips of the wolf's ears, and his crisp officer's cap came to a halt right behind Serge, the wolf a half foot taller than his Bernard gunner.

“What is the meaning of this!? Explain yourselves, now!”

Serge tried to respond, but his words hung in his throat like he had swallowed a billiards ball whole. “I... we-“

Nicholas had no such burdens; the young shepherd spoke quick and clearly, though a bit shakily. “Sir, Serge and I were just discussing the outcome of the latest American baseball game! He was upset the Yankees won, sir!”

From behind Serge the wolf’s hand came into view as it placed itself on the chubby dog’s hip. With a shove, Serge was pushed sideways, the Bernard stumbled but regained composure and stood straight in his new spot as the Hauptmann walked up to and stared down at Nicholas.

“Cut the smart-ass remarks Unteroffizier.” The wolf growled down at his subordinate. “Lie to me again and you’ll find yourself the one with your nose up someone’s ass.”

From the ranks of saluting soldiers surrounding the confrontation there was a snide shout that suddenly drained the color from everyone in the camp, except the Hauptmann. “Plenty of us have died while you had yours buried in your faggot lover’s ass.”

Silence became the weather in the camp. There were no birds, no leaves, no wind, no breathing, no shuffling of feet, no words. There was just silence, a wolf who slowly turned towards the direction of the shout with eyes like daggers, and the eyes of everyone else who spun towards the man who had shouted it out, singling him out quickly. Around the greyhound who had let loose the insult every other soldier slowly stepped aside in directions opposite from him. The greyhound, a Feldwebel, stood defiantly as the Hauptmann stepped one thunderous pace at a time towards him. A rare sight amongst the retreating soldiers, the Hauptmann’s hackles rose even from the collar of his jacket and his fangs slowly came to view as his composure faltered and he quickened his threatening gait towards the greyhound that now started hemorrhaging his once bounteous courage. Ten feet, five, one, the space between the wolf and dog was barely enough to fit another person in and the Hauptmann’s snout looked ready to lunge downwards and rip the greyhound’s throat out.

With venom and barely-restrained violence the wolf’s words slowly slipped past his growling lips. “What is your name, Feldwebel?”

The dog swallowed his own tongue, or at least it looked like it with the effort it took him to swallow and clear his throat. “L-Leopold Hofacker.”

Tense and deafeningly silent seconds dragged by. Both parties just stared at each other, one with murderous intent, and the other with infinitesimal amounts of bravery left. The Hauptmann seemed to be regaining his composure as his neck-fur started to lower. Most around him started to relax just a bit, suddenly remembering their commanding officer’s penchant for

forgiveness to his troops. This unanimous lowering of guards was not to last however.

“Feldwebel Hofacker. If you *ever* bring into question and or attempt to sabotage or smear my leadership again I will have you shot for insubordination.”

The greyhound’s eyes sank backwards in their sockets and his hands trembled. Across from him the Hauptmann’s hands tightened even further, one rose up to his neck to adjust the collar of his overcoat.

“You will be shot by your comrades and your body will be left as carrion for the local wildlife. Do you understand the severity of your claims and the punishment to be given if you should do so again?”

Stricken mute in fear the dog managed to meagerly nod his head in threatened understanding. No more words were exchanged; the Hauptmann simply turned around and walked back to his quarreling crew members who still stood at attention under their tarp. Behind the strolling wolf the greyhound bowed a bit at the legs and spun his head to look at all the soldiers around him. He gave them all a look like that of a wounded puppy, none gave sympathy back. They all looked away, on purpose, ignoring him like they would a leper. The Hauptmann came to a halt back at his men. He looked to Nicholas who immediately stood up just a bit straighter, hurting his back a bit in the process, then to Serge. The Bernard too tried to stand up straighter, not doable as he already ran as parallel to the Hauptmann as his spine would allow.

Hackles still lowering and fangs not bared to his gunner, the wolf growled, “Serge, I expect not one more instance of this foolery. Control yourself or you will find yourself on permanent latrine duty.”

The Bernard looked up to the wolf and kept his face straight and devoid of emotion. “Jawohl!”

“Good.”

Done reprimanding, and his composure regained, the wolf turned around once more to face all the assembled soldiers. All stood at attention, even the shaky greyhound with a wet-spot at the front of his trousers managed to stand at attention despite fearing for his life. The crowd of Fifth Panzer Army remnants, 150 men strong counting the Hauptmann and his three remaining crew, were all present for the impromptu briefing that followed the tense display of the last ten minutes.

“Men. I understand that all of you are hungry, sore, tired, and your bodies are not built for this sort of constant torment”

The wolf’s right arm rose up in a curled fist and then turned to point Southwest in the woods.

“But those murderers will not stop killing us or trying to destroy our homes. We have bought our

lives by making it to Germany's lines. But our fighting and marching doesn't stop here. Today we will be heading Northwest, 200 miles to a train depot in Northern Belgium. There, most of you will be reassigned to different divisions. The Fifth Panzer Army is officially disbanding and being absorbed into other forces once we reach our destination. I know that my crew and I will be receiving a new Tiger and driver once we arrive in Belgium, then we will be sent further North into the Netherlands to train in our new charge.

The Hauptmann's hands lowered to his sides and the wolf looked up to the sky in a couple quiet seconds of contemplation. He looked back down with tears just starting to well up in his eyes and a frown that was desperately being fought back by the wolf.

"It has been an honor serving with you all, but this is the last day I will most likely see any of you. I apologize for the idiocy of my crew this morning, and the baseless accusations made by Feldwebel Hofacker." The greyhound's legs weakened once more and eyes spun to look at him all across the assembled soldiers at the mention of his stupid, near-suicidal outburst.

"You are to all be ready to leave by 9a.m. sharp. We are on a schedule today, men; fit as many of you to each truck and car as you can. Comfort is not a luxury you can afford if you want to keep fighting for Germany. If you don't report to our destination, you will be absorbed immediately into the Ardennes defensive line. You all saw their conditions as we passed them. You do not want to be standing shoulder to shoulder with those poor souls."

In the center of the camp, where he stood, the wolf threw his heels together and saluted to all of his men with as much straightness and earnest intent as he could. "I will not be your commanding officer tomorrow, but I hope that I have imparted onto you the bloodlust and determination of the German people we fight for. You will not falter, I will not falter, we will not turn on one another, and we will never let these invaders into Germany."

The wolf reached into his overcoat with his right hand and grasped a tiny locket in the middle of his palm. "Fight for your family, your home, and your loved ones. FIGHT FOR GERMANY, OR NOTHING!!!"

The assembled soldiers all cheered and shouted. Battle cries were yelled even though all around them was friendly territory. Squads came together in groups and gave each other hugs and handshakes. Singing started to break out among far corners of the gathered soldiers. Many took the Hauptmann's warning very seriously and started getting all of their things together and scurrying to quickly get a reserved seat inside a cargo truck, halftrack, or staff car. The camp, which had this morning so far been lazy, then tense almost to the point of mutiny, was now a bustle of activity and drive. With a purpose in their step all 150 men set about packing up their belongings and securing them away for the trip to Northern Belgium.

Fifth Panzer Army Remnants: 8:00a.m. September 1st, 1944

Hauptmann Ritter turned around once more to face his men. Serge and Nicholas didn't make a peep, in fact the two tried to avoid contact as best they could. Eckart got up on his feet and cracked his back.

The fox yawned and stretched as he spoke. "So, we're getting thrown right back in the fire already? And they're already got a replacement for Sven. God, not an ounce of time to even grieve or mourn."

The wolf retorted back with stiffness in his voice. "Sven is dead Eckart, we all know that. And more will die, that is far beyond truth, it is fact. But we can lessen those tolls when put in command of Germany's finest creations once more. We are going to the Netherlands to take command of the Fatherland's biggest predator."

Serge and Nicholas both looked upwards, though still submissively, at word of their new Panzer. Both were thinking to ask, but the usually last-on-the-uptake Eckart beat them to it.

"What Tiger are we to be in? What's her designation number? Will she still be Jägerwolf?"

The wolf's voice cleared a bit, his occupied mind becoming less-muddled by the reassuring voice and interest of his crew and closest comrades. "We will always be the crew of Jägerwolf, and her designation is Königstiger 526."

Serge, Eckart, and Nicholas all looked to the wolf in awed unison. Serge was the first one off the line this time. "You mean?"

The Hauptmann interrupted. "Yes Serge, we will command Germany's finest instrument of war. The invaders have no chance. She will be invincible, and we will give no quarter. We will kill every one of those loathsome ilk and need not fear any gun they can bring to bear on us. Now, see to your things. We're leaving in an hour."

The Hauptmann about faced and strolled back to, then into, his tent just as quickly as he had emerged from it earlier that morning. With the tell-tale shuffle of tarp his flap closed and the wolf was gone from sight and hearing.

Serge looked to his crewmates and whispered to the fox and shepherd. "First off, sorry for exploding at you, Nicholas."

"No worries, Serge, sorry I called you a fat kiss-ass."

"No offense still taken, and speaking of which, that's what I wanted to talk about."

Eckart cocked his head and scratched at his lower back. “What the hell are you talking about Serge?”

“Eckart you are hopeless... Innuendo and double meanings are lost on you.” The Bernard shook his head dismissively. “Anyway, did you see how Hauptmann Ritter exploded on that Hofacker guy?”

Nicholas swallowed out of memory of the fright and worry the greyhounds shout had imparted on everyone. “Yeah, that guy was out of line, and his mind.”

“Yeah yeah, sure Nicholas. I’m talking about the Hauptmann’s reaction, did you guys see it?”

Eckart chimed back in. “Sure, we all did, he was practically going to kill him on the spot.”

Serge nodded and slapped his fist in his palm. “Right! Now, when have you ever seen him lose his cool like that? When has he ever not been calm, collected, and relaxed?”

Nicholas cocked his head, widened his snout in glee, and answered. “Never, except for just now!”

Serge raised one jowl in a look of ‘oh for Pete’s sake’. “No you idiots, the Night Sven was killed and we lost 432 was the first time. Now think about all the rumors going around from the other guys seeing him that night and how he always walks around clutching that locket now. Now think about how he reacted today when that idiot Hofacker called him out on the rumors about him and Sven.”

Eckart’s ears stood straight up in realization. “Nooo...”

Serge nodded. “It has to be! That would explain why Sven never got in trouble for disobeying or being difficult with Hauptmann Ritter. And why they always seemed to disappear for no reason, or for Sven to be ‘disciplined’.”

Nicholas’ jaw fell open in shocked realization. “Mein gott! So the rumors are true then. They were ‘lovers’?”

Serge nodded a final time. “Correct. That’s the only explanation.”

Eckart frowned and looked to his right hand that he placed over his back pocket and wallet. “I don’t know what I’d do if I heard Heide had been killed in some bombing or something in Berlin.”

“Neither do I, Eckart. One thing’s for sure, don’t bring it up with the Hauptmann. It’s obviously a sore subject.”

Nicholas’ ears suddenly flattened and he looked from Bernard to fox back and forth worriedly. “Guys, aren’t we supposed to report homosexuals, the lame, and gypsies to the SS?”

The Saint Bernard instantly rose up in defiance with a stature of worried guard. “Oh shit... No wonder he always kept the SS out of our battle-groups... We can’t tell anyone! We have to rub out these rumors quick, before everyone is absorbed into other divisions. If word spreads to other groups, the SS is bound to pick up on it.”

The fox nodded in agreement, but then paused. “But, what if it’s not true at all? We need to get a look at that locket. See if it’s Sven inside, or his mother or something?”

Serge put his hands up in the air, instantly, palms facing the other two. “Not me!”

Eckart quickly shot his hands up in the air in the same fashion. “Not me either!”

The black shepherd looked from gunner to loader, then back to his gunner, then back to his loader, a realization once again reached the shepherd’s mind. “Aww... come on... Really?... Damnit...”

End part 1
