

Reaching the edge of the dugout, Keller saw two bodies in the mud; both were American GIs. One was lying face down, an apparent victim of an earlier battle. The other looked about the same age as Keller. He was lying face up with a single bullet hole through his forehead, just below the rim of his helmet. Keller's lucky shot had been a bullseye.

He stared with sadness at the man he had just killed. Sure, it was from a distance, and, sure, he had fired his rifle plenty of times before, but here, he had seen his prey fall and had seen that he, Gerhard Keller, was responsible for this man's death. His enemy, like himself, had been alone on this great battlefield. For the first time since donning the field-gray uniform, Keller understood that war was not really a clash of nations, not even of ideologies. It was a succession of private encounters between strangers who might, in another life, have shared a beer, argued about football, or complained about the price of coal. Instead, they met like this, through crosshairs.

Keller almost felt sympathy for the man. With a gentleness that belied his frenzied state of mind, he reached down to tenderly run a hand over the dead soldier's eyelids, closing them. After a moment, he made the Sign of the Cross over the body, just as his Catholic upbringing had taught him.

The German sat down heavily in the cramped foxhole, ignoring the rain beating out a tattoo against his helmet. His fear fought another emotion, just as powerful—guilt. Only evil men killed, he had always believed.

*But I am not evil! I am not a bad man!*

Tormented thoughts ripped his mind.

*This man was my enemy, wasn't he? I had to do what I had to do, didn't I?*

"There must be a line between a bad man and doing bad things to survive!" his mind shouted at him.

*Survival! That's the only thing! What other choice did I have? Surrender? Try to escape? Fight back? No! Those were not good choices.*

He looked again at the dead GI, a bullet hole in his forehead, a single, cold opening above his eyes, quiet as a confession.

*Yes, this was my only choice,* he thought, his throat closing.

His stomach gurgled violently, and suddenly Keller vomited into the bloody foxhole, feeling overwhelmed with despair. His tortured thoughts refused to stop.

*I survived. But at what cost? Another man is dead by my hand!*

Keller cried out in anguish. He didn't want to be here. He'd never wanted to be here, never wanted to be a soldier, especially not in Hitler's army. The thought triggered a deep-seated anger that intensified his suffering. The Wehrmacht soldier felt little loyalty to his homeland. His hatred for the Third Reich was rooted deep inside him. His fury at the totalitarian Nazi regime was like a blade in his chest, stabbing with every breath.

"*Scheisse!*" the soldier swore as he struggled to regain his composure. He could have just as easily said "Shit!" in English. Keller was fluent in three languages. In the 1930s, his family moved to Canada when his father, working for the giant German chemical firm I.G. Farben, was appointed its local representative

under a long-term contract with a supply company in Quebec, producing products for the Third Reich. Keller grew up learning French, English, and his native German.

When his unit invaded France with the rest of the German war machine, Keller thought he might have a chance to use his French, enjoy some fine wine, and meet some charming mademoiselles. What foolish thoughts they were, he now realized. The closest he'd come to wine was digging foxholes in countryside vineyards. Now, here he was in this miserable foxhole near Kassel.

*I have to get out of here!*

In his panic, a familiar phrase nearly made him gag. "Abandon every hope, ye who enter here." Keller believed Satan himself might somehow emerge from all the blood and gore besieging him. He felt more vomit bubbling up from deep inside his gut.

*What can I do? How can I escape? Not just this battlefield. This war! This nightmare! This...this...*

Frantically searching for an answer, Keller's wide eyes once again fell on the American he had killed. He looked closer, and a flicker of excitement lit inside him.

*Was this the way out?*