

It is now approaching mid-summer in 1943. Victor's friend, André Frodel, now one of some 41,000 combatants and some 74,000 civilians comprising "Anders' Army," is joined with the Allied forces in Egypt. This Polish contingent sent by Russia's army, due to its current geographic location, has now come under British command. And as the Polish 2nd Corps, it is now part of what have been designated as the Polish Armed Forces of the West. And war's peculiar fortunes are about to manifest themselves.

Also a member of this unit is Franki Mrowicki. He has been such since its formation some 18 months earlier, and at which time he was also separated from his friend, André Frodel. For when André had been sent off to a *gulag* labor camp in Siberia, all communication between them was terminated. Franki, therefore, plagued now with the depressing possibility that André may even be dead, is without any idea as to what might have happened to his companion.

André meanwhile, due to his broad linguistic skills, has been assigned to serve as an interrogator of war prisoners for the Allied armies in North Africa, most of which prisoners are Germans and Italians. As a serendipitous outworking of this assignment, a day was to come when André would be virtually electrified, a day when he was to be more than delighted – when he was to be as good as beside himself.

As with most any other day, André Frodel is busy. Apart from any precise details, and unaware of the High Command's plan for an amphibious landing at Anzio in January of the coming year, he and his fellow interrogators have been impressed with the need to acquire accurate information as to the disposition of German and Italian forces on the Italian mainland. Particularly was this so regarding positions held by them to the south of Rome.

There had, therefore, been a number of interviewees that day, many of whom had proven to be informationally fruitless, and no small number of whom had been equally and frustratingly stubborn. Such was the Italian colonel who now sat facing André, where he had been for the last 40 or so minutes. Compounding André's exasperation were the intermittent and all-too-frequent interruptions of his interviews; people coming and going, people asking questions. At the moment, and following one such interruption, he has resumed addressing the colonel.

"Now then, sir, may we get back to the matter of ..." Irritatingly, the office door opened once again.

A voice. "I was told to bring this prisoner ..."

Interrupting but never looking up, André barked, "Will you please get out of here and shut the door!" Then whirling on his chair he snapped, "I am seriously trying to ..." The sentence was not to be finished.

Standing in the open doorway, prisoner in hand, was Franki Mrowicki!

"Franki?" André exclaimed. "I ... "Guard!" he shouted. And as an MP erupted through another door, braced for whatever anticipated emergency was suddenly at hand, André urged, "Take the aah ... take the colonel and this ... and this other prisoner away. I'll deal with them later."

As the two Italians were then hurriedly and summarily escorted from the room, Franki, as dumfounded as was André, stood speechless, wide eyed and slack jawed.

Then André virtually bolted across the intervening space. Grasping Franki by the shoulders he exclaimed, “Where in th ... Lord, it’s good to see you, Franki! Where *have* you been?”

Grinning, Franki said, “Well, there’s a lot to tell, my friend, about the last year and more. But I’ve been with Anders’ outfit since its formation. And since our arrival here in Africa I’ve been a guard at the Italian POW compound.”

“This is unbelievable!” André cried. “Unbelievable but *wonderful*!” Then collapsing into a chair he said, “Sit down, sit down; take that chair there.” And grinning with uncontrolled joy he said, “I feel like a ... like a father who’s just ... just discovered a lost son!” And tears of emotion glistened in the eyes of both men.

For it was truly a grand reunion for these two. And that night they slept little as they exchanged experiences. Thus, after so long a time, after having been separated for seemingly endless months, these two philatelists – this pair of stamp-collecting friends from Lwów – were finally reunited. But more than that: André would now arrange for them to share the same living quarters.

Things are moving rapidly in the Mediterranean. It is mid-July; and even now the island of Sicily has already been invaded. In Italy, the city of Rome has been bombed and millions of leaflets have been dropped, warning Italy of its pending defeat, barring its immediate surrender. An invasion of the mainland is afoot.

His language skills having expanded his responsibilities beyond mere prisoner interrogations, André is now also involved in the coordinating of operations and logistics, this as an interpreter for the various multinational Allied forces now being assembled in

North Africa. When he learns through channels that the bulk of the Allied forces there are now poised to invade the continent, to invade Italy, his excitement can hardly be contained.

It is late afternoon. The mess hall at the base is nearly empty. Sitting apart from the few scattered others who remained, André looked intently at his friend across the table. This was his first opportunity to share the news.

After looking about cautiously and then leaning forward as though conspiring, André said, “Franki,” his voice intensely hushed and his eyes aglow with excitement,

“We’re going to invade Italy!”

“We’re going to ... are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure, and keep your voice down.”

“Then all of this ... ”

“Yes! All of this *preparation*, as you were about to say, is to that end.”

“But when?” It was a delirious response. “Does it mean that we’re ... ”

“I don’t have the date, Franki, but yes! Yes, it means that we are going to Italy. Finally we’re heading back to the European mainland, our road back to Poland! Just imagine, Franki; we may very soon be able to see the Perantonis again: Carlo and Luigi, and the family!”

Franki was almost trembling. “Do you suppose they’re still in Volargne?” His eyes were bright, sparkling with the hope he was feeling.

“I don’t know, Franki, but wherever they are, we’ll find them. And the girls ... wherever they are – hopefully back home in Poland – we’ll find them too.”

And they finished their meal in silence.

It was later now, and with greater privacy, that they walked alone through the camp. As they did, they reasoned on the logic of the pending operation. It was André who said, “It makes perfect sense, Franki. It’s logical that the border between Italy and Germany would not be quite so heavily defended. What a perfect place to mount an attack.”

“Well, yes,” Franki agreed. “But the terrain there is so much more difficult.”

“True,” André said with a nod. “So I don’t think this is all there will be to reaching Germany.”

Franki turned to look at him quizzically. “Oh? What then?”

“I think – and this is only my opinion – that the really big push will come from the north; from across the English Channel. I think the Allies, while trying to keep the German’s attention drawn to Italy, will very likely make a landing somewhere in France.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I’m no military strategist, but I believe that’s what will happen, and there would certainly be less ground to cover en route to Berlin. And I feel, therefore, that this invasion of Italy is only a feint.”

“Well, whatever,” said Franki, grinning. “At least it’s a move in the right direction for us; it’ll get us back to our friends; and back to the pastasciutta and the wine!”

“Oh yes!” André smiled reflectively, his enthusiasm likewise warming as he repeated the words. “The pastasciutta and the wine. O how I remember that! So ... now we wait, Franki.” And his face widened in a grin that threatened to reach both ears.