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The Good Soldier: From Austrian Social Democracy to Communist Captivity with a Soldier of Panzer-Grenadier Division "Grossdeutschland"

Alfred Novotny

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Alfred Novotny was born in Vienna on 1 April 1924, and was perfectly placed to suffer the ancient Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times." His times were interesting and deadly, but that he survived them is not the greatest surprise. Rather, what stands out is that Fred never lost his compassion, nor his humanity, nor his mind.

Growing up in 1930s Vienna, the former home of a young, frustrated, and fuming artist named Adolf Hitler, Fred was the stepson of an ardent Social Democrat. As such, he grew up with a visceral and deep dislike and distrust of their rival parties, including the National Socialists, or "Nazis." Although the political situation in Austria throughout the 1930s was stormy, the German annexation of Austria absolutely ended effective opposition to the "New Order."

Attracted by the superficial benefits of unity with Germany and the evident achievements of the Nazis, young Alfred gradually parted ways with his stepfather. He performed his duty to the *Reich* when called up for service in the Labor Corps, and later proudly served in the most elite division of the German Army in World War II, Panzer-Grenadier Division *"Grossdeutschland"* ("Greater Germany").

From 1942 forward, Fred saw more than his share of combat. Starting with action as a member of a hurriedly-armed labor detachment in the famous British naval and commando raid at St. Nazaire, France, in March 1942, Fred later joined the *Grossdeutschland* Division in time to participate in some of the most well-known—and most bloody—battles of the war on the Eastern Front. During the Germans' last great offensive in the Soviet Union in 1943, Fred fought at Poltava and in the titanic clash of thousands of tanks at Kursk. Wounded there, he later returned to his unit and fought in the long series of fiercely-contested defensive battles that ended only when the Soviets occupied much of eastern and central Germany and Austria. . . and when Hitler and the Thousand Year Reich were finally destroyed.

Like so many members of German units, Fred was happy to surrender to the US Army at the end of the war, but under the terms of inter-Allied agreements reached months before, units which had fought only against the Soviets were turned over to the Red Army, *en masse.* Thus began the ordeal after the ordeal—2½ years in Soviet prison camps.

After being freed from Soviet captivity, Fred eventually escaped the old world and the old conflicts . . . and started a new life in the United States, free of the competing "isms" of Europe that had wreaked misery on millions.

Supported by detailed commentary by author/historian Marc Rikmenspoel, *The Good Soldier* contains 62 illustrations, including original diagrams and sketches drawn before the war and during the author's captivity; comprehensive documentary authentication of the author's military service; and extensive wartime photography.

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